

The background features a large, stylized orange illustration. On the left, a sword is shown diagonally, pointing towards the top right. On the right, a shield is depicted, partially overlapping the sword. The shield has a circular design with several smaller circles inside. The entire illustration is rendered in a solid orange color against a white background.

# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,  
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,  
and who is the sword of thy excellency!  
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;  
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.  
Deuteronomy 33:29*

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## CHRIST, THE MINISTER OF SIN

*If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. — Galatians 2:17–19*

It is a terrible thing that the apostle says in this text: “Christ the minister of sin.” It is an appalling statement that was brought about by an appalling doctrine.

Shockingly, already in the apostle’s day, among the churches that had been established by his preaching, the apostle Paul had to contend for the truth of justification by faith alone over against false apostles who had crept into the churches and undermined that truth. Even more shockingly, the apostle had already contended for the truth of justification by faith alone against the apostle Peter. The gospel truth of justification by faith alone seldomly is held in the church for very long. This is true in our day. This has been true throughout history. This was true in the apostle’s day.

In the context of Galatians 2, the apostle had rebuked Peter for dissembling with the truth. Peter was living like a Gentile and was not keeping the civil and ceremonial laws of Moses. Peter ate pork, worshiped God on Sunday, and dressed like a Gentile. Importantly, Peter ate with the Gentiles. They were not sinners of the Gentiles any longer. They were righteous. God had justified both Peter and the Gentiles by faith alone and not by law-righteousness. But when certain men came from James, then Peter feared them and withdrew from the Gentiles. This was to dissemble with the gospel and to teach by his actions that besides faith in Christ something else was necessary for salvation.

By withdrawing from the Gentiles, Peter was saying that besides faith in Christ it was necessary to live like a Jew to be saved. Peter was teaching that something extra besides Christ received by faith alone was necessary for salvation and acceptance in God’s sight. In reality it does not matter if you eat pork or you do not eat pork or if you dress like a Jew or you dress like a Gentile. But Peter made that something extra besides Christ a matter of righteousness. So also today, for example, it does not matter if you drink a beer or you do not drink a beer, but some make that a matter of righteousness.

And the exclusion of law-righteousness from salvation extends to all deeds and activities of man. *Law-righteousness* is anything that man does or that man claims that he does for his acceptance with God. Man is not righteous because he believes. He is not righteous in the way of his repenting. He is righteous by faith alone in Christ, and through Christ alone he stands in the grace of God.

Today such law-righteousness is taught when faith is made man’s act, repentance is made to be that work of man through which one receives the forgiveness of sins, and man’s works are said to function as helps for the assurance of salvation. The same law-righteousness is promoted when men teach that obedience to the law brings one into closer fellowship with God; that the more one obeys, the more God loves him; and that Christ and man’s works are the way to God. All that is law-righteousness.

Those who teach law-righteousness frequently have many pious-sounding defenses for their doctrine: “We do not want the people to be lawless.” “We are interested only in the holiness of the church.” “Obviously,” they say, “you cannot have fellowship with God when you walk in sin.” “Is it not clear that man does believe and that man does repent? He is not a stock and a block, after all.” “We are emphasizing only the responsibility of man.” All these are the same species of argument. They are all intended to defend the teaching of law-righteousness. The teachers of law-righteousness usually do not come out and blasphemously say that Christ is not enough. They always have a word about Christ, and yet they always add the activities of the sinner to Christ as the way of salvation. They make Christ and the activities of the sinner two things that together give righteousness, blessedness, peace, joy, happiness, and ultimately eternal life.

Everyone must understand that righteousness is the foundation of life. To be righteous is to have God’s approval. And so also these things always go together:

righteousness and peace, righteousness and joy, righteousness and happiness, righteousness and comfort, righteousness and assurance, and righteousness and blessing. If our blessedness and assurance come in the way of works, then righteousness must come in the way of works. False teachers in the apostle's day and false teachers in our day teach that it is Christ and something of the sinner that bring righteousness. For them it is *both* Christ *and* the sinner.

But the apostle says that it is *either* Christ *or* the sinner. Our justification is either all of Christ, or our justification is all of ourselves. Either we are justified by faith alone, or we are justified by works alone.

Over against all those who teach and believe that sinners are righteous, have peace with God, and stand in his grace by both Christ and their activities, the apostle says that they make Christ the minister of sin.

All must understand that in Galatians 2:17–19, the apostle is not guarding his doctrine from the charge of lawlessness. That is how many interpret the text. They understand that the apostle says, as it were, “Do not suppose that being justified by faith means that you can live as you please. You cannot be careless and profane in Christ because he does not justify you so that you can sin freely. Christ is not a minister of sin.” But that is not the case. The apostle is charging the teachers of the false doctrine of righteousness by works with the most terrible crime: For all their professed interest in the holiness of the church and the responsibility of man, they make Christ the minister of sin.

Many teach the doctrine of justification very differently than the apostle. Let us say for the sake of argument that these ministers teach in words the sound doctrine of justification by faith alone. But they immediately cast doubt on the doctrine by saying, “But this doctrine does not mean that men can be careless and profane.” They betray by their warning about careless living that they believe that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a doctrine that could make men careless and profane. Their understanding of the doctrine is not that careless and profane men will abuse the doctrine as a license for their own wickedness. No, their understanding is that the doctrine itself could—and does—make men careless and profane. The doctrine is to blame.

However, it is in fact impossible that the doctrine of justification by faith alone makes men careless and profane. It is as impossible for the doctrine to make men

careless and profane as it is for Christ to be still in the grave, for God to deny himself, or for the Holy Spirit to sin. It is an utter and inconceivable impossibility that the doctrine of justification makes men careless and profane. If it did, then it would be a wicked doctrine that no longer should be preached in the churches.

When a man preaches the doctrine of justification by faith alone soundly in words but immediately warns that this does not mean that men can be careless and profane, then he himself has never tasted the goodness and power of the doctrine. In fact, such a teacher takes into his mouth the slander of the enemies of the truth and presents it to his listeners as a real possibility that the doctrine makes men licentious.

Such men are up to no good. They suggest the possibility that the doctrine of justification makes men careless

and profane because they believe that the doctrine in fact does. They warn against the doctrine because they are intent on overthrowing the doctrine in order to bring in their doctrine of law-righteousness. They hold for truth that Christ is sufficient as far as he goes, but man must also believe, repent, and obey. For them it is both Christ and the sinner, both the grace of God and the responsibility of man, both Christ's obedience and the sinner's obedience, and both Christ's activ-

ities and the sinner's activities that are necessary for the blessing of God, righteousness, and eternal life.

Rather than warning that his doctrine not be used as the occasion of evil living, the apostle charges that the doctrine of those who say both Christ and the sinner are necessary for salvation is a wicked doctrine. Their wickedness is that by their doctrine they make Christ the minister of sin. They take the glorious, spotless, lovely Christ, who came to take away sin, to overcome sin, and to destroy sin, and they make him a minister of sin.

The apostle says, “If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin?” By “while we seek to be justified by Christ,” the apostle does not mean that we do something to be justified, but he means that we confess that we are justified by Christ and that we are justified in Christ. Does anyone who is a Christian deny that? Does anyone who is a Christian dare to say that Christ is not enough? We seek to be justified in Christ. That is our confession. Ask any Christian if he is saved by grace and not by works, and he will say, “That is true. I am saved by Christ alone. We are saved by grace alone.”

Over against all those who teach and believe that sinners are righteous, have peace with God, and stand in his grace by both Christ and their activities, the apostle says that they make Christ the minister of sin.

The apostle here puts our confession about our righteousness in the form of “seek to be justified” because he is mocking the false apostles who bound everyone by the law and said, “We have to be active in our faith, active in our repentance, and active in our obedience. God does not believe, repent, and obey for us. We are not stocks and blocks, after all.” Over against that the apostle says in effect, “I am active. I strive to be righteous in Christ every day by doing nothing for my salvation but resting in Christ crucified alone.”

When the apostle speaks of our justification, he refers back to his doctrine stated in verse 16, that we are justified “by the faith of Christ,” that is, the faith that has Christ as its object. To be justified is to be declared righteous by God and to have our sins forgiven. We are not justified by law-righteousness. Doing this or doing that does not make us righteous. We are justified by Christ; we are not at all justified by our activities or our deeds. Being justified by faith alone and not by our activities, we stand in the grace of God, we have the assurance of our salvation, and we know that God is our God and that all things are for us and nothing can be against us.

We are justified *in* Christ. Faith makes us members of his corporation and partakers of his righteousness. We are justified by the faith of Christ, the faith that has Christ as its object and that looks to Christ for righteousness, holiness, satisfaction, grace, blessedness, and glory. Seeking to be justified in Christ is the hope, the only hope, of the Christian.

There is no other justification.

Many who dissemble with the truth say the same thing: “We are justified in Christ.”

When Peter withdrew from the Gentiles, he would not have said that Christ was insufficient. But when he withdrew from the Gentiles, by his actions he was saying that they needed something besides Christ. When he withdrew from the Gentiles, he was saying that those who had Christ, confessed that they were righteous in Christ, but did not live like Jews were still sinners. That is why Peter withdrew from the Gentiles.

What Peter said by his actions is what all say who teach that in addition to Christ some activity of man, some work, some deed, or some lifestyle is needed for the blessing of Christ. They are saying that we have Christ but that we are still sinners until we live a certain way, do certain things, or conform to certain rules.

Even more sinister is the teaching that Christ justifies, Christ alone justifies, and Christ justifies by faith alone but that we cannot and do not know that, are not and cannot be assured of that, so that we are found in our own hearts, minds, and consciences to be sinners until we have obeyed the law, repented, or done something.

We seek to be justified and righteous in Christ, but in our own minds and consciences we are found sinners.

The words “found sinners” express the terrible pains, anxiety, and trouble of heart and mind of those who are not right with God. They are not found sinners of men but of God. They are found sinners not merely in outward deeds but also in their inward natures. Their consciences trouble them, and they are tossed to and fro and are without any comfort, joy, peace, or assurance of eternal life.

If we say that we have Christ and have no peace, comfort, or joy, that is because Christ is not enough to us. That is what all do who add to Christ their own righteousness, that besides Christ man must do something to experience and to have the peace of Christ in his conscience and mind.

The words “we seek to be justified [righteous] in Christ” mean that we are really righteous in him and before God, and the words “we ourselves also are found sinners” mean that we are not really righteous in Christ and before God.

That is what Peter said about the Gentiles by his actions. The Gentiles were righteous in Christ. Peter himself had taught them that. Then he withdrew from them and by doing so said, “Really you are sinners yet until you keep the law of Moses.” So ministers say that we are righteous in Christ, but we must also do this thing and that thing in order to experience righteousness. Then we are not really righteous until after we have done something. Or men teach what amounts to the same thing, that we do not experience our salvation, taste the goodness of God, and know God as our God until we have performed this or that work. They teach that in Christ we are still in need of the righteousness of the law. So those who are righteous in Christ are not really righteous at all.

These teachers, like those who troubled the Galatian churches, make Christ a minister of sin!

Is it not true that if we seek to be justified in Christ and we are still found to be sinners in Christ, that Christ is the minister of sin? If we say that we are justified in Christ and yet we still have to obey, to live a certain way, and perform certain works to experience justification, have we not denied that we are in fact justified in Christ? All that Christ has done then is to remind us of what we must still do and that we are still sinners before God until we do it.

When the apostle says “the minister of sin,” he means that Christ brings all our sins back into view, and Christ leaves us as sinners before God.

The law is a ministry of sin. The purpose of the law is to bring all your sins to remembrance. The law makes sin exceedingly sinful, and transgressions abound under the law. The purpose of the law is to tear away the pretense of righteousness that every man uses as a shield against

the judgment of God. Being a ministry of sin, the law is a ministry of death. The purpose of the law is to kill you. Men say that they are righteous, and the law comes and shows them that they are not. Men say that they have overcome sin and that they live, and the law comes, sin revives, and they die.

If we say that those who are righteous in Christ still need something else to be righteous, then we have turned Christ into a new lawgiver, and his ministry is no different from the ministry of the law. Those who are supposedly righteous in Christ are still found to be sinners. Christ is a new Moses, and Christ's work is no different from the deadly work of the tyrannical law.

The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The ministry of Christ is to take away sin and guilt and to destroy all the works of the devil. The purpose of Christ is to give light where there was darkness, to give life where there was death, to grant righteousness where there was unrighteousness, and to abolish the reign of death.

Christ does that by establishing righteousness. He comes to sinners, absolves them of their sins, imputes to them his righteousness, and ministers to them an abundant entrance into God's kingdom. Christ does that according to God's grace and his eternal election of grace.

But if we still need to keep the law for righteousness, if we still need to keep the law in order to experience the favor of a reconciled God, if we still have a host of laws that we need to obey to be loved by God, then Christ is nothing other than the minister of sin. Then he comes to us only to bring our sins to remembrance, to make us work again, and to fill us with anxiety about whether we have done enough, repented enough, or believed enough. If we who are justified in Christ still need to be justified by the law, then we are not in fact justified in Christ, but we are made sinners and guilty in him. Christ is the minister of sin.

Christ does not take away sin, but he brings sin in again.

Christ does not bring peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Christ brings sorrow and distress and trouble.

God forbid!

Can you think of a greater blasphemy than to say that Christ is the minister of sin?

The apostle explains his vehement "God forbid" when he says, "If I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

The apostle refers to his preaching and to all preaching of Christ. By preaching Christ he destroyed something. Whoever mentions Christ, the work of Christ, and the righteousness of Christ, no matter if he does so in

sincerity or not, destroys something. The apostle preached Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. He preached Christ as the one who suffered wrath, fulfilled the whole law, freed us from the curse of the law, established righteousness, and did all that was necessary for our salvation. Christ cannot be mentioned by anyone without bringing in that truth. The very name of Christ is synonymous with those works of salvation.

The things that the apostle destroyed by preaching Christ were the whole old testament economy of Moses; Paul destroyed the dominion of the law over souls; he destroyed all the power of the devil; Paul destroyed sin, guilt, sorrow, and condemnation. He destroyed the idea that a man is justified by laws and rules and regulations. He destroyed those things when he preached Christ because Christ himself by his cross and resurrection had destroyed those things.

But to so preach Christ and then to teach that we must still obey the law for righteousness or that there are many things yet that we must do to have the favor of God is to build again the things that were destroyed.

The apostle here transfers to himself what he accuses the false apostles of teaching in order to show both the absurdity and the wickedness of their doctrine.

If we destroy something and then simply rebuild the same thing, we are fools. Let us say that there is a broken-down, rickety, and dilapidated old house, and we tear it down. If we simply rebuild the same rickety, old house again, we are fools. It is not that we tear down that old house to build a new and better house. That is what Christ did. He tore down the old, rickety, and dilapidated house of the law that could not make anyone righteous but only brought sin to remembrance and threatened all who lived in that house with destruction. And thus do all those who preach Christ. They tear down that old house. Having torn down that old house of the law, Jesus Christ built a glorious house in his body, in which all who are in him by faith have a place and are righteous and heirs of eternal life. But if we tear down an old house and build again the same rickety and dangerous house, we are fools. Such is the folly of saying that we are righteous by a work, a lifestyle, or a deed after we have preached Christ.

But it is worse than folly. In the case of a house, we could charge a man who did such a thing with folly, but in the case of the gospel, we charge him with transgression: "If I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." The apostle transfers this charge to himself, but he condemns the false apostles and their doctrine. They make themselves transgressors.

The false apostles said that by their doctrine of the law and their doctrine of obedience for blessing that they made the church and the people of God holy. But they



made them wicked, and that wickedness started with the false apostles. What a monstrous sin to tear down the law and then to build it again in another form. By doing so they were saying that faith in Christ cannot save, but the law saves. The false apostles made the law to be grace and turned grace into the law. They made Moses to be Christ and Christ to be Moses. The false apostles mixed everything up, and in the process they made Christ the minister of sin and themselves and all who listened to them to be transgressors. They changed the whole scripture, for the promise of scripture is that whosoever believes in Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life. They added to the promise that whosoever believes in Christ and obeys the law shall not perish. They made God a liar because they said that whoever believes and keeps the law shall be saved, when God had said that those who believe in Christ shall be saved. They robbed Christ of his glory as the savior; they robbed God of his honor as the one who is just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus; and they robbed men of all hope, joy, comfort, and assurance.

And in love for Christ, God, and God's people, the apostle attacks the lie: "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." The word *for* usually gives a reason for something said previously. Here the apostle does not give a reason for something he said in the immediate context, but he gives the reason for attacking the doctrine of the false apostles with so many furious charges and for publicly rebuking Peter. Now the apostle Paul is stating the truth of the matter of justification in relationship to the law.

The false apostles always told their hearers, "Do not forget that you have to keep the law too." They placed the church under the law and said that keeping the law would make the church a holy church.

We say that we do not deny that the law is good and that good works are desirable and necessary. However, we are not talking right now about whether the law is good and good works are necessary. But we are talking about righteousness, peace, joy, and blessedness that comes to us in Jesus Christ.

When the apostle says "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God," he makes all teachers who add man's works to Christ's righteousness not only foolish and transgressors but also ministers of death. They are bloody men. They kill souls, congregations, and denominations. They have stained their own hands with

blood and have filled the pages of history with the blood of souls they have slain by their doctrine, and they are still filling hell today. What a disgrace that those who are supposed to be ministers of reconciliation are ministers of death.

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. He is our life, and he is our law. So the apostle says, "I...live unto God." Christ brings life. The false apostles bring death. The false apostles say, "Law, law, law." Paul says, "Christ is our law." The false apostles insist that we must have law, and we say that Christ is our law. They insist that we must be active, and we say that Christ is our activity. They insist that we must obey, and we say that Christ is our obedience. They insist that we must do this and that to be righteous, and we say that Christ did all that they require of us. We simply refer all the demands and requirements of the false apostles to Christ.

The apostle says, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."

In Christ we are dead to the law. If we are alive to the law, we die. To be alive to the law is to seek to be pleasing to God by law-keeping, so that we seek our blessing in our law-keeping, our doing, and our activities.

But if we are alive to the law, we cannot live unto God. That means that if we are alive to the law, we cannot be holy people. The law slays all those who are alive to it. To be alive to the law means that we must keep the law and keep it perfectly. The law terrifies those who are alive to it. To be alive to the law is to hear its curse and to fear the coming of death and hell. To be alive to the law is to be in danger of hellfire because we come under all the law's condemnations. To be alive to the law is to have no peace with God. To be alive to the law is always seeking and striving to be righteous but never attaining righteousness and peace of conscience.

All those who are alive to the law begin to loathe the law. Those who are alive to the law never say, "Oh, how we love God's law." If we are alive to the law, then we hate the law. Hatred of the law is a terrible crime. Man must not hate God's law. The law is good and true. But if we are alive to the law, we will hate it. Those who are alive to the law may say with their mouths that they love the law, because it is hardly Christian to say otherwise, but they hate the law in their inward beings. They wish that the law would be quiet and that it would stop saying, "Cursed is everyone who continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But

If we are alive to the law, we die. To be alive to the law is to seek to be pleasing to God by law-keeping, so that we seek our blessing in our law-keeping, our doing, and our activities.

that is all the law can say. It cannot promise eternal life. The law curses sinners and damns the least imperfection.

The evidence that those who are alive to the law hate the law is that they try to change it. Is that not a terrible wickedness to change God's perfect law? They take the law that says "be perfect and be holy as I am holy," and they say that God requires that we do our best and teach that God is satisfied with our imperfect good works. They change the law, which addresses our inward parts and places us before God's judgment seat, and they make keeping the law a matter of outward behavior and looking good before men. They substitute for the law of God the laws of men that they can keep. That is the evidence that men hate the law and cannot bear its testimony.

Besides, those who hate the law hate God. To hate the law is to hate the God of the law. They hate the very thought of God. The proof of that is that they will not abide his word about them that they are wicked and evil. They want to be good, and they say that they are not totally depraved. Such people hate the law, and they hate God.

That is what being alive to the law does. We cannot live unto God if we are alive to the law. Being alive to the law, we become terrible sinners who hate the law and hate the God of the law. The law never made anyone holy nor caused anyone to keep it. The law is a ministry of death, and all those who add man's law-keeping and activities to Christ are ministers of death.

To live unto God, we must die to the law by the law. To die to the law by the law is to die to the law by the perfect work of Christ. Christ is our law, through whom we died to the law. The apostle calls Christ our law because Christ perfectly obeyed the law. He satisfied all God's justice. Christ bore all God's judgments. Christ died under the judgment of the law.

And we died with Christ. We died to the law by the law. In Christ the law cannot curse us. The law cannot say, "Do this to live or do this to have God's blessing and favor." The law can no longer threaten us with death and

damnation. We are free from the law's tyranny because we died to it, just as a servant who dies is freed from the tyranny of his cruel master.

Our death, and thus our freedom from the bondage of the law, is lawful and righteous. Our death came by Christ. So the apostle calls Christ our law, through whom we died to the law.

Only if we have died to the law can we, do we, and will we live unto God.

Only by death to the law by the death of Christ, can we, do we, and will we live unto God.

And to live unto God is perfection. Is there anything more glorious that we can say about a human being than that he lives unto God? Remember that to live unto God is God's own life. God lives unto God. God seeks the glory of God in God in everything and from eternity to eternity. So to live unto God is to live God's own life. There is no holier life than that. That is to be lifted up to heaven and to enjoy a life that cannot perish, is immortal, and is beyond the condemnation of the law, beyond sin, and beyond the possibility of dying.

We do not and cannot have that life by the law, by saying that we must do this or that to be blessed by God. You must die to the law, so that the law can no longer say to you, "You must keep me to live. If you do not keep me, I will kill you." You die to the law in Christ through his death; and in Christ and his resurrection, you are lifted up to the highest honor and the most glorious freedom of living unto God.

If we add to Christ the least thing, so that our blessedness in the least thing depends on what we do, then we will be in bondage, and we will hate the very thought of God. Only the righteousness of Christ is the ground of the higher and more glorious life of living unto God. Christ is not the minister of sin. He is the minister of righteousness. Thus he is the minister of holiness, goodness, peace, joy, happiness, liberty, and everlasting life.

Hallelujah!

—NJL



With this issue we have come to the end of another volume year of *Sword and Shield*. Those who would like a bound volume of all twelve issues are encouraged to contact the business office.

The closing of the fifth volume year brings a time of reflection on the existence of *Sword and Shield*. In its brief lifetime the magazine has been witness to and has witnessed against many departures from the truth. The business office receives monthly cancellation requests from those who no longer want and no longer read *Sword and Shield*. This is sad. One would think that a free magazine promoting the Reformed truth would be welcomed by all who confess to be Reformed and to have an interest in the Reformed truth. But what these cancellations show is that many who claim to be Reformed are that only in name. The Reformed faith purely and clearly explained has no savor to them. They cannot be bothered even to open the magazine. The Lord sends a strong delusion that many believe a lie. I, for one, believe that the trend will not change. We writers of *Sword and Shield* and board members at Reformed Believers Publishing submit to the Lord's will in that. The truth is not only a savor of life unto life but also a savor of death unto death. We are not the masters of the effect of the truth proclaimed and the truth written. That effect was decided by our sovereign God before the foundation of the world. What we are convinced of is that we are writing the truth. What we are committed to is writing that truth whether the majority receive it or not. We, of course, pray that *Sword and Shield* will find its way into the hands of God's people everywhere and that they will be edified by it. But we are all too aware that the opposite happens as well. So we pray too that *Sword and Shield* may testify polemically to the wholesale departure from the Reformed faith that characterizes our present age and be a witness in this evil age of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). We are but servants and instruments in the hands of the living Lord of the church, who loved her and gave his life for her and who also slays with the sword that proceeds out of his mouth. We are but servants of the truth, and our commitment is to write it as long as God gives us opportunity.

In this issue Reverend Pascual in his rubric, *Dry Morsel*, writes against the scurrilous charge of the disgraceful Rev. John Flores and First Reformed Church of Bulacan that First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church,

Bulacan, is not a church but a group. The readership must know that the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) had a long involvement in the Philippines prior to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC), and Reverend Flores was part of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. When the RPC was formed from the PRC, then Flores became Reformed Protestant too, so we thought. Later we learned that he does not even believe in the authority of the Reformed creeds. He is not Reformed at all. Some members of Reverend Flores' church in Bulacan left and formed First Orthodox, and Rev. Jeremiah Pascual was ordained to be her minister. Now Flores attacks First Orthodox with the charge that she is not a church. This charge, of course, is not unique with him. He is simply parroting the line of many in the PRC in America about the RPC. Reverend Flores is a crook and a huckster. He was happy to take Reformed Protestant money while it suited him, and it did not bother him a bit how the RPC had started. Now he has a bee in his bonnet about how First Orthodox started? The way that First Orthodox in the Philippines started is not much different from the way that Second Reformed Protestant Church started, and that never was an issue with Flores because the checks were being sent to him. With whom is he trying to curry favor now? What is notably absent from Reverend Flores is any discussion about doctrine. Perhaps that is to be expected from the man who could not answer the simple question that was put to him when he was invited to speak at the Reformed Protestant Churches Family Conference in August 2022: Why did you leave the PRC? We all knew why we had left. He did not and could not answer the question.

For the rest there is the usual cast of characters. The editor has his meditation and continues his series on the benefits of union with Christ. Reverend Bomers writes more on the offerings of the old dispensation. This time he writes on the so-called meat offering. And the seminarian of the RPC, who is on his residency in Cornerstone Reformed Protestant Church, reflects on the covering of our sins as that is pictured in the snow. There was a lot of snow in Canada this year! So snow was an apt thing for a theologian to reflect on as he sat in his study, surrounded by the drifts.

May the Lord bless the contents of this issue to the hearts of his people!

—NJL



## UNION WITH CHRIST (8): JUSTIFICATION

### *Salvation's Application*

In this series of articles, I have been explaining the riches of Christ that become the possession of the elect people of God in their union with Christ. Union with Christ is the essence of the elect's salvation. The elect are conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins on account of their union with Adam. Being guilty of Adam's sin, the elect bear Adam's punishment of death. The work of God to save the elect consists in cutting them out of the rotten corporation of Adam and engrafting them into the righteous corporation of Jesus Christ. This union with Christ we call faith. By faith the elect are one plant and one body with Christ. Through faith the elect receive all that is Christ's. Christ is the great treasure house of salvation, and all that he stored up in himself by his death on the cross and through his resurrection becomes the possession of the elect by this union. This union with Christ by faith is demanded and indeed is the effect and fruit of the elect's eternal union with Christ in election. This union with Christ is wholly the work of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, who operate within the elect to make them one with Christ and who preserve that union unto the perfection of salvation in the new heaven and the new earth.

While we can and do distinguish many aspects of the riches of salvation that become the possession of the elect in Christ, nevertheless we can never lose sight of the fact that it is one salvation, decreed from all eternity by God, stored up in Christ through his cross, and bestowed graciously by the Holy Spirit. The elect are engrafted into Christ, regenerated, called, come to conscious faith, and are justified, sanctified, and glorified; they receive the whole of their salvation as it were in a single moment. To use a figure, there is one stream of salvation that flows to the elect out of the fountain of salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Many waters make up this stream, yet it is one stream. Or to use another figure, if we take the pure, white light of salvation and refract it through a prism, we will see that the light is made up of many colors, yet it remains one beam of light. To use yet another figure, the sap of life that flows

in the tree of Jesus Christ has many aspects to it, yet it is one sap that fills all the branches with the life of the tree of Jesus Christ.

It is this idea of salvation that stands behind the Reformed question to believing parents at the baptisms of their children: "Whether you acknowledge that...our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself, yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of his church, ought to be baptized?" (Form for the Administration of Baptism, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 260). The point of the question is not to focus only on the benefit of salvation called sanctification but to point out that the elect infant already possesses the entirety of his salvation as a member of Christ by faith. The infant has faith, regeneration, calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification. Nothing changes between the infant and the adult regarding the way of salvation, except that the adult becomes aware of his salvation, can be instructed in the truth of that salvation, holds the truth of that salvation over against all evil that comes upon him in this life, and consciously joys in God as the God of his salvation.

### *Application is Salvation*

Thus the application of salvation is not to be viewed as the distribution of a series of discrete gifts given in succession, one after the other, with one benefit depending on the reception of the previously bestowed benefit. The application of salvation may not be conceived of this way: The first benefit is regeneration, which is necessary before the second benefit, calling, is given; and the second benefit is necessary before the third benefit, faith, is given, and so on. The application of salvation is not to be thought of as though the elect receive regeneration; then later they are called; later they are given faith; and later they are justified. Then too the application of salvation is not to be viewed as a temporal order.

Such conceptions are barren and mechanical and tend to view the application of salvation as though it

were a mathematical equation. We especially reject these temporal and mechanical views of the order of salvation when the reception of the gifts of God is made to depend upon works of man that are the fruits of God's grace. To make this rejection concrete, we reject as a corruption of the truth of the application of salvation that God makes the believer repent in order that God might be able to forgive or that God makes the elect believe in order that God might be able to justify them. We reject this man-first conception of salvation that has taken root in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) to the overthrow of the truth of gracious salvation. For that denomination there are activities of man—by grace, of course—that are necessary for man to perform in order for God to be able to perform his part. This man-first conception is essentially an Arminian conception of the order of salvation. Man is first—by grace, of course—and in response to man's activity, God gives the next benefit of the order of salvation. This conception has been described as a mutual interplay between God's grace, man's activity, and a gracious reward. The end result of this conception has been the denial of salvation by grace alone and especially the denial of gracious justification without works.

In their consciences and experiences, the children of God do not experience that God responds to them and their activities, but the children of God experience their salvation at every point as a divine wonder of grace that God performs without their deeds and activities. God's people experience that this divine wonder of the reception of their salvation produces in them fruits of repentance, faith, and good works. Salvation in the consciences and in the experiences of the elect is always and at every point in their lives an experience of the irresistible grace of God. In a moment the elect pass from death to life and from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son; they are cut out of Adam and engrafted into Jesus Christ; and in that moment salvation and all its riches are given to them. And such is always the reality of the experience of salvation for the elect. The elect are saved and being saved. The elect know their gracious salvation, and they grow in that knowledge.

Of this reality of God's gracious work to give salvation unto them wholly as a gift, God's people become more and more aware as they mature and grow. Sunday

after Sunday the elect enter church as sinners and leave as the justified, until at last they leave this life and enter into the fullness of their salvation in eternal life. For this reason we do not need to speak of the application of salvation to the elect, but we can speak simply of their salvation. The application of salvation is salvation. The elect are saved at the moment of their engrafting into Christ, and they are saved all their lives as God brings into their consciences the truth of their salvation and of the riches of that salvation that is theirs in Christ Jesus their Lord. This all is only a revelation of the elect's eternal salvation in the counsel of God as election has its fruits and effects in the hearts and lives of God's people and as the powerful word of salvation that God spoke at the cross comes to the elect and takes them up into that

The application of salvation is salvation. The elect are saved at the moment of their engrafting into Christ, and they are saved all their lives as God brings into their consciences the truth of their salvation and of the riches of that salvation that is theirs in Christ Jesus their Lord.

salvation so freely accomplished for them. Each aspect of that rich salvation God impresses upon his elect people as wholly his work as the triune God, and God excludes all their works as salvation's explanation and power. Never is the thought of the children of God in faith, "We must do this in order to receive that from God." God's children are not mercenaries who fight for their pay or laborers who work for their wages. God's children are beneficiaries and heirs who receive what God has appointed to them and stored up for them in Jesus Christ, his Son.

Whom God loved he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son; and whom God predestinated he regenerates, calls, gives faith, justifies, sanctifies, turns from sin to him as their God, graciously preserves, and finally presents in the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

### *Justification's Importance*

Among these benefits of salvation is justification. The justification of the ungodly sinner freely by God's grace for Christ's sake alone is the heart of the gospel that Jesus Christ commanded his church to preach in his name throughout all the earth. The church that does not preach that gospel is no church, despite what she claims. By the mark of their respective messages, the true church and the false church are easily distinguished from one another. The true church teaches the truth of justification by faith alone. The false church does not. The false church may have a certain confession about justification, but she corrupts that confession with all sorts of lies. The church that corrupts her message concerning justification ceases



to be church in the world. The church that teaches the truth of justification is a pillar and ground of the truth in the world.

The act of God to justify the ungodly sinner freely by grace for Christ's sake is the ground of the Christian's glory, hope, and patience in the world. The Christian stands in the world before God without fear as an ungodly sinner whom God has justified and who has peace with God through Jesus Christ. The justified, ungodly sinner is freed from wrath, the law, and death. He has hope that he will inherit eternal life and that he will see God in the face of Jesus Christ. This very peace with God that the justified sinner has and his hope in the glory of God are transformative of his view of the tribulations that he must pass through in this life because he knows that as a justified sinner all things work together for his good and that the tribulations work in him patience, experience, and hope. Having hope, he presses on in his pilgrim's journey here below toward the heavenly city, where his citizenship resides and to which he has the right to enter for Christ's sake. Over against the testimony of the law and of his own sin and guilt, the justified sinner stands persuaded that he is justified in Christ and is an heir of eternal life. In his conscience the justified sinner has passed in Christ from death to eternal life, from wrath to favor, and from curse to blessing.

The true church of God in the world always has cherished the doctrine of justification as the bedrock of her peace and assurance in this valley of tears and of the shadow of death. This doctrine promises to her a new day in a new world in which all will be made perfect in Christ.

This doctrine also ascribes all glory to God. Out of his own grace and love for his elect church and motivated only by his own sovereign good pleasure, freely by his grace God justifies the elect, who in themselves are worthy only of condemnation.

Because the pure preaching of justification is the mark of the true church, is the ground of the Christian's hope in the world, and gives all glory to God, the doctrine of justification has been the object of Satan's continual assault throughout history. It can be argued that the doctrine seldom has been held in its purity for any length of time by that which is called church in the world. Yet we maintain that the gates of hell never have been able to prevail against God's church and that there always has been that which was truly church in the world that believed this truth, although we might not be able to point to it historically. Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. David sang of the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works. The prophets proclaimed this message, so that the apostle Paul takes the theme

of his epistle to the Romans from the prophet Habakkuk: Those who are righteous by faith shall live. Christ preached justification as the gospel of the kingdom, and the apostles carried that message into the world. The ancient church confessed in the Apostles' Creed that she believed the forgiveness of sins. And it was especially in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century through the work of Christ in Martin Luther that this confession was brought out of the shadows in a way not seen since the time of the apostle Paul. The Reformed fathers in the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, Canons of Dordt, and liturgical forms placed the confession of the doctrine of justification on the lips of every Reformed believer. And we confess it yet today.

### *Justification and the Reformed Protestant Churches*

This doctrine of justification comes very near to the heart of the reason that the Reformed Protestant Churches were formed by Christ. The Protestant Reformed Churches had corrupted this doctrine. This has been proved at length on the pages of *Sword and Shield*, and I do not intend to establish that in any detail again. The Protestant Reformed Churches' corruption of the doctrine has been long-standing, if not so obvious at first. That corruption goes all the way back to the division in the PRC in the 1950s over the conditional covenant. That the controversy concerned justification is clear from the false doctrine of the then Protestant Reformed minister Hubert De Wolf. He taught that repentance is a prerequisite or condition to enter the kingdom of God. However, according to Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 31, our entrance into the kingdom is our justification. Thus De Wolf made repentance the prerequisite of justification. Another way to state the truth is that entrance into the kingdom is our conscious experience of God as our God and the assurance that we are members of his covenant and that all our sins are forgiven. Thus De Wolf made repentance the prerequisite of that knowledge and assurance. The conditional covenant and conditional forgiveness are two sides of one coin, just as the unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone are two sides of one coin. The promise of the covenant is always the promise of the forgiveness of sins and that on the basis of forgiveness we are friends of God and heirs of eternal life. Therefore, if the promise is conditional, the forgiveness of sins is conditional. If the forgiveness of sins has a prerequisite, then the covenant promise and the covenant itself must have a prerequisite.

The connection between the promise and the forgiveness of sins has been shown especially in the false doctrine

promoted by the Reformed and Presbyterian theologian Norman Shepherd, who taught a conditional covenant and right along with that and with perfect logical consistence also taught that man is justified by an obedient and a repentant faith. Shepherd sneered at the Reformed confession of justification by faith alone. For him and all who follow his doctrine, the faith that justifies does not justify alone, but faith justifies when it repents and obeys. According to Shepherd, repentance and obedience are necessary for justification. Justification is not by faith alone but is by faith, repentance, and obedience. De Wolf in the PRC taught essentially nothing different. Both he and Shepherd were enamored with the conditional covenant view of Klaas Schilder and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), and both necessarily then also corrupted the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone.

That teaching of Reverend De Wolf was never fully excised from the Protestant Reformed Churches. The teaching was promoted already at the time of Reverend De Wolf's trial by men who were intent on talking his theology straight, as found in their majority report to Classis East. Some of De Wolf's supporters never left the PRC, and the theology of that report never left the PRC. The false theology came to the surface from time to time, but it was excused and explained away. For years many ministers in the PRC have insisted that they preach the gospel. However, their gospel is no gospel. Gradually it became clear that the theology of the PRC is not much different from Hubert De Wolf's and Norman Shepherd's.

While insisting that they teach an unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone, Protestant Reformed ministers and theologians undermine and deny those truths in all sorts of ways. Rev. Ronald Cammenga taught that Jesus Christ and his atonement are not enough for rest—justification—but that we must also come to Christ in true repentance. Rev. David Overway taught that Jesus and the Spirit-wrought good works of the believer are the way to God. Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma taught that we will be justified before God on the last day by our words—works. Rev. Kenneth Koole taught that our righteousness in the kingdom that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is our acts of love. He taught that when Paul told the Philippian jailor to believe, that his believing was the act of man. Along with this Reverend Koole taught that if a man would experience the favor of a reconciled God,

he must perform that act of believing. He also taught that good works are not to be slighted in assuring souls of their justification. The Protestant Reformed Classis East in recent decisions agreed that good works are not to be slighted in assuring souls of their justification and likewise insisted that good works are necessary for fellowship with God. Prof. David Engelsma led the way by his teaching that the covenant is destined to become a mutual relationship between God and man. He clearly stated what he meant by that when he taught that man must first repent and then God will forgive or that man must first draw near to God and then God will draw near to man. Prof. Barry Gritters took that teaching and ran with it and taught that man is unforgiven unless and until he repents and that God cannot and will not forgive man unless and until he repents. Not to be outdone, the slippery Rev. Martyn McGeown taught that faith is man's activity and not God's act. All of this has been

demonstrated and responded to on the pages of *Sword and Shield*. Those who are interested can search the archives of the website of Reformed Believers Publishing ([reformedbelieverspub.org](http://reformedbelieverspub.org)). Protestant Reformed ministers and theologians maintain that they teach an unconditional covenant, but because they teach that forgiveness has a prerequisite repentance,

that works are part of the way to the Father, and that works of love toward the neighbor are first before God can or will forgive, they necessarily teach a conditional covenant.

What must stand out in all this apostasy that has happened is that these all are denials of the absolutely unconditional nature of God's covenant and of the truth of justification by faith alone. To teach that faith is man's activity and not God's act is to make faith a condition of justification. To teach that man must first repent and then and only then can and will God forgive man is to make repentance a condition of justification. To teach that our works are part of the way to the fellowship of God or part of the way of maintaining and having that fellowship with God is a denial of justification by faith alone.

Justification by faith alone teaches that the ungodly sinner, whom God has forgiven freely by his grace for Christ's sake, stands in God's fellowship in this grace. That sinner has fellowship with God by faith alone and is justified by faith alone. Nothing else—no activity or deed of the sinner—may be injected into his standing in God's fellowship as its cause or explanation. Faith alone truly

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means faith alone. As important, necessary, and good as repentance and good works are, they are not part of the cause, reason, or explanation of justification or of the cause, reason, or explanation that the ungodly, forgiven sinner stands in God's grace. Faith alone means nothing is required of the sinner for salvation. He does nothing; he has in himself only his sin and guilt; and he stands in the grace of God, at peace with God, and as an heir of eternal life. By faith alone everlasting righteousness, the favor of God, and eternal life are his.

And it is this precious truth, which is the source of all Christian comfort, joy, peace, assurance, and hope, that I must explain.

### *The Definition of Justification*

Key to the truth of justification is righteousness and God's attitude toward the righteous. Righteousness simply means conformity to the law of God as the standard of righteousness according to God's own judgment. Before men it is easy to appear righteous, and men may readily justify their fellow man and say that he is an upright man. When men judge men whom they favor, the standard of their judgment is an easy standard, which sometimes is based on nothing more than whether they find someone pleasing and interesting; certainly that standard consists of nothing more than what men can see. But God knows the heart, all the inner recesses of man's mind, and the truth of man's nature. God does not judge outwardly and superficially, but he judges what is inward and according to the strict interpretation of the law, which demands perfection of nature and deeds. According to the standard of the law, God judges one to be righteous or unrighteous. The unrighteous he curses and only curses. Those whom God judges to be righteous he blesses. He only blesses the righteous. He always blesses the righteous, for the Lord loves the righteous.

How then shall a sinner be right with God? If God would enter into judgment with a man, how could that man answer even one of a thousand different charges that God might bring? Man is a sinner in his nature and by birth. He incurred a debt that he cannot pay, and that sinner daily increases his debt. God justifies the sinner as an act of free grace out of his love for the sinner.

The heart of justification is grace—a grace that is rooted in God's eternal election of grace, which is itself motivated by the free love of God. Nothing in the sinner, not even his worthlessness and misery, moves God to love that sinner and to justify him. God's good pleasure to love this sinner and not that one, to choose this sinner and not that one, is the deep and eternal explanation of the sinner's justification. It is as the apostle says in Romans 3:24–26:

24. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:
25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
26. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Justification then is the gracious act of God to forgive the elect sinner's sins, to impute righteousness to the sinner, and to declare the ungodly sinner to be righteous in God's sight. To make it simpler, God declares the sinner who in himself is guilty to be not guilty. The scene is the courtroom of God. God is judge, and the sinner is in the place of the accused. Justification is a legal, declarative act of God that changes the sinner's state before God and as a fruit places that sinner in a whole new relationship with God. The sinner's state is his legal standing before God. His state can be one of guilt or one of innocence. The guilty one God punishes, and the righteous one God blesses. In himself the justified one is ungodly, has in himself no good thing, and has broken all God's commandments. In himself the sinner is guilty and worthy of condemnation. In the act of justification, the sinner appears before God only and always as the sinner. He does not appear as the repentant sinner. He does not appear as the obedient sinner. He does not appear even as the believing sinner. He appears as the sinner and as the ungodly. This one—the ungodly—God forgives; this one—the ungodly—God declares to be righteous. Because God justifies the sinner, God adopts him as his child, declares him to be worthy of eternal life, speaks peace into his heart, gives him an unashamed hope, and assures him of his salvation. Because God justifies the sinner, God frees the sinner in his mind from wrath, delivers him from the bondage of sin and death, sets him at liberty from the cruel bondage of the law, and pours out in his heart the Spirit of life in Christ, who testifies that God loves the sinner. In short, everything that is good and lovely and blessed comes to the sinner because of his justification.

The elect sinner's salvation consists in his justification. All the other blessings of salvation are wrapped up in this one blessing. This view of justification is biblical, as David teaches us in Psalm 32:1–2:

1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
2. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.



God does not impute to his people iniquity (guilt), as Paul also teaches in Romans 4:6–8:

6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
7. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
8. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Justification is a man's blessing, joy, hope, and glory. God does not impute the sinner's sin to him and declares him to be righteous.

### *Justification's Two Sides*

There are two sides, or aspects, to justification.

First, God declares the sinner to be righteous because God forgives the sinner's sins. Another word that is used to describe this aspect of justification is *remission*. Jesus was speaking of this when he taught us to pray for our justification by praying, "Forgive us our debts." Remission of sins is the forgiveness of sins. Frequently *remission* or *forgiveness* is used as a simple, shorthand expression for the whole act of justification. God justifies because God forgives. He sends away the sinner's debts and does not hold the sinner responsible for his sins.

Second, God imputes righteousness to the sinner. In himself the sinner does not have righteousness but unrighteousness. Imputation means that God legally counts another's righteousness as the sinner's own. *Imputing* is a very important word, which is creedal and found in Belgic Confession article 22: "Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50). Scripture teaches the truth of imputing when it speaks of reckoning or "reckoned":

4. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works. (Rom. 4:4–6)

The word used for reckoning and imputing is a Greek word that means *a legal counting*. Imputing is the legal counting of another's righteousness as one's own. Sometimes the King James Version translates this legal act as makes or "made," as in Romans 5:19: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the

obedience of one shall many be made righteous." This translation is unfortunate because in this verse the Greek word translated as "made" means *constitutes*. That word is often used of appointing someone to office. It is a legal word meaning the legal appointment to office that confers on an officebearer the right of rule, though he may be both foolish and unfit for office. In Romans 5:19 the idea is that God constituted us righteous. He held us in the office of the righteous, though we in ourselves were unrighteous. That was God's legal act. He did not make us righteous people inside; we were still rotten sinners when this happened.

We insist on this legal concept of imputation to guard against the error that justification consists in making the sinner a righteous person or consists of the infusion of righteousness to the sinner. Justification does not consist of imparting (infusing) righteousness to the sinner, so that instead of being a bad man he is made into a good person who does good works. The sinner does not receive justification that way. In justification his spiritual condition remains the same—sinful. God justifies the ungodly. This is Romans 4:5: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Always, as long as we live, God is justifying a sinner, an ungodly and impious person. The sinner's condition in justification does not change. Rather, his legal position changes from one of guilt to innocence.

### *Grounded in Christ*

The question is, how can God be just if he declares an ungodly sinner to be righteous? God wills to be known as the God who is just and the justifier of those who believe in Christ. Yet is that not, in fact, a corruption of justice to declare the guilty to be not guilty? If an earthly judge were to declare a criminal who is obviously guilty to be innocent, then that judge would reveal himself to be corrupt, and the justice of his courtroom would be no justice at all. But God is just, and he is the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. The righteousness that God imputes to the sinner is not that of the sinner himself, but it is the righteousness of Christ.

The creeds are clear on this truth. Answer 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism says that "God...of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 106). The Belgic Confession drives this truth home throughout articles 22 and 23. Article 22 says that "we embrace Christ our righteousness" and that Jesus Christ imputes "to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead." Article 23 says that we rely and rest "upon the obedience

of Christ crucified alone” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50–51). Justification is imputing, reckoning, or accounting to the sinner a righteousness that is not his but is the righteousness of Christ.

Yet how is it just to take the righteousness of one and impute that to another? How can the judge say that because my brother obeyed the law, then I have obeyed the law? How is it just to declare that because Christ obeyed, I obeyed, and that because Christ suffered for sins, he suffered for my sins?

It is thus crucial to understand that Christ is not in this sense another from those whom he justified, but he is the head of a spiritual corporation that has its origin in eternity. Christ is one with his people as the head of the covenant and the head of the elect. He represents them according to God’s own appointment and thus is responsible for them, for all their sins, and for all their salvation. Christ’s relationship to the elect explains that he stood in their place, made atonement for them, and accomplished all obedience to the law for them. There is an identification between Christ and the elect church such that he is able to stand in their place and accomplish their righteousness for them. The relationship between the elect and Christ in justification is not like the relationship between a criminal accused in the courtroom and a random man off the street who happens to be in court and whom the judge decides to punish instead of the criminal or whose civil obedience the judge decides to impute to the criminal. The relationship between Christ and his elect is more akin to the relationship a minor child accused of arson has to his parents, which parents the judge justly holds accountable and orders to make restitution for their son’s crimes.

Because we are part of Christ by election and because in that relationship he is our head, then what is his is legally imputed to us.

### *Faith Alone, Not Works*

This justification of ungodly sinners is by faith alone.

We must understand precisely how we are justified by faith alone. Faith is our union with Jesus Christ whereby we are made members of his corporation. By faith then we have titles to his righteousness as members of his corporation. As members of that corporation and possessing the righteousness of Christ, God justifies us in our own consciences by faith. Faith is the means by which we are joined to Christ; then also faith is the means through which we become aware of, are convicted of, and rest in that verdict of God that God passed upon us in Jesus Christ. Faith itself is nothing less than the knowledge and conviction of our justification. So the Belgic Confession in article 22 says that faith is the embrace of Christ, who

is our righteousness. Righteousness is not something that is infused or moved around. Righteousness is in Christ. Christ is our righteousness. And becoming one with him, what is his is ours.

This truth stands over against the false doctrine that justification is in some sense dependent on the works and activities of the sinner. There are no deeds, activities, or works of the sinner that are the cause or explanation of his justification. Throughout history in their assault on the gospel truth of justification by faith alone, the devil and his teachers have found all sorts of ways to insert man’s works into his justification. Man’s works cannot be a part of his righteousness with God and are excluded in order that God is completely glorified in salvation and no glory goes to man. Even our very best works, such as prayer, suffering for righteousness’ sake, going to church, and reading the Bible are all polluted and tainted with sin. The righteous God cannot approve as righteous anything defiled with sin. Only perfect works will do.

The Reformed faith has a tremendous conflict at this point with the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church denies the truth of justification by faith alone. Rome’s teaching is that Christ works in the sinner when the sinner by his free will allows Christ to do that. Then by grace the sinner can do good works and contribute in part to his own righteousness. When a sinner stands before God, the righteousness of that sinner is partly what Christ did for him and partly what the sinner did. Therefore, justification is by faith and works. The controversy between Rome and her doctrine of justification by faith and works and the Reformed and their doctrine of justification by faith alone remains yet today. The truth is that works and man’s activities are totally excluded in justification.

In this connection warnings especially must be given against three forms of the devilish doctrine to bring works into the sinner’s justification.

The first form is that faith itself is a work or an act of man that makes him worthy of justification. That we are justified by faith alone does not mean that faith becomes the substitute work or activity of man that God accepts in the place of perfect obedience. When we say that we are justified by faith alone without works, this does not mean that faith itself justifies us.

That faith is meritorious is Arminianism’s denial of justification by faith alone. The Canons of Dordt clearly lays out and rejects the error that God “chose out of all possible conditions...the act of faith, which from its very nature is undeserving, as well as its incomplete obedience, as a condition of salvation.” That is the nasty, demonically clever lie of Arminianism. God counts faith in the place

of good works, and faith is meritorious. The Reformed answered that error this way:

For by this injurious error the pleasure of God and the merits of Christ are made of none effect, and men are drawn away by useless questions from the truth of gracious justification and from the simplicity of Scripture, and this declaration of the apostle is charged as untrue: *Who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal* (2 Tim. 1:9). (Head 1, error and rejection 3, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 160)

In head 2, error and rejection 4, the Canons also brings up and rejects the same Arminian corruption of justification. Especially shown in this article is that the Arminian corruption of justification corrupts the unconditional covenant doctrine, for the Arminians teach

that the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.

The synod rejected that false doctrine in these words:

For these contradict the Scriptures: *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood* (Rom. 3:24, 25). And these proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 165)

All who teach in some sense that man is justified because of his faith, that faith is man's act that brings God's justification into man's consciousness, or that faith is substituted for perfect obedience to the law likewise teach that new and strange justification of the wicked Socinus.

To teach that faith is a work that earns righteousness is just as serious a departure from the truth as Rome's teaching that by repentance and good deeds man is justified.

Belgic Confession article 22 also denies this idea of meritorious faith when, talking about justification by faith alone, it says that we do not mean "that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50). Here we see that the Belgic Confession was warning about the Arminian error some fifty years before the Arminian controversy in the Netherlands. The Arminians simply took up as their own a doctrine that the Reformed had long condemned as an error regarding justification. This error teaches that yes, we are justified by faith alone, but this means that God declares us to be righteous *because of* our faith. Thus what is being taught in this error is that we are justified on *account of* faith. Our work of faith earns righteousness. The Bible never says that we are justified because of faith, but it says that we are justified *by means of* faith or justified *through* faith. Faith does not create or deserve righteousness, but faith is the means by which righteousness comes to us through God's imputation.

To teach that faith is a work that earns righteousness is just as serious a departure from the truth as Rome's teaching that by repentance and good deeds man is justified. Faith becomes a kind of work that God pays with righteousness. This error must be condemned along with the Roman Catholic error of faith and works.

The second form of this devilish doctrine is that repentance is a work or an activity of man upon which his forgiveness waits. The warning must be given at this point that repentance is not a work or an activity of man upon which his forgiveness waits. Repentance is not another side of the one coin, faith. Faith and repentance are not to be mingled together. Repentance is the good work of sorrow for sin and the whole life of obedience that proceeds from it. Faith is union with Christ and the conviction of one's justification. When repentance is mixed with faith, then a toxic doctrine of justification is the result, that is, that God cannot forgive us until we repent, or that God will not forgive us unless we repent. Repentance rather is the evidence that the righteousness and grace of God have so laid hold on the heart of the sinner that he is turned from sin to God. Repentance is not the hinge on which justification turns, but repentance is the evidence of the faith by which alone a man is justified. Yet however good, necessary, and lovely repentance is, it is not faith. Repentance is not that by which, through which, or because of which we



are justified. The statement that we are justified without repentance is as true as the statement that we are justified without works. To put it bluntly, God does not justify the repentant, believing sinner, but God justifies the ungodly. That ungodly sinner whom God justifies will become manifest in sorrow for his sin.

The third form of this devilish doctrine is that the believer's assurance of his justification comes from and is maintained by his obedience. This is the particularly nasty development in the PRC's wholesale departure from the truth, which development is openly taught in those churches. In the PRC's other departures from gracious justification, she is clever and underhanded, but in this departure she is bold and God-defying. The PRC in her Classis East simply came out and said that good works are not to be slighted in assuring souls of their justification. That is the rank and blatant denial of justification by faith alone and the teaching of justification by faith and works.

Rather, the believer has his justification and the assurance of his justification by faith alone.

Indeed, it is proper to say that our justification is the assurance of our justification, or our justification is our confidence of our justification. We are justified in our consciences, and the justified conscience is the assured and confident conscience.

In light of the corruption of the truth of justification—specifically in the form found in the Protestant Reformed Churches—two important points must be made about justification.

First, there is no essential difference between the truth of the remission of sins and the truth of justification. In the Protestant Reformed Churches, ministers and theologians are making a distinction between forgiveness and justification. These ministers and theologians are doing this in the interest of teaching that a man must first repent, and then and only then can and will God forgive him. The distinction serves the teaching of a prerequisite repentance. For the PRC justification is an objective reality that has no real bearing on the life and consciousness of the sinner from day to day, but the reality of the sinner's daily experience is that he must first repent, and then and only then can and will God forgive him. Thus man is first in his repentance, and then God responds with his forgiveness.

Those who are keen to make such a distinction between justification and the forgiveness of sins are up to no good. They are false teachers who with sleight of hand and cunning craftiness lie in wait to deceive. If forgiveness is by means of repentance, or, as they say, repentance is a means unto forgiveness, or if God will not forgive

unless and until one first forgives the neighbor, then justification is by means of repentance, and that doctrine is no different than Rome's.

However, this distinction between justification and the forgiveness of sins could not be further from the truth. Remission of sins is part and parcel of justification. The doctrine of justification is the same as the doctrine of forgiveness. Sinners are justified by faith alone, and they are forgiven by faith alone.

Second, good works are not helps to the assurance of one's justification. It is not that the sinner is justified, and then he must look to his works for maintaining the confidence of his justification or that he must view those works as additional proofs of his justification. Works are excluded from justification and the assurance of justification. Justification by faith alone truly means justification by faith alone.

### *The Truth of Justification*

We can do no better as a conclusion to this first article on justification than to quote the words of the Belgic Confession's teaching of justification in article 23:

We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied; as David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works. And the same apostle saith that we are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ.

And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before Him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig leaves. And, verily, if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed. And therefore every one must pray with David: *O Lord, enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.* (*Confessions and Church Order*, 51–52)

—NJL

*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.—1 Timothy 4:13*

## SACRIFICES (10): THE *MINCHAH*, OR MEAT OFFERING

*When any will offer a meat offering unto the LORD... — Leviticus 2:1*

### *What It Was*

**W**hat was the meat offering? Even a cursory reading of the law for the meat offering in Leviticus 2 elicits that question.

Where was the blood? Unlike the four bloody offerings presented at God's altar, the meat offering had no shedding of blood. The meat offering did not involve the death of a bull or goat or sheep. Instead, the meat offering required grain that had been harvested from the field: "When any will offer a meat offering unto the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour" (Lev. 2:1).

What we notice right away about the meat offering is that the word "meat" must be understood according to its archaic sense; that is, *meat* according to the old English usage does not refer specifically to the flesh of an animal but to food in general. The basic material for the meat offering was not beef or kid or lamb but grain.

Neither could the meat offering consist of raw grain. The grain for the meat offering had to be fine flour. That grain was first processed into fine flour by grinding it at a hand mill and by sifting away any undesirable particles. It was the finest form that grain could take, a table luxury, suitable for a king's household or for an honored guest.<sup>1</sup> And for the meat offering, that fine flour could also be further prepared into a cake or a wafer and baked in an oven (Lev. 2:4) or cooked on a large iron plate (v. 5) or fried in a skillet of oil (v. 7).

Besides all this, the meat offering was to be mingled or anointed with oil, scented with frankincense, and seasoned

with salt. Especially the latter ingredient was given special emphasis in the law: "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering; with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. 2:13). And while these three things could not be lacking, the meat offering was to be free from all leaven and honey: "No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the LORD made by fire" (v. 11). Unleavened, fine flour and oil, sprinkled with frankincense and seasoned with salt, formed one meat offering.

When these things were presented to the priest, he would take a "memorial" portion to burn upon God's altar. The remainder of the meat offering was designated by the law as "most holy" and allotted to the priesthood for food. What the priest was required to do with the meat offering, being briefly mentioned in Leviticus 2, is further expounded in Leviticus 6:14–18:

14. This is the law of the meat offering: the sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD, before the altar.
15. And he shall take of it his handful, of the flour of the meat offering, and of the oil thereof, and all the frankincense which is upon the meat offering, and shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour, even the memorial of it, unto the LORD.

<sup>1</sup> This fine flour, or *soleth* as the Jews call it, was what Abraham used to make cakes for his three honored guests in the plans of Mamre. Fine flour was given in large measure to Solomon for daily provisions (1 Kings 4:22). It was symbolic of luxury, according to Ezekiel 16:10–13: "I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and brodered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom."

16. And the remainder thereof shall Aaron and his sons eat: with unleavened bread shall it be eaten in the holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation they shall eat it.
17. It shall not be baken with leaven. I have given it unto them for their portion of my offerings made by fire; it is most holy, as is the sin offering, and as the trespass offering.
18. All the males among the children of Aaron shall eat of it. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations concerning the offerings of the LORD made by fire: every one that toucheth them shall be holy.

What was the bloodless meat offering, with all its unique ingredients and rituals?

For if there was no shedding of blood, then the purpose of the meat offering in the temple service could not be expiatory, and its function as a shadow of the old dispensation could not be that of the vicarious satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture itself forbids such an interpretation in Hebrews 9:22: “Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” God had given blood at his altar to atone for sin. God had given the soul of an animal to suffer the sentence of death in behalf of the sinner. But if the meat offering was bloodless, then what was God’s purpose by its prescription?

What is more, the meat offering was never an independent offering.

Though the law for the meat offering in Leviticus 2 does not speak of any relationship between the meat offering and other offerings, there are other passages of the law that do. What the law tells us, first, is that the meat offering was often—if not always—accompanied with a drink offering of wine. Second, the law tells us that the meat offering always followed a bloody sacrifice, which was most often a burnt offering but could be a peace offering as well (Lev. 7:11–12).

For example, when the continual burnt offering—the sacrifice of a lamb both evening and morning—was prescribed in Exodus 29, then the law added this requirement:

40. With the one lamb a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil; and the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering.

41. And the other lamb thou shalt offer at even, and shalt do thereto according to the meat offering of the morning, and according to the drink offering thereof, for a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

Besides the continual burnt offering, the meat offering was joined in the laws for certain feast days to the drink offering and a bloody sacrifice.

For example, when the sheaf of the firstfruits was waved before the Lord in the court of the sanctuary on the Sunday after the passover feast, then this waving of the sheaf was not done without the following offerings:

12. Ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD.
13. And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. (Lev. 23:12–13)

Here scripture uses an important grammatical construction to teach the inseparable relationship between the meat offering and the bloody burnt offering. What the King James Version translates in verse 13 as “the meat offering thereof,” we should read as “the meat offering of it,” where “it” refers to back to “a burnt offering” in verse 12. Therefore, scripture teaches that the meat offering *belongs to* the burnt offering and *depends on* that bloody sacrifice. The same applies to “the drink offering thereof.”<sup>2</sup>

We also observe this inseparable relationship between the meat offering and the drink offering as well as their dependence upon a bloody offering in the law for the feast of Pentecost:

16. Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.
17. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baken with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.
18. And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be

2 It is grammatically possible that the antecedent of “thereof” is “the LORD,” in which case verse 13 should be read this way: “And the meat offering of the LORD shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour...” But if this were the case, then there would be needless repetition. Besides, there are other passages of scripture that establish this relationship between the meat offering and the burnt offering without any doubt. For example, Numbers 8:8: “Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering...” where “his” can only refer to the young bullock as a burnt offering.



for a burnt offering unto the LORD, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the LORD. (Lev. 23:16–18)

When the two wave loaves were presented before God at Pentecost, then that was not done without burnt offerings and their corresponding meat and drink offerings.

Finally, when all the sacrificial laws were reiterated by Moses in Numbers 28 and 29 with a view toward Israel's possession of the land of Canaan, then the very things may be observed: The burnt offerings sacrificed daily and weekly and monthly and on feast days always included their meat and drink offerings.

Therefore, we may conclude that when the law for the meat offerings was given in Leviticus 2, it presumed that the Israelite had also brought both a drink offering and a burnt offering. And we may take note that the meat offering's dependence upon the burnt offering also explains the peculiar placement of the law for the meat offering in scripture. Scripture, having set down the law for the burnt offering in Leviticus 1, immediately proceeds to prescribe the law for the meat offering in Leviticus 2 rather than the other bloody sacrifices. In the mind of Israel, the burnt offering, meat offering, and drink offering were inseparable.

Now, what was the meat offering, with its attendant drink offering of wine and its dependence upon a bloody sacrifice?

What did the meat offering have to do with the gospel of the vicarious satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross?

### *God's Gift*

To arrive at the meaning and significance of the meat offering, we must first consider its name, which name God ascribed to the offering as his divine word of revelation. What is called a "meat offering" in our English version was called *minchah* in the Hebrew tongue.

*Minchah* was used by the Jew to speak generally of a gift or present. It was a *minchah* that Jacob presented to Esau, that Jacob sent to the lord of Egypt by the hands of his sons, that Gideon made ready for the angel of Jehovah, that the children of Belial refused to give to Saul after he had been anointed, and that the king of Babylon sent to Hezekiah after he had heard that Hezekiah was sick. But in a more technical sense, *minchah* referred strictly to the meat offering. The meat offering was a gift.

But we must not immediately speak of the meat offering as being man's gift to God. To speak of the meat offering as only man's gift to God is the direction that so many scholars and commentators are eager to tread according

to their man-centered theology. For example, here is C. F. Keil's comment on the name of the meat offering:

The usual epithet applied to [meat offerings] is *minchah*, lit., a present with which any one sought to obtain the favour or goodwill of a superior...then the gift offered to God as a sign of grateful acknowledgment that the offerer owed everything to Him, as well as of a desire to secure His favour and blessing.<sup>3</sup>

Now, although I reject Keil's language of securing God's favor and blessing, I do not altogether deny that the meat offering served as an instrument by which faith in the old dispensation expressed its gratitude to God, worshiping him as the overflowing fountain of all good. Yet, to understand properly the idea of *minchah*, we must remember that the early sanctuary, together with all its sacrifices and various articles, was but a temporal picture of eternal and spiritual verities, even as Moses was admonished of God to make all things according to the pattern that God showed him in the mount. We must remember that Canaan with its earthly bounties of corn and wine and oil was but a reflection of the heavenly.

How we must interpret the meat offering is made clear by the prophet Isaiah in the sixty-sixth chapter of his prophecy, wherein he stands as a seer of the entire new dispensation and observes the following:

20. They [God's messengers] shall bring all your brethren for an offering [*minchah*] unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering [*minchah*] in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.
21. And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD.
22. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.
23. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. (Isa. 66:20–23)

What the inspired prophet observed was both the shadow and the fulfillment of the meat offering. He saw the gathering of God's elect from every nation, tribe, and tongue by means of the glad tidings of the gospel. Isaiah

3 C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *Pentateuch* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 516.

saw them being brought up to God's holy mount in the new Jerusalem. And he recognized that such a glorious event had its pattern in the meat offering. Even as Israel brought her *minchah* up to the earthly sanctuary, so all God's elect are brought into the new heavens and new earth as the true *minchah* unto God.

And the apostle Paul, standing in the time of this prophecy's fulfillment, echoed the prophet's language in Paul's epistle to the Romans when he spoke of himself as a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, preaching "the gospel of God, that the *offering up* of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:16, emphasis added).

Therefore, the meat offering was God's impress or stamp of a new humanity into the moldable substance of the old dispensation, a new humanity that the triune God desired for himself as his own gift. The meat offering was a representation of a righteous nation, the branch of God's planting, the work of his hands, that he might be glorified (Isa. 60:21). The meat offering was God's Jezreel: a people who deserved to be scattered to the four winds of heaven but a people whom God eternally favors, so that he sows them in the earth, nurtures them by his blessing and favor, gathers them in the time of the harvest, threshes them of all the reprobate chaff, and presents them to himself as his *minchah*.

A gift!

Yea, more—the meat offering was God's gift to his Son, Jesus Christ.

Just as the priests in the earthly sanctuary were able to partake of the meat offerings that Israel brought to God's altar, so our high priest after the order of Melchizedek is given a people as God's gift. We hear such heavenly language in the Lord's high-priestly prayer recorded in John 17. There Christ intercedes for a people—a people whom God had given to Christ and bestowed unto him as a gift! Just read how often Christ speaks this way:

1. These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:
2. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.
6. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.
9. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

10. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.

24. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:1–2, 6, 9–10, 24)

What was the meat offering?

A gift! The meat offering was God's gift to God. The meat offering was God's gift to his Son. The meat offering was God's gift in the Spirit.

The meat offering was the gift of a new humanity, a planting and gathering by the Lord of the harvest, to the glory of God and his Son, Jesus Christ. It was the gift of a perfect living entity, formed by the grinding of many grains into one meal, kneaded and baked into a complete loaf. It was the gift of a new lump, purged of old leaven and free from malice and wickedness. It was a gift well-seasoned with salt, wholly agreeable to the holy palate of the living God and not that which he spewed out of his mouth. It was a gift of a people whose life is made perfect, whose earthly sorrow and misery transformed into the fullness of heavenly joy, even as grape juice ferments and is transformed into wine. It was the gift of a chosen generation who, having been redeemed and renewed, live as holiness to the Lord.

What was the meat offering?

A gift by God's living decree of election!

Only because God gives that gift by his decree in eternity did that gift take a form of a meat offering in the old dispensation. Because God gives that gift in eternity, that gift is being formed even now, the time of fulfillment, when the Lord sends out his servants to gather his grain and to cast away all the tares. And when the harvest is complete, when all God's choicest grain is sifted from all that is undesirable, when that grain has been perfectly united together to form one baked bread, and his *minchah* is presented to him in the heavenly sanctuary, then that living decree shall be perfectly manifest!

What is this meat offering? It is a gift that is found centrally in Jesus Christ.

It is a gift that God purchased for himself by the precious blood of his Son. It is a gift that began to be formed when God raised his Son from the dead. It is a gift that the risen Lord prepared for God, gathering the elect by his word and Spirit. It is a gift that he completes when he returns on the clouds of glory to raise the dead, to purge away all old leaven from the earth, and to present to God a new and perfect lump.

In the next article, the Lord willing, I will finish my treatment of the meat offering by examining its ingredients and dependence on the burnt offering.

—LB

*Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.—Proverbs 17:1*

## A QUESTION ON BEING AN INSTITUTED CHURCH

### *Ad Hominem*

In this article I correspond partly with an article written on the official website of First Reformed Church of Bulacan (formerly First Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan). What is written on the website is specifically addressed to First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church, Bulacan (FORPCB), the church of which I am the minister. Thus the section, which has three articles, is titled “Response to Orthodox RPC.” The first two articles are position papers concerning the history of FORPCB’s secession in June 2022 from First Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan. The articles lay out the defense of First Reformed Church of Bulacan (FRCB) for the baptism of a child whose parents were withdrawn communicant members of another Reformed church (specifically the Berean Protestant Reformed Church, Philippines). These two position papers are two parts of a document titled “Position Paper on the Issues Raised by the FORPCB Against the First Reformed Church of Bulacan.” I suppose that these first two articles come from an official document of FRCB since they are designated as position papers.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is regrettable that FRCB refused to send the position papers as official documents to the church to whom FRCB was responding. As far as I recall, on August 16, 2022, the council of FORPCB ensured that its official position paper on baptism and church membership was received by FRCB prior to the paper’s distribution to the September 2022 classis meeting of the Reformed Protestant Churches in America. The document was sent to FRCB twice. FRCB did not correspond with FORPCB regarding its position paper, but FRCB ignored the paper and set it aside. Total silence. No public preaching, no

doctrinal classes, and not even any articles were made available online to refute FORPCB’s position paper. However, FORPCB consistently ensures a fair debate by making all her preaching, doctrinal classes, and writings available online.

To censure FORPCB—though she sees the humor in the situation—after more than two years, all FRCB did was to take a screenshot of my face during a FORPCB worship service and post it on FRCB’s website without prior consent. No interactions with my sermons, doctrinal classes, or doctrinal articles were made. FRCB appears to be more interested in undermining her opponent’s integrity than in interacting with his doctrine. I know that FRCB is too invested in making herself look smart, but using her opponent’s photographs (for the third time) is not smart but childish. FRCB is found guilty of violating the eighth commandment, which the Heidelberg Catechism explains in Lord’s Day 42: “That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may, and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others.” The prohibition of committing theft (in FRCB’s case, acquiring photographs without consent) hangs on the principle of promoting the advantage of the neighbor. FRCB is also found guilty of violating the ninth commandment, which the Catechism explains in Lord’s Day 43: “That I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 132–33). Even the wicked Philippine magistrates prohibit such unauthorized use of someone’s photographs under the provision of R. A. 10175, also known as the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012. This is how careless and evil the actions of FRCB were. Those actions prove FRCB to be guilty of violating God’s law and culpable of violating the laws

<sup>1</sup> First Reformed Church of Bulacan, “Position Paper on the Issues Raised by the FORPCB Against the First Reformed Church of Bulacan (1);” “Position Paper on the Issues Raised by the FORPCB Against the First Reformed Church of Bulacan (2),” <https://www.frcbulacan.com/resources/response-to-orthodox-rpc>.



of the land. In FRCB's constant attempts to avoid a doctrinal defense regarding the controversy, those who wrote the articles consciously put themselves in a battle over personalities. The disregard of God's law and even of civil law is prevalent and inevitable when the battle is of this kind.

This disregard for the law is clearly the result when a church is built upon the will and doctrine of man. Man—the persona per se—always has the preeminence, so that when the truth is spoken and defended in the church, the hunt against the person begins in order that certain men's names are maintained and given due respect. Man, man, man. All about man. Whether against or for man, the controversy is always characterized by fighting about man. No doctrine. No gospel. No principle is needed since a church that is built upon man is equipped to engage with worldly ways and philosophies. Obsession with man hastens the spiritual demise of a church. Worse yet, obsession with man exhibits a church's carnal and natural state, which only proves her to be destitute of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. These words of the apostle Paul rightly fit FRCB's obsession with man: "Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:15–18).

The first two articles on FRCB's website intend only to incriminate the officebearers and members of FORPCB. The minds behind the documents have no desire whatsoever to defend the gospel. It goes without saying that incrimination involves only man's reputation but never serves the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Reformed Protestant Churches witnessed how this way of thinking rightly fit the attitude of Rev. John Flores when he spoke about the controversy at the Reformed Protestant Churches Family Conference in August 2022. His speech was consistently humanistic but never Reformed.<sup>2</sup> And by reading the articles on FRCB's website, you can easily judge them for yourself and see how they are written to defend certain prominent names in the church while inflicting harm to the names of those who left FRCB in June 2022. Relying on mudslinging is undeniably dirty and ugly. Moreover, such a ploy can be used by only cowardly and lazy persons who are accustomed to stepping away from the

heart of an issue and who eventually resort to worldly brawling.

FRCB's litany defending the baptism of an infant whose parents were not members of FRCB offers no substantial biblical and creedal arguments. I think my previous articles published in *Sword and Shield* since June 2024 disprove FRCB's claims as she stubbornly defends her procedural-error argument (since FRCB insists that baptizing an infant whose parents are not members of the church is *just a procedural mistake*).

I do not intend to interact with the first two articles on FRCB's website since FORPCB's position paper has not received any official correspondence from the consistory of FRCB. Besides, way before these supposed

positional articles of FRCB were published online, the position paper of FORPCB had presented and defended the Reformed view of the relationship of church membership with baptism. Falling on deaf ears, consequently, the position paper of FORPCB would find no substantial and new arguments from FRCB in her positional articles. Nevertheless, I do not wish to outrun our church and get ahead of her to fight her enemy. Let FORPCB officially correspond

with FRCB. I am no match for the wisdom of FORPCB's council of men.

### *Clerical Magicians*

I intend to respond to only the third article published on FRCB's website under the title "Instituted Church?" The author of the article is unknown. But the assumption on which I make a judgment is that, along with the first two articles, the third one is an official statement of FRCB. However, since this particular article does not touch the heart of what is mainly in dispute (that is, the article skirts the controversy itself), I will give my personal take on the third article. I will do so not because I am mentioned specifically in the article nor because my character is being questioned. I have no intention of defending myself no matter how hard the document tries to malign my character. FRCB is always free to throw mud at me. I can confess with the heart that I am more wicked than that for which FRCB accuses me. A sinner I am today, the chief of sinners, until my last breath. Rather, I am set to defend the church as she is manifested in the world and the liberty of the believers constituting an instituted church.

Obsession with man hastens  
the spiritual demise of a church.  
Worse yet, obsession with man  
exhibits a church's carnal and  
natural state, which only proves  
her to be destitute of the Spirit  
of Jesus Christ.

2 Rev. John Flores, "Morning Devotions," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZbJP6E7HXE>.

The Romish church always questions the office of the believer and the liberty the believer has in Christ. Boasting about her mothership, Rome abuses her power and shackles her children to traditions and superstitions. She stands tall before her children, using every means to make them obedient by imposing laws and regulations in order to restrain them from doing what is biblical and godly—suppressing their rights to fulfill their godly callings as dictated by the law of Christ and tyrannically deciding for her children through manipulation—whether in a secret meeting or in a public meeting. And all these are only possible when her children are shackled to her religion, so that whenever liberty is achieved by some of her children, she gaslights the remaining children to make them believe a lie and to provoke them to anger against those who left. She attacks the seceders and accuses them of many evil things. She calls them Protestants to connote that they are unruly enemies of the church.

This attitude of Rome is seen in every false church that has existed in history. For instance, an ancient false church impugned the godliness of Christ's religion by calling the believers Christians and accused believers of being followers of a con man whose body had been robbed by his disciples. Then some years later, after the apostles had died, believers were called cannibals because they ate and drank Christ. Or in the time of the Protestant Reformation, a false church called the Reformed believers Sacramentarians and Calvinists, giving despite to their sacraments and the gospel of sovereign grace. In the late modern years during the time of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Rev. Henry Danhof, and Rev. George Ophoff, the believers were branded as Anabaptists because they rejected Abraham Kuyper's theory of common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel of the three points of the Christian Reformed Church and insisted on the spiritual separation of the church and the world. And more recently in the 2021 reformation that led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches, the believers were called troublemakers and schismatics.

Finally, in the case of those who left FRCB and formed First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church, Bulacan, FRCB continuously impugns the legitimacy of FORPCB's being a true church institute. FRCB ascribes more power and authority to herself than to the word of God (Belgic Confession 29). FRCB makes herself a judge over the very being of an institute. She does not judge whether a church is a true or false church, but she judges even the legitimacy of the institute, despite the

fact that the church she is judging was organized out of the office and liberty of believers. Thus over and over again she refers to FORPCB as a mere "group." In the third article FRCB refers to FORPCB as such almost ten times. If FRCB would call FORPCB a false church, I could appreciate that. That is all right. No hard feelings. Nothing personal about that because that language is biblical and confessional. But if FRCB wants to secure the remaining children inside her synagogue, there is something amusing in calling the ones who left a mere "group" because, after all, for FRCB the battle is consistently over who is right, and who is wrong; who is more convincing, and who is far-fetched; and who is more influential, and who is insignificant. The battle is about man. Amusing, is it not? Imagine how comical it is to see a man brawling over his opinions and principles. "Those who left? Oh, they are just a group of people blindly following a leader. They are just a group of people related to an eloquent man." I ask, why call FORPCB just a "group"? Why not a false church? The explanation lies in the heart of the controversy—baptism and church membership.

The controversy is confessional. No matter what the church does, the dispute weighs more heavily on the doctrinal side than on the procedural one. Baptism and church membership are both implications of our being one with Christ by intimate fellowship through faith. Baptism and church membership in principle have covenantal implications. They are not mere procedures, nor can they stand apart from the doctrine of Christ's mystical union with every member of his church. The Reformed confessions and creeds understand the relationship clearly, so that making baptism and church membership mere procedures undermines the authority of Christ and his word as expressed in the Reformed confessions and exposes the false church and her superstitions.

Calling a doctrinal disagreement a "controversy" is an exaggeration for FRCB. She writes,

Take note that since this group took an issue with the *First Reformed Church of Bulacan* (i.e., a mere issue which they exaggerated to be a '**controversy**') without even exerting efforts to engage in exhaustive deliberations or even a series of discussions to categorically come up with a sound position on doctrine and practice pertaining to what is being disputed.<sup>3</sup>

This statement strategically dismisses the people and the doctrinal controversy. FRCB has to do this so that

3 "Position Paper on the Issues Raised by the FORPCB Against the First Reformed Church of Bulacan (2)." The emphasis is not mine.

she can belittle and dismiss her glaring doctrinal error in the baptism of an infant whose parents were not members of FRCB. Also, by dismissing the people who objected to FRCB's error, she can divert the attention of the laity from the doctrinal error toward the seceders. The leaders of FRCB are like magicians—clerical magicians—from Egypt who perform manipulation in the realm of doctrinal illusion. Through diversion FRCB's focus is now on the people who left rather than on the error she committed in the administration of baptism. Why? Because she knows that a false church does not administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in his word (Belgic Confession 29). If FRCB would delve into the heart of the doctrinal issues, it would give a hint to the laity that she is despicably a wolf in sheep's clothing. One hint could make the laity hear her howl. Her error in illegitimately administering baptism betrays her true identity—that is, as an instituted church she constitutes the false church. From her old mother, the Protestant Reformed Churches, she inherited her character and skill in manipulating the laity by eloquently saying, “There is no controversy here. We are fine. The issue is just a dispute over semantics. There is no doctrinal error. There is peace.”

The prophecy of Jeremiah condemns these seemingly comforting words:

13. For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.
14. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.
15. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. (Jer. 6:13–15)

There is no peace when the law of God is despised; when Christ's institution of the sacraments is profaned; when membership in the church institute is deemed a merely procedural matter; and when the Reformed confessions are thrown down in pretense of love for the supremacy of scripture.

## *God's Witnessing for the Truth*

If baptism and membership are not a controversy, what are they?

First Reformed Church of Bulacan writes,

There were no follow up meetings nor further discussions re: this so-called ‘doctrinal’ concern (*i.e.*, not even a protest) after only a single meeting between candidate Jeremiah Pascual and the consistory to clarify and resolve his apparent serious concern on this matter. And yet everyone in this group who sent their letter of withdrawal of membership used this same issue as one of their main grounds for withdrawing their membership. They simply followed blindly this malicious and baseless allegation. They all claimed that the issue is such a serious matter and even made it a blown-up controversy declaring the matter as a *heresy*; hastily concluding that the FRCB has altogether thrown the creeds and confessions. They maliciously judged the FRCB to be guilty of ‘*bibliolatry*’ without even giving tangible proofs nor further deliberating, clarifying and carefully evaluating their judgment.<sup>4</sup>

In this statement it seems that FRCB qualifies a “serious matter” as a controversy only if it is “a blown-up controversy.” Let me ask FRCB: Was the controversy between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the then Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan on April 25, 2021, a “blown-up controversy,” so that suddenly on May 16 of that same year, members left the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP) and formed First Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan? Was it? After the 2015 sermon of Rev. David Overway, those of us in the Bulacan church never heard the word *controversy* regarding faith, good works, and the covenant. But all seemed quiet and at ease with the PRCP. Her pulpit was silent. She made no effort to write against the doctrines of the PRC. But after individuals of First Reformed Protestant Church gave the assurance of financial support to members who intended to leave the PRCP, suddenly there was “a blown-up controversy.” Abruptly and surreptitiously, plans were orchestrated. I ask again, were there any efforts made to have a series of meetings with the PRCP? All we heard at the PRCP meeting of classis on April 25, 2021—the day that Rev. John Flores was

4 First Reformed Church of Bulacan, “Instituted Church?,” <https://www.frcbulacan.com/resources/response-to-orthodox-rpc>. The emphases are not mine.



given a hint that the RPC in America would be very willing to support a newly seceded church financially—was Reverend Flores’ allusion that his church would be leaving the PRCP. After members withdrew from the denomination on May 16 and formed First Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan, did the church send a single letter to the PRCP concerning the controversy? Did the church initiate a meeting to discuss the matter? All we had was April 25 and May 16. That is all. According to FRCB’s judgment now, should she consider the 2021 separation as if it were caused by “a blown-up controversy”? She lies if she answers positively. A hypocrite she is, to say the least.

A controversy is not qualified by the process it has to go through but by the subject in dispute. Doctrine is the highest priority, for a controversy is always about the justification of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked (Deut. 25:1). A controversy is between the truth and the lie, not primarily about the process or if everybody is following the ordinary way of protest and appeal or writing this or that to the council or consistory. Controversy is, first of all, conviction of the truth. “The LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land” (Hos. 4:1). “The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah” (Hos. 12:2). “Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD’s controversy” (Mic. 6:2). Jehovah has the truth, and upon examination of sinners, controversy with them arises. He exposes the lie in the lives and lips of sinners because the priority of Jehovah is his truth as it stands against the lie. Thus every controversy between men should be done before Jehovah (Deut. 19:17) because only God is true, while every man is a liar (Rom. 3:4). Thus every controversy should never be between men alone. Man has no right to quarrel against his kind since he is a liar, as is everyone else. Mudslinging must only be done outside of or apart from God. It is never an activity worthy of God. It is not something prescribed to those who are before God or to those who are in his fellowship. Thus the dispute should be made before God. He is the highest implication of truth and the final arbiter of disputes. This applies also to every controversy in the Reformed Protestant Churches or with other churches. That should be done before Jehovah because he himself will witness for the truth; and when he witnesses for the truth, true liberty is attained (John 8:32). His word determines the end of every controversy.

True enough, according to Deuteronomy 19:17, standing before Jehovah implies resolving controversy before the

ordained officebearers. But exegetically speaking according to the context of this verse, the controversy was between men in Israel, not between men and the church or the officebearers. One instance in the Old Testament where a controversy was between the members and the officebearers is recorded in Numbers 16:1–35, and history tells us that God defended the officebearers against the members, and the members were killed or excommunicated through destructive and painful deaths. But there was another instance in which a controversy between officebearers and members of Israel, the daughters of Zelophehad, was resolved through inquiring of God regarding what to do, and God vindicated the cause of the daughters, and the laws in the land were adjusted in response to the need of the people (Num. 27:1–11).

Whether a controversy happens between men or between officebearers and members of the church, the priority is the truth. When we conclude that that is the case, we simply mean that God witnesses for the truth. God resolves the controversies by himself. And in Reformed churches today, the Reformed creeds, as summaries of biblical truths, settle doctrinal controversy because God himself speaks through those creeds with authority coming from his own word.

In our case the council of FRCB has no regard for the Reformed creeds and thus has no regard for the truth. Upon receiving a letter of concern on April 30, 2022, about the April 24, 2022, infant baptism and meeting with the letter sender on May 29, 2022, the officebearers of FRCB proved themselves to be destitute of the truth. They proved this especially on June 5, 2022, when FRCB made an announcement gaslighting the congregation that the problem was the letter sender, who FRCB claimed was rather confused about the procedure in baptizing an infant who belonged to another church.

Members of FRCB heard the announcement and some members were convinced that the sacrament of holy baptism had been profaned and the importance of membership in the church had been set aside. They were convinced that these two things are confessional truths that FRCB persistently despised. The council left those members with no other option than to secede since it was clear that the council would not listen to the truth. God convicted the believers that there was no truth in the lips of the council and that there was no interest in the truth. The priority was the truth. The priority was not to write letters upon letters to the council. One improper administration of the sacrament and one announcement

The truth comes first because any controversy is about the justification of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked. Controversy regarding the truth is about life and death.

defending the glaring error in that administration were enough for those believers to be fully convinced that the church was heading toward destruction and walking in the way of Rome.

That God had truly witnessed for the truth was evident since the conviction of the truth was prioritized, and this inevitably produced in the lives of his children the urgency to fulfill their calling “to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church” (Belgic Confession 28, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 61). In prioritizing the truth sometimes leaving a false church as soon as possible is the best way to serve the truth. The supposed man-made rules should never hold the people of God when the voice of Christ is clearly heard, calling the people to come out of the false church. The call should come first and therefore be the priority of those who have been taught by the Lord Jesus Christ, for inside a false church the truth will always be choked in the service of man.

If the withdrawal of membership of FRCB from the PRCP was done in the service of the truth, then I might say that all lapses in taking the course of due process should never be an issue. If the withdrawal of FRCB happened immediately, even on the day after she learned

that the PRCP was in error, there would be no problem as long as the priority was the truth. The process should never be an issue. The truth comes first because any controversy is about the justification of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked. Controversy regarding the truth is about life and death. The same principle should be applied to the former members of FRCB, who now constitute FORPCB and who withdrew their membership on the basis of the erroneous infant baptism and the public announcement defending and covering up that error. Jehovah had controversy with the baptism, with the parents of the child, with the council, with the carnal minister, with the preaching, and with the whole church. And since Jehovah witnesses for truth, the Spirit of Christ who dwells in the hearts of those former members of FRCB always seeks the truth or where that truth is preached. The implication, of course, is to separate from where this truth is not preached and practiced and to join like-minded Christians who are willing to despise themselves in the building of the church of Jesus Christ as it is manifested in the institute.

I will continue my further response to FRCB in the next article, the Lord willing.

—JP

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**T**he judgment of the world...through the cross of Christ must begin at the Church, in order that God's Church in Christ may be justified and saved, while man's Church is condemned and destroyed. For even as we distinguished in the previous chapter between God's world and man's world, so we must now distinguish between God's Church and man's church, the true and the false church, the faithful bride and the adulterous woman. The one is called Jerusalem, the city of the living God, the daughter of Sion; the name of the other is Sodom and Gomorrah, even though in the world she appears as Jerusalem. To the one the Lord says, Ammi, My people; to the other He says: Lo Ammi, not My people. They are Jacob whom God loves, and Esau whom He hates. In the world they are always one to a certain extent, like the wheat and the chaff. Especially was this the case in the old dispensation, when the church was under the law and confined within the limits of Israel's theocracy. Also in the new dispensation the false church constantly arises in the bosom of the truth; and always that false church seeks to gain the ascendancy, the controlling influence in the church in the world. It seeks the pulpit that it may corrupt the truth of the gospel; it wants a ruling position that it

may deliver the Church to the world and the devil. But in the new dispensation the true church can always maintain purity of doctrine by separating from the false, apostate church in the world. In the days of the Old Testament this was impossible. There was one throne of David, one temple, one king, one service of God according to the law, one institute, and if the wicked were in power, occupied the throne and served officially in the temple, the true Church had no means of expressing itself...Nor is there a more wicked, abominable, hypocritical, self-righteous, self complacent, outwardly pious and inwardly corrupt part of the world whose prince is the devil than the false, apostate church, that wicked adulteress that denies that Jesus is the Christ! It is that church that stones the prophets and then builds their tombs, that kills the righteous and then garnishes their sepulchres; it is that church that is compared to a whitewashed sepulchre, beautiful without but within full of dead men's bones and uncleanness; it is that ungodly, abominable, antichristian harlot that sheds all the blood of the saints, that crucified Christ, and always crucifies Him again! (Herman Hoeksema, *When I Survey...* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1977, 12–13)

*And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.—Leviticus 26:7*

## A PICTURE IN THE SNOW

**T**he snow has melted from off the earth. The winter has come and gone, and we are well into spring. All around life is springing forth from the earth. Grass shoots up. Flowers begin to bloom. Trees cover themselves with their leaves. Where once the snow covered all, now the earth is laid bare.

But did you see the picture in the snow? The picture to which I refer is the picture of our salvation in Christ Jesus. We know this passage in Isaiah 1:18 well: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” A lovely picture for the child of God. A marvelous reality! Sin like scarlet but white like snow. That is the truth. That is the reality for the child of God: sin like scarlet shall be as white as snow. And in the winter God sets that reality before the whole world with that most lovely picture, the white snow.

A picture is something earthly that points to or resembles some heavenly or spiritual reality. Scripture uses many pictures. Jesus often used pictures in his public ministry. Jesus calls himself a vine and his people the branches, which is a picture of their union and his life-giving power. There is the picture of the ground on which a sower casts his seed that shows the types of men to which the gospel comes. There are many soils and many responses, yet only one type is prepared by the Lord to spring to life. A graft as a picture of faith; leaven as a picture of the abundant pollution of sin; and the stars of heaven, the dust of the earth, and the sand by the seashore for the innumerable throng of elect, known and numbered by God alone, are all examples of how scripture uses the earthly as a picture of the heavenly and spiritual.

Pictures in scripture are given for our instruction, which is always the case with a picture. A picture makes something easily graspable by someone. Teachers employ pictures to instruct children. A picture places before their eyes a concept that their minds cannot easily grasp and makes the concept more easily understood. The minister

gives pictures or examples; they sprinkle so-called salt and pepper into their sermons in order to drive home a point or to explain a word or concept to the congregation. God also uses the picture to instruct. That which God would have us know is heavenly, that which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

God puts before us a picture so that we might understand, so that we might have a little glimpse of what he has prepared for us, and getting a little glimpse, so that soon we do not forget. Is that not also the point of a picture? A picture can be grasped so that we remember. A picture is worth a thousand words. That is the value of a picture; it keeps the truth of it before the mind. You will not go astray in your mind with a solid picture.

The problem with false teachers is that they ramble on and on. They ramble about faith. They ramble about forgiveness and repentance. They ramble about justification. And in all their rambling speeches, they mix truth with falsehood, and the end is a confusing mess that one has to wade through and wonder if this is correct or if that is correct. And one says to himself, “Something does not add up, but what is it?”

Remember the picture—the truth set forth in a clear example, in a clear representation. A simple picture is sufficient to condemn false doctrine and to confound false teachers. Deeming themselves wise, they become fools, and esteeming highly their wisdom, their wisdom is made folly.

The picture that we consider is snow. In Isaiah 1:18 sin is opposed to the white snow. Isaiah gives a picture of sin in the text too. Sins are as scarlet and as red as crimson. Sin is as bold and brazen as scarlet. Sin is deep and dark like crimson. Crimson and scarlet are both shades of red, a bold and pronounced color. Who wears red to be inconspicuous? Red easily catches the eye; it stands out. And red cannot be blotted out. When you



spill wine on a white shirt, it does not come out. The stain remains; you cannot get it out. Worse yet, the stain is red, and everyone can see it. You will have to get rid of the shirt. That is sin in the text, but more specifically that is sin in God's eyes. Sin is brazen rebellion. Sin is bold transgression. Sin is pollution that cannot be blotted out. Sin is guilt that cannot be masked. The sinner cannot clean himself, and he cannot hide. His sin ever provokes God to anger. This truth stands for all of man's works, even the works of faith. Sin is as scarlet and as crimson. If one sin is committed, then the whole work is corrupted. There is a big, red stain in the work. Will not God, who sees all things, notice? Will he love that which is polluted? Will he suffer the stain that provokes him to anger?

But the reality for man is far worse than a mere stain. Man from head to toe is red. His whole nature is glaring with sin. Flowing from his heart is crimson iniquity. All he minds is sin. All he wills is sin. All he does is sin. His whole existence is one of sin. Sin is all man ever does. Man does not have only a red stain, but he himself is also thoroughly stained red. This is all men, and this is the child of God too by nature. You cannot miss that in this picture. The child of God must think this concerning himself: "I am the sinner." His sin is not only as scarlet and crimson, but also he himself is as scarlet and crimson. All his sin pollutes and condemns him. He is a bold, glaring provocation in the eyes of God. That is all man ever is.

Though all this is true of God's people, God has a word to them in Isaiah: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." A lovely picture. Sins like scarlet shall be as white as snow. Red is made white! Who has heard of such a thing? Who can perform it? But that is the gospel. Scarlet and crimson are made white. That is impossible. Yet that is what God promises in this verse, and that is what God actually does. But greater, that is what already has been done!

This verse shows that man can never have any part in his salvation. Can man make white the crimson of sin in his nature and deeds? That is the impossibility that is always taught when men teach that there is that which man must do to be saved. They teach that in some way, shape, or form man must make red into white. You want to get blessings for your obedience? You want the experience of your salvation by works? Can you make all your redness into white? And folly of follies, how shall man do it? By more crimson? Such are man's deeds and man's nature. No, salvation and its blessings come from him who can change red into white. From him, by him, and through him alone.

God performed this wonder of grace at the cross. That is when red sin was made as white as snow. That is what God speaks of in Isaiah 1:24–27:

24. Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies:
25. And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:
26. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.
27. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

These verses refer to the coming and work of Jesus Christ. Isaiah also speaks of this later in Isaiah 9:6–7: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." And he sits upon the throne and kingdom of David "to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." And Malachi 3:2–3 says that Christ "is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap," and he "shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." And Christ, "whose fan is in his hand...will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

Christ came in judgment. That is what you must always understand about him. He came to execute judgment. He came to purge his floor. He came as fire to purify and redeem Zion and to ease and avenge God of his adversaries with unquenchable fire. That is what happened at the cross. With the fire of God's judgment, God purged in Christ all our sins. And with fire God consumes all the reprobate because they are not given to him; thus they do not partake of the cross. God with fiery judgment turns the red to white for the elect, and he leaves all others in the red. God does this when he takes sin away. Sin is always as scarlet and crimson; it cannot be made into good. Sin must be punished and taken away; that is the only way. And in Christ, God gives to his people righteousness as white as the snow. Zion is redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness. She is purified. She is as white as snow.

White is symbolic of absolute purity. There is no stain in white. There is no imperfection. There is no filthiness. White is clean. White is beautiful. White shines in the light. That is what God made his people at the cross—white like snow. That is the truth of the cross. When

Christ said that it was finished, he meant it. You must believe that. And when God speaks this promise, you must understand that this is how God sees his people. They are as white as snow before his eyes.

This is an astounding reality. Does he not see our sins yet? Do we not pollute and defile ourselves with the red of sin? The answer is no. The red is made white forever. The white garment of righteousness that Christ gave to his people at the cross never can be polluted. You can pour sin all over the white garment, and it will remain white. Imagine that you would take a bottle of wine and pour it all out over a white shirt, and the shirt would remain white. You would say, "That is impossible!" But that is the wonder of grace.

And God displays this in the picture of snow. Every winter God covers the earth with snow. White and clean. Pure and unpolluted. Writ large in the earth, God declares this heavenly reality: "I have washed my people. I have purged away all their pollution. Though they sin, they are as white as snow. This is how I see you! White as snow." That is God's word to us every time we see the snow.

But do we believe it? I say that we barely do. There is much sin in us; are we not red like crimson? We sin against God; how can we be clean? We transgress; are we as white as snow? That is why God gives us the picture. He would have us to know and understand the reality of our salvation at the cross. No matter how grievous, no matter how great, no matter how many sins, the truth is that though they be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. That is the believer's comfort over against all his sin. Though he sins, there is no sin in him. Though he sins, he is not guilty. Though he sins, God is not angry with him. A wonder explained in Christ alone.

And the simple picture makes the truth simple. I say this over against Protestant Reformed theology, which teaches that man must do this before God can and may do that. Man experiences his salvation in the way of his obedience. Man must repent before he is forgiven. Have those in the Protestant Reformed Churches never seen snow? If we are as white as snow, what remains to be done? Does not God bless the righteous? Shall that which is white become cleaner? Are they blind? But they teach that there is that which man must do for salvation because they deny the cross. They do not believe the word in Isaiah 1:18. They even do not believe in Jesus Christ. Does his word mean nothing? Has he not said, "It is finished?" Has God spoken a lie? A simple picture is sufficient to show their lie and folly. "Christ is not enough," they say, "so let us use crimson to make scarlet to be white." Surely that is all of man's repentance. It is all red; it is polluted with sin. Can man's works be anything else? And that is what they attempt to use to appear clean in God's eyes. It is all folly. The truth of our salvation is very simple and is able to be shown in a little snow that falls on the earth.

But now the snow is gone from off the face of the earth. It has melted away, and the filth of the earth is again exposed. We are well into spring, and we head toward summer. The snow is long gone and will not soon fall again. Yet the truth abides, and we have a simple picture. A picture worthy to be remembered. A picture of a glorious reality. We are washed perfectly clean now and forever. That is the picture in the snow. A profound wonder shown forth in some earthly snow.

Praise, honor, and glory be to God!

—Earl David Kamps





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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*He built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry. —2 Chronicles 26:10*

**T**he above verse is about Uzziah, king of Judah. Uzziah was a true son of his father David. David loved husbandry. He loved to care for his sheep and was very attached to them. Nathan the prophet had used that very love of David for his sheep to point out his sin to him. Uzziah too loved husbandry. The Hebrew says that Uzziah loved the land, which means not simply the land but also all the work that comes with the land. He loved the land of Canaan and of the kingdom of Judah. Uzziah loved the land as the Lord's land and as the heritage that Jehovah had conferred on his people. And Uzziah loved all the work that was to be done in the Lord's land.

Uzziah found it to be a dry and thirsty land, and he dug wells to water his cattle. When he came to the throne, certain parts of his land where he raised his cattle had been overrun with Arabians, Ammonites, Edomites, and Philistines who pillaged and stole his animals or otherwise took the land for themselves. Uzziah brought them to heel and built towers to protect his herds from their raids. Yes, cows and sheep and donkeys, and maybe camels and goats too. He had many animals that needed water and protection.

Uzziah had plowmen too and vinedressers in the mountains. You can see his fields in the valleys: This one for barley and that one for wheat and that one over there for a garden of herbs, cucumbers, leeks, and melons. You can see his vineyards on the sides of the hills, full of vinedressers ridding the plants of pests and disease, pruning the branches of the establishing vines, and fertilizing the vines to produce an abundant harvest of grapes to be made into the rich wine of Canaan. It was a land that flowed with milk and honey, that was watered abundantly with the early and the latter rains, and that was drenched in the sunshine that warmed the earth.

And at the center of it all was King Uzziah, who loved that work in the Lord's land. He never viewed the labors as drudgery or merely as a job to complete. He loved the work. He loved to plan for it, to think about it, to oversee it, and to engage in that work. After the long confinement of winter, he was eager to see his fields tilled and planted and his flocks and herds turned loose again into their lush summer pastures. You can see Uzziah touring his estates and walking in the freshly plowed fields, listening to the contented lowing of the cattle and the pleasant bleating of the sheep, and observing the careful tending of his vineyards. And when harvest came, he gathered his grain into the barns, pressed his grapes in the winepresses, and sheared his sheep on the hills. He had much cattle, and he loved husbandry.

He was but a type of David's greater Son.

Listen as that Son describes his love of husbandry. "No man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles" (Mark 2:22). "Behold, a sower went forth to sow" (Matt. 13:3). "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman" (John 15:1). "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

—NJL