# 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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# REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

*Remember Lot's wife.* — Luke 17:32

A simple exhortation. A simple reminder.

We are no doubt familiar with the history of Lot's wife. Her history was brief. Her history is likewise well known. Perhaps even the youngest of children knows her history. The history of Sodom and Gomorrah. The horrific state of Sodom and the other cities of the plain. The severe judgment and condemnation of God, who rained fire and brimstone and destroyed the cities of the plain with an overthrow. The gracious deliverance of Lot out of the midst of that overthrow. The providential deliverance of Lot's wife and two daughters, who were brought with Lot out of that city.

In the day that God, by the hands of his angels, delivered Lot, his wife, and their two daughters out of the city, there was the gracious deliverance of Lot and the providential deliverance of Lot's family. One deliverance was gracious, and the other was providential. Lot's deliverance was gracious; God saved Lot because Lot found grace in the sight of God. Lot's family's deliverance was providential; God did not love Lot's wife and daughters, neither favored them, nor justified them, but they were taken out by an act of God's providence.

Because the deliverance of Lot's wife and two daughters was an act of God's providence, there can be instruction in the exercise of remembering Lot's wife. God's providence is his counsel, which God carries out by his everywhere-present and omnipotent hand. Yet the hand of providence, God's own hand, is for us a fatherly hand. This means that providence, as the carrying out of God's will, is directed for us and for our benefit, yea, for our eternal good. Such was the deliverance of Lot's wife and daughters. They were not delivered because God loved them and saved them. They were not delivered because God willed their eternal good. Rather, God delivered them because he loves us, and so he designed their deliverance to be for our instruction, for our remembrance, and for our eternal good.

The question then is, what possible good is there for us in remembering Lot's wife? What is the instruction that God would give to us?

What was Christ teaching to his disciples in Luke 17? Jesus' instruction in verse 32 was prompted by a question to Jesus from the Pharisees. "When he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." We must note that then Jesus "said unto the disciples…" (vv. 20, 22). Jesus' disciples were the objects of his instruction, though the Pharisees remained in earshot, hearing the Lord's instruction. There was most certainly a word to the Pharisees and to all those who claim to be of God yet are not of God. Chiefly however the instruction in verse 32, "remember Lot's wife," was for the disciples and is for the church, for God's elect people.

What then is that instruction?

To understand the command of verse 32, it is necessary to understand the context. This includes both the context of Christ's teaching and the context concerning Lot's wife. Christ was teaching about the coming of the kingdom of God. The language he used throughout Luke 17 alluded to Revelation 19. He referred to "the Son of man…in his day," and he said that the Son of man will be as the lightning that lightens out of the one part under heaven and shines unto the other part under heaven (Luke 17:24). This refers to all the glory of the Son of man and all the glory in which he will appear suddenly. His appearance will be most glorious, as lightning, radiating light, beauty, and perfection. He will come crowned with the glory and honor of the crucified, risen, and exalted Son of man, for God has glorified Christ for all his work. Furthermore, Christ spoke of the fact that two will be together, and one will be taken. Finally, when his disciples asked Jesus where this will be, then he answered, "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (v. 37).

In Revelation 19 we read of him who is called "Faithful and True," who rides on a white horse, and "in righteousness he doth judge and make war" (v. 11). And his glorious appearance is described. His eyes are as a flame of fire. His head is adorned with many crowns. He has a

vesture dipped in blood. Besides the name Faithful and True, he has a name that no man but himself knows, and he has the most glorious name of all—"The Word of God." Riding on his white war-steed, he leads the armies of heaven, who are clothed in fine linen, white and clean, and likewise riding on white horses (vv. 11–14).

This one who is adorned in glory, might, and honor comes with a sharp sword proceeding out of his mouth that he might smite the nations and rule them with a rod of iron, and he comes to tread "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:15). This one casts the beast and his false prophet into the lake of fire, which is burning with brimstone (v. 20). This one also smites all those who are with the beast, his armies who set themselves in array against Christ and his kingdom (v. 19), and this one slays all those who are deceived by the false prophet and worship the beast (v. 21). But notably we read, "and all the fowls were filled with their flesh" (v. 21), and this was at the command of an angel who called to all the fowl of heaven, "Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God" (v. 17).

It is not hard to see the similarities between Luke 17 and Revelation 19, especially regarding the fowls of heaven and the eagles of which Christ spoke to his disciples: "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Luke 17:37). Yet what does Lot's wife have to do with this? Did she not perish in the plain of Sodom?

The answer is not difficult. The destruction of Sodom was a picture of the destruction of the world by the hand of the Son of man at his final appearance. But what we must note about this is that Sodom's destruction was not the singular instance of God's judgments and destruction. There are slaying and deliverance not only at the end but also throughout all world and church history. The truth of Christ's words "wheresoever the body is" is that wherever there is a corpse, there are eagles to devour it. The context in which Christ spoke verse 32 was one of eagles—vultures—feasting on the flesh of a corpse.

In that context we are to remember Lot's wife.

From thence it is plain that remembering Lot's wife is a history-long reality.

Fundamentally, we are dealing with God's judgment. When God's judgment comes, then there are corpses and those who live. There are two men together; one is taken, and the other is left. That is a reality that always comes when God makes a judgment. One shall be left and the other taken. The wicked shall be left and destroyed, and the righteous shall be taken out and saved. We are dealing with God's judgment, and God constantly and perpetually judges. He is judging all men, righteous and wicked, this very moment. He judges men when the sharp sword comes, when Christ comes and is heard, and when the word of God comes and the gospel is preached. God is the judge; at all times God is the judge. If I may put it this way, God cannot help it. God *is* a righteous God. His own righteousness is his perfect love for his perfect being, and in his judgments that is God's standard. Does this man love me as I love myself? If yes, then he is righteous; if not, then he is wicked.

In this circumstance Lot's wife found herself. Sodom and Gomorrah had been weighed by Jehovah God. He had entered into the judgment with Sodom and Gomorrah. He had heard the cry of their iniquity. He had searched them out. He had discovered all their wickedness. He had made a righteous judgment; the cities were to be destroyed. Sodom and Gomorrah had filled the cup of iniquity. Their wickedness had come to its extremity. They could not reject God more than they already had, which was manifested in their wickedness—their unbridled, widespread, and predatory sodomy. They were fit for destruction. No longer would God forbear, but he would reduce the cities to ashes with an overthrow.

But Lot's wife must be remembered in light of her husband. Lot was utterly unique in the fact that he was a righteous man who had a wicked wife and wicked children and lived in a wicked city. He was the one righteous man in the midst of the ungodly.

That was not a mere coincidence, for to live in Sodom had been Lot's conscious choice. Sodom had been the choice of his carnality, and his carnality bore further fruits in his marriage and in his children.That was Lot.

Nevertheless, Lot was a righteous man, and the fact that he lived in a wicked city that was fit for the Lord's destruction presents what seems to our eyes to be a grave dilemma.

Abraham accurately described that dilemma by his question in his prayer to God after it had been revealed to Abraham that Jehovah would destroy the cities of the plain: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. 18:23). Abraham's concern in his entire prayer to God was not for Sodom and Gomorrah. That would have been an impossibility. The inhabitants of the cities were the wicked, and Abraham believed in the righteous and holy God. God damns the wicked. They are the reprobate wicked. They are fit for destruction. They hate God. Abraham was not concerned with

Sodom and the plain, but he was concerned with the one righteous man who lived among the Sodomites. His concern was for Lot.

But specifically, Abraham was concerned for Lot because Lot was righteous. This made the matter about God, God's judgment, and God's righteousness. The question was, how would God maintain himself as a righteous God and as the righteous judge of heaven and earth? This was the question because God is the just judge. This means that God saves and blesses the righteous and that God curses and destroys the wicked. That is God's judgment. Always God blesses the righteous. Always God curses the wicked. Yet how could this be done when the righteous were intermixed with the wicked? That was Lot in Sodom. God as the just judge not only had to destroy the wicked; that was without question. But God as the just judge also had to bless the righteous; they had to be saved from destruction; that was also without question. Abraham's concern was this: Since only one righteous man lived in Sodom, would God simply destroy him with the many wicked who were fit for destruction? That is the idea behind the word "destroy" in Abraham's question in Genesis 18:23. The word literally means *to shave*. Would God simply shave the righteous and the wicked together? As a man shaves all the hairs on his head by merely running the razor through his hair, would God do that with Sodom? Destroy the righteous like the wicked? Slay the righteous with the wicked? Deal with the righteous like the wicked? Would God make no distinction?

That would have been an impossibility, as Abraham prayed, "That be far from thee to do after this manner… Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). How then shall the Judge of all the earth do right? When the Judge comes to execute judgment in the earth, how does he do right? How does he maintain himself as the just judge of just judgments?

God would have us examine the history of Sodom and Gomorrah to know the answer. The whole account in Genesis 19 makes several things very clear.

First, Sodom and Gomorrah were fit for destruction. The cities had come to the extremity of wickedness, and there was no escape from that destruction. Lot was pulled back into the house; there was no time for rebuke. The door was closed to the men of Sodom; there was no possibility of escaping the judgment of God. The men of Sodom were blinded in their wickedness; they shall grope in the darkness and never see the light.

Second, Lot and his family had been living in Sodom for almost fifteen years, and they were entirely part of that city. Lot, as it were, had woven Sodom into his heartstrings. His house, livelihood, life, family, and friends were in Sodom. He had left Abraham for Sodom; he did not leave Sodom when the Sodomites had been carried away captive; and he had continued dwelling there apart from Abraham and apart from God's covenant on the earth. Ultimately, Lot lingered in Sodom. He was in Sodom; thus to all appearances he was a partaker of Sodom's judgment. That is what it meant to be in Sodom.

Third, the account in Genesis 19 gives us a small glimpse into the fact that Lot was righteous. It was evident that Lot had faith, for even the Sodomites knew him as a sojourner (v. 9). Lot rebuked the wickedness of the Sodomites (v. 7). Lot sought to defend the angels from the predatory, gang-sodomy of the men of the city (vv. 3, 8).

These things appropriately set the stage for us. The cities were wicked indeed and were to be destroyed, which the angels had been sent to do. Lot was a righteous man, yet because he was in Sodom that righteous man would be destroyed with the inhabitants of the city. On this stage God revealed the answer to Abraham's questions. No, the righteous would not be destroyed with the wicked, and God showed how.

The answer can be summarized in one word: Deliverance. And this word can be further qualified: gracious deliverance, sovereign deliverance, irresistible deliverance, righteous deliverance. Nevertheless, deliverance. To deliver someone means to take that one out of some place and to bring him to another place. That is deliverance. The mailman delivers mail, taking it out of the post office and bringing it to someone's house. The firefighter delivers men out of a burning building and brings them outside to safety. That is how God saved righteous Lot. God delivered Lot by the hands of God's angels. God laid hold on Lot's hand, dragged Lot out of the city, and set Lot squarely outside the city.

Furthermore, Lot was commanded to flee to the mountain and to not look back. Do you see? Deliverance. That is how God saves his people, the righteous. That is the only way. The wicked must be destroyed; God is just. The righteous must be saved; God is just. The righteous must be delivered then. They must be taken out. Then can God (I say "can" because God is just; he will not ever destroy the righteous [Gen. 19:22]) destroy the wicked because the righteous are delivered to safety outside the wicked and their destruction.

And to make an example of the wicked, God took Lot's wife and two daughters out of Sodom. Lot's wife was taken out with Lot. She was delivered, not because God loved her, neither because God accounted her to be

righteous in Christ, but to make an example of her so that Christ could use her as an example. Having been delivered from Sodom with Lot, Lot's wife fled with her husband, and in her flight she turned back to behold her city, Sodom. She gazed upon Sodom as Jehovah God was raining fire and brimstone upon it. Her beloved city! Overthrown! The wicked whom God hated, whom God destroyed—her beloved. In the city were her children, her family, and her friends. There was her life, joy, soul, and heart. Her beloved Sodom, destroyed! And in her turning back to Sodom, she was destroyed.

Remember Lot's wife!

She became a pillar of salt, a *pillar* because she was an example for remembrance, of *salt* because it is an example of the Lord's judgment and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. To that pillar of salt, Christ directed us. She was the example of which Christ spoke: "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back" (Luke 17:31). The judgment of the Lord had come, and by her looking back, Lot's wife returned to the stuff of the house and from the field back to the house.

Had she not been told to not look back?

Her history also explains Christ's later statement: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33).

Remember Lot's wife.

It is not difficult to see the deadly consequence of one's turning back, or as Christ says, "seek[ing] to save his life." Turning back is deadly precisely because of the way God saves when he judges. Deliverance. When God saves the elect, the righteous, the objects of his grace, God delivers them. He takes them out. He takes them out of the world, separates them from the wicked, and makes a distinction between his people and the world. And having taken them out, God brings them elsewhere. He brings them into his own fellowship, into his church, and ultimately into heaven. In this way God saves them. He saves through deliverance. God makes a distinction. God makes a separation. The reprobate wicked are left, and the elect righteous are taken out. The elect righteous are taken into the safety of God's fellowship, and they dwell in that safety alone.

Is that complicated? Is there any safety in going back? Are the righteous not spared because the Lord has delivered them? If they are safe through separation, then is it not destruction to return back?

Christ's words are not difficult to understand. To seek one's life is to do the same thing as Lot's wife. Her life was in Sodom. In Sodom was all the delight of her soul. In Sodom was her home. In Sodom were her friends, those whom she loved, the beloved of her heart. In Sodom was her family, her daughters, her children, her in-laws. In Sodom was all her wealth and success. In Sodom was her livelihood. Yet it all was in the midst of destruction. She sought her life and returned back. But to return back was to go back to the place of destruction. She had been delivered and taken out; in earthly terms she had been delivered, but returning back, she was destroyed. She left the safety of deliverance. Is it any wonder then that she lost her life? Sodom was a burning building. She had been taken out. But loving her life and the things of the world, she returned to a burning building. Do not those inside a burning building perish?

Remember Lot's wife.

Now, as I wrote earlier, Christ was speaking to his disciples, that is, to the church. He was speaking to the believer. The believer is the proper object of this exhortation. It belongs to the believer to remember Lot's wife. It is the believer who is called out and delivered. It is the believer, like Lot, who is taken out of the world, taken away from her abominations, and delivered from her destruction. It is the believer who lives in the world but is not of the world. It is the believer who fellowships with God and is the friend of God. That one is delivered, and as the believer stands as one whom God has delivered, the believer must hear the instruction of Christ.

Remember Lot's wife.

The believer must hear the sharp warning of Christ's words: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever seeks to save his life shall lose it." This is far from teaching that the believer can ever fall away from God. God always sovereignly and efficaciously preserves his people. Lot was an example of this. Even in their wanderings, God always preserves his people. The Judge of all the earth shall do right! The righteousness of Christ imputed to them demands their preservation and all their salvation. Nevertheless, it is a warning indeed. It is the same warning of the angels: "Escape for thy life! Look not behind thee! Escape to the mountain! Escape, lest thou be consumed!"

Remember Lot's wife!

This goes a long way in explaining the antithesis in the life of the believer. It is often said that the teaching of the antithesis in the Reformed Protestant Churches is legalistic, that the Reformed Protestant Churches teach the antithesis as a made-up law. Some say that the antithesis is spiritual, not physical—that is, the antithesis is something that perhaps they can talk about, but God forbid that the antithesis ever affects their lives. Rather, the antithesis begins with God.

Remember Lot's wife!

Was there not a distinction made in Sodom and Gomorrah? That distinction, that discrimination, that judgment was God's. Flowing from the distinction, there was the act of God to leave in destruction and to deliver from it. The antithesis flows from the reality that God delivers some and leaves others. Having delivered Lot, the command to Lot was, "Now, flee!" That is not something that man makes up, but it is that which God commands. "I have delivered thee, now escape for thy life!" That is the reality for the believer. He is delivered out of the world, and his whole life consists in fleeing for his life.

This is because returning to the place from whence he was delivered is of deadly consequence. Men deny that too. There are many good Christians out there. They have good things to say. Are there not many opportunities to witness? Good can come from taking these people in, from fellowshiping with them, from marrying them, from making them our friends. Do you not see all the good that we can do? Can we not advance the cause of Christ in the world?

Oh yes, the believer certainly may speak the truth. He may speak it freely. He is a partaker of Christ's anointing! But shall the believer go back? The position of the believer is apart from and outside the world. That is where God put him. There is nothing positive that can ever come from his turning back to the place out of which God called him. God took him out to save him. Shall he return back? God took you out, and you would go back? Know ye not that God delivered you for your good? Know ye not that Israel dwells in safety alone? And you would go back? You would seek to save your life?

That points out the folly of those who refuse the simple command of scripture to be separate. Refusing the command is disobedience, and their very acts of seeking to save their lives destroy them. See the picture. A man had been sitting in a burning building with no escape, and someone delivered him. As he stands outside the burning building, he thinks about all the stuff in his house, and desiring those things, he goes back into the burning building. As he heaps into his arms all his possessions, the building collapses on his head. Would you not say, what a fool? Did he really think that good would come from his running back into a burning building?

Remember Lot's wife.

That is also why the church confesses that outside the true church there is no salvation. The church is the place to which God calls and brings. The church is where the Word of Life is proclaimed. The church is where the fellowship of God is. That is because Christ is found there, and where Christ is, where the Word is, there also is the Spirit of Christ. That is why the church can say that one has no fellowship with Christ, his church, and with God when one leaves the true church. What? Is the Spirit of God apart from the Word of God? Shall a man live apart from Christ? Shall a man live apart from the Spirit? There is life in the true church alone; outside it there is no salvation. That is where God places those whom he delivers. In the church there is life. Outside the church there is death. That is why God delivers, taking out his people and bringing them elsewhere.

That is why scripture also says, "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow" (Gen. 19:29). When God remembered Abraham, God viewed Lot as with and in Abraham. With Abraham was the covenant, the promises, the inheritance, the seed. Outside Abraham there was none of this. God remembered Abraham and saved Lot. God counted Lot with Abraham and thus as a member of the covenant, a partaker of the promises, an heir, and one with the seed, Jesus Christ. That was Abraham, not the world. Outside Abraham there was none of this.

Remember Lot's wife.

These judgments are pleasing to the Lord. They are his own judgments. Let no man seek to alter the Lord's judgments. Let no man esteem his own judgments rather than the Lord's. Let the Lord's judgments be our judgments. That is what is pleasing to God. The believer is not a judge in himself. Man is always a warped judge. But by grace we speak God's own judgments. We may judge as God judges. We may judge as God reveals himself to judge. And when God's judgment is pronounced, even by a man, let none reject it. It is the Lord's judgment.

And as I write, I am reminded of another part of Luke 17, namely verses 3–4:

> 3. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.
> 4. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

I am aware of a certain question. It is this: Do we forgive our neighbor before he repents? And since I am writing about the Lord's judgments, which are pleasing to him, then I may as well write concerning this. Is it not in the same chapter? These verses do not need much explanation, and a simple reading of them ought to be sufficient to see plainly that the answer is no. Do we

make forgiveness contingent on repentance? No, but our forgiveness of the neighbor demands evidence. Does not any judgment require evidence? Well, Christ tells you the evidence: "If he repent." Then there can be forgiveness of the neighbor, and that repeatedly. "If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Is not our forgiveness of our neighbor as God's forgiveness of us? Yes, it is freely for Christ's sake, by faith alone. Such is our forgiveness, and such is our forgiveness of the neighbor.

In addition to the gracious forgiveness of God, there is his work to turn the sinner. This is not difficult. God justifies men through faith in Christ; and on account of the righteousness of Christ, the Spirit is life. God always turns the sinner whom he forgives. Hence there is always evidence of a man's forgiveness by God—the man is also turned by God.

Such was also the case with Lot's wife. There was evidence that she was wicked. God did not have favor on her; God did not give faith to her; God did not forgive her sins; and God did not work in her whatsoever by his grace. Hence she looked back.

Remember Lot's wife!

Whenever the believer must judge, he ought to remember Lot's wife. She is an example of the Lord's judgment for our instruction. God hates sin. God judges sin as sin. God does not mitigate sin. God condemns sin. God punishes sin.

Finally, there is also a word of encouragement to the believer in this passage. Having exhorted his disciples to remember Lot's wife and saying "whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it," Christ added "whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." That is the encouragement to the child of God because this is his lot in life. He shall lose his life. This is the fact of the matter for the believer. He must lose his life. It cannot be otherwise. He will be mocked and reviled by the world. The believer will be forsaken by former friends and those closest to him—a man's wife or a woman's husband—or even by those who hate the believer. He might lose all his livelihood. He might be a beggar. He might starve. He might be slain. There is much that he must lose for Christ's sake. The word of Christ to such a believer is that his life shall be preserved.

Christ said this especially in light of the believer's conscious choice by faith to lose his own life for Christ's sake. The believer consciously loses his life. It is not merely taken away from him, but he loses it. He gives it up. That was true of Abraham when by faith he left Ur of the Chaldees. That was true of Lot when he left Sodom and even ran ahead of his wife. That was true of Moses. That is the choice of faith. And for the encouragement of the believer, Christ said, "Though you lose your life, you shall preserve it. Flee for your life. Look not back. The Lord has delivered thee. Be of good cheer. Your life is preserved!"

Remember Lot's wife.

—Earl David Kamps

This issue our editor, Rev. Nathan Langerak, has been provided a much-needed break from his usual writing. With few exceptions over the past two years, Reverend Langerak has written three of this magazine's rubrics every month in addition to his normal duties as editor. May the Lord bless the countless hours spent for the production of and contribution to this magazine's witness to the pure, Reformed truth. "The sower bearing precious seed / May weep as in his toil he grieves, / But he shall come again with joy / In harvest time with golden sheaves."[1]

Before we get into the contents of this issue, let me remind the reader to order your bound copy of *Sword and Shield* volume 5. If you have not done so already, gather up the stack of last year's issues that sits in the basket beside your living room couch and go hunting for that missing issue hiding somewhere in the house…or maybe it is in the seatback pocket of the car? Even if you end up with one or two issues short, Reformed Believers Publishing will supply what is missing. Just make a note on your magazine stack of what issues are missing and either bring them to the office of Reformed Believers Publishing or hand them over to a board member. Otherwise, you can request a bound volume of new issues by an email to office@reformedbelieverspub.org. The cost is $35 and $45, respectively; and Reformed Believers Publishing would gladly receive any additional monetary support for publication of *Sword and Shield* with your order.

In this issue seminarian Earl Kamps takes up the meditation. Earl has just completed a six-month internship at Cornerstone Reformed Protestant Church in Teeswater, Ontario, Canada. The Lord willing, he will be examined by the September classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches with a view to declaring him eligible for a call to the gospel ministry.

This issue also contains the edited versions of two speeches.

First, in the editorial the undersigned has published a speech that he delivered in behalf of the evangelism committee of Faith Reformed Protestant Church in Loveland, Colorado. This speech, teaching the truth of man's happiness and wherein that happiness consists, also charged the former minister and current minister of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church with corrupting the truth of justification by faith alone, using as proof multiple quotes from the sermons of these two ministers. A more serious charge could not be made, for the doctrine of justification was the hinge of the Reformation and that by which a church either stands or falls. But since the time that this speech was delivered on May 27, 2025, the undersigned has not personally received any response from any member of Loveland church—or, for that matter, from any member of the Protestant Reformed Churches—as to whether his charge is true or not. Will Loveland church keep silent? Is there not any zeal in her midst to contend for the truth?

Second, Reverend Ophoff has published a timely speech in *Understanding the Times* that he delivered to First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan, Philippines (FORPCB), on the occasion of her third anniversary celebration. This speech examines the doctrine of the church according to her antithetical existence in the world, applies this doctrine to the slanderous accusations brought against FORPCB by unholy and ungodly men who despise the true doctrine of the church, and teaches God's glorious purpose that the church's antithetical existence in the world serves.

As for the rest, Travis Kamps continues a discussion on the doctrine of the antithesis in *Running Footmen,* drawing important conclusions for us today from the controversy over covenantal theology in the early 1950s between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches (liberated).

You have in your hands a full issue for good reading when you must retreat to the air-conditioned indoors to escape these remaining dog days of summer. May the Lord bless the contents of the issue to your hearts and refresh you in your souls.

—LB

1 No. 357:4, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian Psalter (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1927; rev. ed. 1995).

# THE ONLY WAY TO BE HAPPY IN JESUS

*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.*
—Belgic Confession 23

## *The Doctrine of True Unity*

The beginning of Belgic Confession article 23 positively and emphatically declares what man's happiness is: "That God imputes righteousness to him without works." I am going to emphasize that declaration of the Belgic Confession presently.[1]

But before I proceed further, I remind you of what the Belgic Confession is. The Belgic Confession is one creed that belongs to what we call the three forms of unity. Alongside the Belgic Confession are the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt, so that together these three creeds make up the three forms of unity. These three creeds are called the three forms of unity because they teach the truth, which truth is the only basis of unity that the church institution possesses. The church's unity is not found in solving social and family issues or in blood relationships and common experiences. The church's unity is only found in the truth.

As Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 21 teaches: "The Son of God...gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, *agreeing in true faith*" (*Confessions and Church Order,* 104, emphasis added). "Agreeing in true faith" means that the church whom the Son of God gathers in this world is detected by this indelible mark: She confesses the truth. That the Son of God gathers a church agreeing in truth faith means that a church institution with a cacophony of conflicting doctrines does not have any true unity. That institution's unity is something other than the truth. That institution's unity is something carnal, sensual, and devilish. Because the Son of God gathers, defends, and preserves unto himself a church agreeing in true faith, this means that a church that departs from the truth of the three forms of unity is not merely un-Reformed, but it is also no longer the church.

Belonging to that true unity of the church is the teaching of Belgic Confession article 23, which I now quote at length:

> 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.
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> 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

1 This editorial is the script of the author's lecture given on May 27, 2025, in behalf of the evangelism committee of Faith Reformed Protestant Church. The lecture has been edited for publication. The original lecture can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S6-PhC2HSA.

> 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)

Again, what I bring to your attention is this article's declaration about what the happiness of man is: "That God imputes righteousness to him without works." The elect sinner's happiness today, tomorrow, in the day of judgment at the end of this age, and everlastingly is "that God imputes righteousness to him without works."

What article 23 teaches, first, is that the elect sinner's happiness is that God forgives his sins: "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." The word "remission" means *forgiveness*. Man's happiness consists in the forgiveness of his sins because forgiveness implies that he is righteous before God. That is a very important implication in this article. Since God is a righteous God who loves the righteous and blesses the righteous and works all things in the world for the everlasting happiness of the righteous, then a forgiven sinner's salvation is absolutely secure. God will infallibly lead that man through this life and bring him to glory. Oh, what happiness! When the sins of an elect sinner are forgiven, he has confidence, joy, peace, and assurance that God is his father for Jesus' sake and that God will bring him to heaven.

And I can state this truth even more simply: Man's happiness is that he belongs to Jesus Christ. The forgiven sinner's happiness is that God no longer remembers the sinner's sins because God *did* remember those sins against Jesus Christ. The forgiven sinner's happiness is that he does not have a debt of sin because Jesus Christ has paid that debt in full with his blood. The forgiven sinner's happiness is that he can never be punished by God's wrath because God's wrath has punished Jesus Christ.

But you must not stop there, for man's happiness is that God imputes to him righteousness, which righteousness is the obedience of Jesus Christ. That is found in the previous article, 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). What this means is that the elect sinner's happiness is that he does not need his obedience and good works to be saved. Jesus Christ is that man's holiness. The elect sinner's happiness is that he does not need one good work to go to heaven because in his stead Jesus Christ has done all the obeying. The elect sinner's happiness is that Jesus Christ so loved God in his lifelong suffering that the sinner's love-debt due unto God has been paid in full. If Jesus Christ is the elect sinner's righteousness, then that means that God imputes the obedience of Jesus Christ to the elect sinner and declares to that man in Christ, "You have rendered to me what my justice demands. I cannot be loved any more than I have already been loved. I am full of love."

Very simply, man's happiness is Jesus Christ.

Second, the Belgic Confession teaches us in article 23 that man's happiness is that God imputes righteousness to him *without works*. Because the happiness of man is that God imputes righteousness to him without works, works do not factor into the explanation of why that man is happy. His happiness has nothing to do with his own activities. His happiness has nothing to do with his own obeying. His happiness has nothing to do with his own repenting. The Belgic Confession teaches that man's happiness—the happiness that he experiences and the happiness out of which he lives every day—has nothing to do with his works. *Nothing* that man does through the power of the Holy Spirit, *nothing* that man does by grace enters into the explanation as to why he is made happy.

To make that point very sharp, if man tries to find any explanation for his happiness in what he does, he necessarily denies that Jesus Christ is the perfection of man's happiness. If man tries to increase his happiness by his activities, he necessarily displaces the perfect work of Jesus Christ.

> For any to assert that Christ is not sufficient [for man's happiness], but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy: for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50)

An elect sinner's happiness is that God imputes righteousness to the sinner *without his works*.

Man's happiness is Jesus Christ *alone*.

The teaching of Belgic Confession article 23 is the teaching of the Old Testament and the New Testament, to which Belgic Confession article 23 directs us: "As David and Paul teach us." What David and Paul teach us is found in Romans 4:6–8:

> 6. 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.

What is that blessedness of which David and Paul speak? That blessedness refers to God's entire gracious attitude toward an elect sinner and all God's gracious dealings toward him. That blessedness is synonymous with happiness. That blessedness includes the elect sinner's assurance and confidence before God that God is his God and that God is determined to do him good and that God will bring him all the way to glory. Blessed—happy—is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Not happy is that man if that man obeys. Not happy is that man if that man repents. Not happy is that man if that man walks in the way of good works. The happiness of man consists in this: That God imputes to him righteousness without his works.

The elect sinner has that happiness in Jesus Christ by faith alone—not by faith and repentance, not by faith and good works, not by faith and faith's fruits. The elect sinner's happiness in his own conscience and his own experience—his happiness that frees him from fear and terror and fleeing from God as did his first father, Adam—is by faith alone. By faith *alone* he is happy.

What must be emphasized when we say "faith alone" is that this confession takes away all man's obedience, all man's repentance, all man's walking in a way of good works. *Faith alone* simply makes man empty. No, more than that, *faith alone* makes man an ungodly person in himself.

That is Romans 4 as well: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (v. 5). Whom does God justify? One who is walking in a way of obedience? One who repents? One who is a *believer*, as such? No. God justifies and makes happy the *ungodly*. The word "ungodly" is bristling with wickedness and impiety. Ungodliness means that a man has assaulted the most high majesty of God, blasphemed God's name and trampled it underfoot, exalted himself as God in God's place, and broken all God's commandments. That is what "ungodly" signifies. And it pleases God, who is holy and righteous and who cannot behold iniquity, to impute perfect righteousness by faith to the ungodly but elect sinner. God declares to him, "I do not remember your sins anymore. You have loved me. You have loved me so much that I cannot be loved any more than I already have been loved." Oh, what happiness!

That happiness is received through faith alone because that faith unites the elect sinner to Jesus Christ. Faith joins that ungodly but elect sinner into the corporation of Jesus Christ, so that Christ is that man's righteousness.

Is that not clear? That is the simple truth of scripture and the Reformed creeds. That truth belongs to the unity that the church possesses. Indeed, that truth is foundational to the unity that the church possesses. What is man's happiness? It is that Jesus Christ is his righteousness, to the exclusion of all works. Jesus Christ is all that a man needs, now and forever.

## *The Refrain of Federal Vision Theology*

Having that truth of man's happiness set before us, it is clear how contrary to the truth is the popular, 140-year-old hymn "Trust and Obey." Maybe you were taught it growing up. Its refrain is well known: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way / To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."[2]

Can Belgic Confession article 23 and "Trust and Obey" be reconciled? No, they stand in the sharpest antithesis to one another. The former says that man's happiness is Jesus Christ and his righteousness to the exclusion of all man's works. Man is happy now and forever because he belongs to the righteous corporation of Jesus Christ by faith alone. The latter says that man's happiness is that he trusts *and* he obeys. Man is happy now and forever by Christ plus man's own obedience, Christ plus man's own repenting, Christ plus man's own walking in a way of good works. To trust and obey is a man's happiness, and there is no other way to be happy. Apart from a life of repentance and obedience, man may not and man cannot be happy in Jesus.

That doctrine is wretched. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way / To be happy in Jesus" turns the whole gospel over on its head. But that wretched hymn has instilled in countless souls that trusting and obeying is the only way to fellowship with God, joy, peace, assurance, enjoying a richer experience of God's covenant, and ultimately the only way to enter heaven.

And so it is no surprise that the hymn "Trust and Obey" becomes a predominant theme, sound, and refrain in the theology of those who hate and assault the truth of justification by faith alone and the truth that a man's salvation and happiness consist in the remission of his sins for Christ's sake. It is no surprise, for example, that federal vision theologians use that hymn as a sort of signature tune for their doctrine. It is no surprise that publications defending federal vision theology reference that hymn. In fact one such defender and proponent of federal vision theology, Ian Hewitson, titled his book "Trust and Obey."[3]

I am not going to spend much time on the federal

2 John Sammis, "Trust and Obey," https://hymnary.org/text/when_we_walk_with_the_lord.

3 Ian A. Hewitson, *Trust and Obey: Norman Shepherd & the Justification Controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary* (Minneapolis, MN: NextStep Resources, 2011).

vision, for that is not my main purpose here.[4] But I will point out that when federal vision theologians speak of man's happiness consisting in trusting and obeying, they emphatically insist that man's happiness is a gift of sovereign grace that God gives to whomsoever he wills, according to his eternal plan and purpose. Federal vision theologians insist that man's happiness is all of grace from beginning to end. They insist that the faith by which man lays hold on his happiness is God's gift to man. They give a vigorous denial of merit and human achievement in connection with man's happiness. *But*—always there is that fatal disjunction—man's happiness is not by faith *alone*. Federal vision theologians do not teach that man's happiness is that God imputes righteousness to man without his works, as scripture and the Reformed creeds clearly teach. No, man's happiness is by trusting and obeying. Man's happiness is by faith and in the way of his obedience. Without faith and faith's repentance, obedience, or good works, man cannot be happy. "Oh!" they exclaim, "God bestows his grace and Holy Spirit to work faith and faith's fruits. Oh! It is all by grace. Oh! It is all God-worked. *But*…man must trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

## *Radiating Devilish Love*

Let me give a specific quote that illustrates this federal vision theology. This quote comes from a sermon on 1 John 4:7–11. First John 4:7 reads, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." In that sermon the minister taught the following:

> [The apostle] John knew the wonder of being taken into the life and fellowship of the living, loving God. He knew that his salvation was entirely of grace, by Christ, and was his through faith. But [*there is that fatal disjunction: But*!] John also understood that the experience of that covenant fellowship with God and the joy of his fellowship, which is by faith, comes also only in a particular way of life, a life which reflects the love of God.

That is nothing less than federal vision theology. After all the necessary qualifications are given—that God is absolutely sovereign in salvation and that salvation is entirely of grace and received through faith—then there is the *but*. "John knew," the sermon taught, "the wonder of being taken into the life and fellowship of the living, loving God. He knew that his salvation was entirely of grace, by Christ, and was his through faith. *But…*" But! Jesus Christ is not sufficient for man's happiness by faith alone. But! "…but John also understood that the experience of that covenant fellowship with God and the joy of his fellowship, which is by faith, comes also only in a particular way of life, a life which reflects the love of God." *But.* What the sermon made clear is that you can only have happiness and you can only experience the joy of God's fellowship in a particular way of life, a life that reflects the love of God. Faith plus the obedience of faith is man's happiness.

Or as the lyrics of that wretched hymn:

> But we never can prove the delights of his love
> Until all on the altar we lay;
> For the favor he shows, for the joy he bestows,
> Are for them who will trust and obey.
> Trust and obey, for there's no other way
> To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

However, that sermon was not preached by a federal vision theologian. That sermon was preached by one who would himself say, "I am an opponent to federal vision theology." That sermon, titled "Radiating Divine Love," was preached on June 5, 2022, by Rev. Steven Key in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church.[5]

The words of that sermon stand in stark antithesis to the gospel, scripture, and the Reformed creeds, which teach that man's happiness consists in this: That Christ's lifelong suffering and obedience are all that is necessary to enjoy God's fellowship and to enter heaven. Belgic Confession article 22 teaches,

> For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or, if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. (*Confessions and Church Order,* 49–50)

The truth is that works are not the explanation as to why a man happily experiences covenant fellowship with God. In fact if good works are made part of the explanation as to why a man experiences covenant fellowship with God—as Reverend Key so clearly taught—those works necessarily take away from, displace, and cast away the perfect sufficiency of Jesus Christ, which is man's

4 For a recent exposition of federal vision theology, see Nathan J. Langerak, "Revisiting Norman Shepherd," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 14 (April 2021): 10–16; "Revisiting Norman Shepherd (2)," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 15 (May 2021): 15–19; "Revisiting Norman Shepherd (3)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 1 (June 2021): 16–20.

5 Steven Key, "Radiating Divine Love," sermon preached in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church on June 5, 2022, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/65221658432493.

happiness and man's happiness alone. Reverend Key asserted that Christ is not sufficient but that something more is required besides him, which article 22 of the Belgic Confession condemns as "too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior" (*Confessions and Church Order,* 50).

Reverend Key did not teach the truth about radiating divine love. The form of love taught by Reverend Key is a devilish kind of love, a form of love that displaces Jesus Christ and that does something to get something in return.

## *Unable to Exhort*

This teaching was not just a one-time thing for Reverend Key. "Trust and Obey" is the leitmotif of his theology and preaching. In a sermon less than two months earlier, on April 23, 2022, Reverend Key spoke about the happiness of man. He preached on the fullness of the joy that belongs to God's people, living in God's fellowship. He preached about how God's people are kept from wounding their consciences and from losing God's favor. He preached about the certainty of being partakers of Christ's grace, Christ's strength, Christ's life, and all Christ's benefits. All these things belong to the happiness of man. And Reverend Key preached about this happiness of man in connection with the calling of the apostle John in 1 John 2:28 to abide in Jesus Christ: "Now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." This is what Reverend Key had to say about this calling:

> Abiding in Christ has to do with our conscious participation in that fellowship that is ours with him and therefore with God our Father.
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> And that's evident from the fact that in chapter 2:28, the call to abide in him, that's an admonition or an exhortation. The call to abide in him is a verb form of a present active imperative. Yes, that call to abide in him is a call to activity, something which appears to be anathema to those who have left us…

Let me pause there. When Reverend Key spoke about "those who have left us," he was referring to the Reformed Protestant denomination. Apparently, it is anathema for Faith Reformed Protestant Church to preach exhortations and admonitions. I will address that charge by Reverend Key presently. The quote continues:

> God, by his Holy Spirit, efficaciously calls us to the activity of faith and the fruits of faith, which not only keep us from wounding our own consciences and losing the sense of God's favor, but more positively, by which our faith is strengthened and confirmed by those fruits as that which show it's a genuine faith, so that we know the fullness of the joy that is ours, living in God's fellowship.
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> As such, therefore, abiding in Christ—that is, conscious participation in his fellowship by faith—is to hold steadfastly to his gospel, to live in complete dependence upon him in faith and hope, and to walk in faithful and loving obedience to him.[6]

Let me summarize that: If we hold steadfastly to the gospel, if we live in complete dependence upon Jesus Christ, and if we walk in faithful and loving obedience to Jesus Christ, *then and only then* will we be happy as those who know that we partake of Christ and all his benefits. If we trust and obey, *then and only then* will we be happy in Jesus Christ. If we trust and obey, *then and only then* will we know the fullness of joy that is ours, living in God's fellowship. If we trust and obey, *then and only then* can we be certain that we partake of all the blessings of grace. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus.

There is another stanza to that wretched hymn that harmonizes perfectly with Reverend Key's theology. That stanza goes like this:

> When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word,
> What a glory he sheds on our way!
> While we do his good will, he abides with us still,
> And with all who will trust and obey.

But that is not the truth of 1 John 2:28.

Let it be known that those who left Loveland Protestant Reformed Church and reconstituted as Faith Reformed Protestant Church do not consider exhortations and admonitions as anathema. Faith Reformed Protestant Church preaches admonitions and exhortations. She just does not preach them as the only way to be happy in Jesus and as that which gives man his blessedness. Let me explain the idea of 1 John 2:28.

That call to abide in Christ must be framed in its proper context within the chapter. First John 2 makes clear that already at the time of the apostles, the church was plagued by false teachers, so that John says, "Even now are there many antichrists" (v. 18). John is warning

6 Steven Key, "Abiding in the Sinless One," sermon preached in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church on April 24, 2022, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/424222350486506.

the true church of Jesus Christ about the phenomenon that is antichrist. John says, "Ye have heard that antichrist shall come" (v. 18). And in the context the apostle John is warning against that final manifestation of antichrist that is pictured in Revelation as the beast that rises out of the sea. It is the deified state at which the man of sin, that son of perdition, stands at its head. But John says, "Even now are there many antichrists" (v. 18). That refers to the whole phenomenon of antichrist as false teachers continue to lead a history-long opposition to God and his Son, Jesus Christ. The false teacher that appeared in the time of John and the false teacher that appears in our age is antichrist. The false teacher is antichrist because he denies that Jesus is the Christ, which is the essence of all heresy. All heresy attacks the truth that Jesus is God's authorized and equipped man to serve God in behalf of God's covenant and that Jesus is entirely responsible to administer to the elect the life, joy, and happiness of that covenant. And John says that that plague of false teachers was widespread. Many antichrists were already in the world.

Then too in the context, those antichristian false teachers are the explanation that "they went out from us" (v. 19). There was this movement of people out of the true church, out of "us." The "us" is the church that agrees in true faith and cleaves to the truth. And there is a history-long movement—a movement in John's day and a movement today—where there are many who go out of the church. "They went out from us," the apostle John says. "They *had* to go out from us to make manifest that they were not of us. They had to go out in order to manifest that they belong to the world."

And now, as it were, John asks the church, "Why is it that you do not go out? Is it because you trust and obey? Is it because you hold steadfastly to the gospel, live in complete dependence upon Jesus Christ, and walk in faithful and loving obedience to Jesus Christ? Is that why you do not go out?" What does John say? "They went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us, *but* ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (vv. 19–20, emphasis added). Why is it that one cannot go out? Why is it that one cannot be deceived no matter how seductive, enticing, and beguiling false doctrine and the false teacher are, no matter how the false teacher clothes himself as an angel of light? Why is it that one abides in Jesus Christ? Why is it that one cleaves to the truth? Why is it that one can never depart from the truth? John says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One." That is the Spirit. John says, "You have the Holy Spirit who abides in you. The Spirit—*the Spirit*—is the one who makes you abide in Jesus Christ. Not you. Not you and your obedience. You have an unction of the Holy One."

That same Spirit who causes you to abide in Jesus Christ also teaches you the truth, so that "ye know all things." Because of this unction, you know that truth in a most profound, spiritual way, for that truth reigns in your heart. That is the great work of the Spirit. The great work of the Spirit is not so that you can speak in all sorts of different tongues or perform all kinds of miracles. The great work of the Spirit is so that you know the truth, and that truth grips you. Why is it that you abide in Christ? Because of the Spirit.

"The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you" (v. 27). "The Spirit abides with you," John says to the church, "not just for a month and not just through a controversy. He abides with you forever. That is why you abide in Christ."

That is the context for this exhortation in 1 John 2:28 to abide in Jesus Christ. What then of this exhortation?

We observe that this calling comes to one in whom the Spirit dwells and reigns, one whom the Spirit has united to Jesus Christ. This calling comes to one who already knows the truth that by faith alone Christ is his righteousness before God. This one knows himself to be an ungodly sinner whose sins God forgives and to whom God imputes a heavenly righteousness without works. Because he belongs to the righteous corporation of Jesus Christ by faith, this one already possesses and experiences the fullness of joy of covenant fellowship with God. This calling comes to one who is already confident and assured that God is his God, that God is determined to do him good, and that God will bring him all the way to glory. He is a perfectly happy man.

Can this exhortation then be *unto* man's happiness? Can it be that faith's activity and faith's fruits strengthen (increase) the "fullness of the joy that is ours, living in God's fellowship," as Reverend Key teaches? Impossible! Certainly, this exhortation is a call to activity. Man's activity is not anathema to the Reformed Protestant Churches. But when man's activity is made part of the explanation as to why a man is happy in Jesus, the Reformed Protestant Churches consider that a gross blasphemy, for that implies that Christ is but half a savior.

But what is this exhortation? This exhortation pertains to the life of gratitude for a man who seeks nothing more besides Jesus Christ for his happiness. This exhortation to abide in Jesus Christ is the *fruit* of already abiding in Jesus Christ by the work of the Spirit, which Spirit abides with the church forever. What John means by this exhortation is this: Abide in the *truth* of Jesus Christ. In the light of the context, this exhortation calls those who are perfectly happy in Jesus by faith alone to defend the truth against those who would try to introduce happiness-quenching false doctrine into the church. Implied by

that exhortation is the calling to continue speaking the truth in love for the truth and to contend for the truth. The church's thankful life includes fighting against all that is not the truth of Jesus Christ, against those very same antichrists who run rampant in the world. That is the exhortation.[7]

That is not my own private exegesis. My interpretation agrees with the exegesis of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, from whom Reverend Key departs. This is what Rev. Herman Hoeksema taught:

> "Abide in him." That means, of course, that we abide in the truth…It means also that we constantly abide in Him, that we do not depart from the truth, and therefore do not depart from Him.[8]

Ironically, the exhortation in the text is to oppose, fight against, and flee from the exact same thing that Reverend Key preaches. Oh, the Reformed Protestant Churches preach exhortations, just not unto man's happiness and blessedness. It is Reverend Key who cannot preach the exhortations of scripture properly and in harmony with the Reformed creeds.

## *A Laver of Terror*

But Reverend Key has retired, and a new minister, Reverend Haveman, has taken the pulpit of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church. One might hope that this new minister would rise up in holy horror against what Reverend Key has preached, that Reverend Haveman would condemn the lie, and that he would teach the truth about man's happiness. One might hope…

But in fact the preaching at Loveland Protestant Reformed Church has become worse, if that were possible. Not content with having his congregation believe that Jesus Christ is not sufficient for their happiness but that obedience is necessary for full joy and happiness, Reverend Haveman has decided to heap the curses of God's law upon his congregation if they do not obey enough. I have two sermons to prove that.

The topic of the first sermon was the laver, the massive basin of water that was in the courts of God's sanctuary. In this sermon Reverend Haveman rightly emphasized that the laver testified of God's holiness. The significance of the laver, he taught, was that God's people "are again reminded just how holy God is." Furthermore, he preached,

> Why was it that the priests had to continually wash themselves day after day after day? Why could they never come into the tabernacle and go about their work while they were unclean? It's because God is holy…The priests had to wash. They had to do so because God is holy. They could not come before him as unclean. If they did, they would be destroyed. Destroyed. If they did not wash with water, God says he would destroy them. They would die…And God had this laver to make his holiness known.[9]

That is the significance of the laver. But this too belongs to the significance of the laver, according to Reverend Haveman:

> [A new] life [of holiness] we must see is necessary. The laver drives that home as well. It was not an option for the priests to wash themselves. They had to wash themselves. They had to be holy. If they were common or unclean, they knew they would be destroyed by the holy God. And it's

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7 After I gave this speech, someone objected to my interpretation and insisted that I taught the same thing as Reverend Key. This person's contention was based on the second part of 1 John 2:28: "And now, little children, abide in him; *that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*" This person's contention was twofold. First, I made the activity of loving and defending the truth that which gives confidence and no shame before Jesus Christ at his appearing. Second, the only proper interpretation of the exhortation should be this: Do nothing for salvation and rely upon Jesus Christ alone; do not rely upon oneself and one's own doing. Now, I reject this charge against my interpretation of the text, and my response is as follows. First, the interpretation to do nothing for salvation is certainly included in John's exhortation to "abide in him." I do not deny that. But even this interpretation does not offer the proper solution as to what gives confidence and no shame at Christ's appearing. My objector must admit that we do not "do nothing for salvation" as we should. Time and again, we as sinners turn to our works for personal confidence before God, and against that wickedness we must fight daily. Not even my doing nothing for salvation can give me confidence and no shame in light of Christ's coming, for I fail miserably in this. Second, the only thing that gives me confidence in light of Christ's return is Jesus Christ himself, the way, the truth, and the life. The truth of Jesus Christ—that he is my righteousness before God—is why I have confidence and no shame before him. John is not saying in 1 John 2:28 that our abiding in Jesus Christ is what gives confidence, but John is exhorting us to abide in the truth of Jesus Christ because *Jesus Christ alone* gives an elect sinner such confidence. Furthermore, my interpretation of "abide in him" as to love and defend the truth is based on comparing this exhortation in its context of apostasy and the final coming of Jesus Christ to other similar passages of scripture. For example, see the exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught" in its context; or see the exhortation in 2 Peter 3:18 to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" in its context. Such passages are very similar to 1 John 2:28. My interpretation is based on comparing scripture with scripture.

8 Herman Hoeksema, *Chapel Talks on First John*, ed. Herman Hanko (Wyoming, MI: Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, 1998), 50.

9 Arend Haveman, "The Laver," sermon preached in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church on February 9, 2025, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/2102522286713.

> just as necessary for us to wash ourselves, to live a holy life. We know who God is. We know the life that is pleasing unto him. We know the seriousness with which he takes sin, and so we know we cannot live as we please. We cannot live like the world. We cannot live common and unclean like those who are without, but we must, like those priests, be washed.[10]

Let me repeat what Reverend Haveman taught: Just as the priests had to be holy by washing themselves—else they knew they would be destroyed by the holy God—so it is just as necessary for us to wash ourselves, to live a holy life. In other words the motivation for a holy life is the threat of being destroyed by God.

And in harmony with that significance of the laver, Reverend Haveman drew this practical application:

> Knowing our God, knowing what he has done for us, knowing the salvation he has given us in Jesus Christ, and knowing who he is truly by faith, we'll worship him with fear and reverence. We'll come to worship him with clean hands and pure hearts. We'll come hating sin, turning away from it, and seeking his face in our worship and in our whole life of worship…The Lord Jesus Christ covers us, washes us clean in his blood from all sin and imperfection. But [*there is that fatal disjunction again*: *but!*] yet knowing that, we still also come to worship Jehovah God with this: He hates sin. He is a holy God. And he will have us to be a holy and a clean people. And so as we go into our lives in all aspects both as a congregation, as a body, and as individuals, as families, as husbands and wives, whatever station and calling we might have, we come and we worship God with this reality of the laver set before us: God will have us to be clean.[11]

I do not care what Reverend Haveman said about the forgiveness of sins. That simply does not set the sermon straight and does not fix the atrocious doctrine that he heaped upon the congregation as a tremendous soul-crushing burden. This is what he taught his congregation: How you come before the holy God, who is a consuming fire against all uncleanness, and seek his face—both in public worship and in your whole life of worship—is through Christ's clean hands and pure heart plus your own clean hands and pure heart. You do not come before God only through faith in Jesus Christ, which faith embraces Jesus Christ with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him (for to say that Christ is not sufficient but that something else is required besides him would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ is but half a savior), but you come with Christ's holiness plus your own new holy life of obedience.

What Reverend Haveman taught is not the truth. What Reverend Haveman taught stands in stark antithesis to Belgic Confession article 23:

> This [obedience of Christ crucified alone] 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 [*relying upon our own new lives of obedience; relying upon something that we did in our lives: our own thoughts, our own purposes, the intents of our hearts*] or on any other creature, though ever so little [*though that be one little tear that we shed in hatred of sin, though that be one little tear that we have over the filth of our own lives*], we should, alas! be consumed. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 51–52)

But that is not what Reverend Haveman taught. What Reverend Haveman taught can be summarized by that wretched hymn:

> Trust and obey, for there's no other way
> To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.
> Then in fellowship sweet
> We will sit at his feet,
> Or we'll walk by his side in the way…

Yet there is something that is missing from those lyrics that Reverend Haveman could have added this:

> But then if you don't trust,
> Yea, and obey enough,
> Then you'll find yourself to be destroyed.

And let me show you precisely how the truth of man's happiness was corrupted by Reverend Haveman. He taught that the believer's sanctification is not merely the *fruit* of the believer's justification, by which justification the believer is perfectly happy. Instead, what did Reverend Haveman do with the forgiveness of sins, in which man's happiness consists? What did he do with the forgiveness of sins, which is the elect sinner's happiness

10 Haveman, "The Laver."
11 Haveman, "The Laver."

today, tomorrow, all the days of his life, in the day of Jesus Christ, and forever and ever? For Reverend Haveman the forgiveness of sins serves chiefly to make the believer's new life of holiness functional in his salvation to grant him full happiness. In essence Reverend Haveman said, "You must trust that God forgives the sins that adhere to all your works and that God accepts those imperfect works as perfect in Christ. Now you must come with your works and your new life of obedience because the knowledge of your happiness—the knowledge and the confidence that you can have that God is your God—can be only in the way of obedience."

Furthermore, what Reverend Haveman had to do was to make the law doable for blessedness, happiness, and fellowship with God. But the terror that arises from Reverend Haveman's teaching is this: How much must one obey? How much must one flee from and hate sin? How much must one turn from the filth of this world to have happiness? How much, so one can enter and seek God's face? These foolish questions always arise when Christ, the elect sinner's righteousness, is displaced.

## *A Faithless Instructor*

Not content with corrupting the truth of his adult congregants' happiness, Reverend Haveman also preached that children's happiness—their happiness today, tomorrow, and everlastingly—depends upon their parents' faithful instruction. Parents not only have to obey the law in order for themselves to be happy in Jesus, but parents also have to instruct their children well enough in order for their children to be happy. That is what Reverend Haveman preached in a sermon on Psalm 78, titled "Teaching the Generation to Come."

What you see if you read Psalm 78 is this: Generation upon generation in Israel failed abysmally in their instruction of their children. All that you see in this psalm is man's failure. And in light of that very sobering reality, Reverend Haveman taught that Psalm 78 sets forth the seriousness of instructing the next generation. He preached:

> That serves as a warning for us, a warning of the consequences of failure to be faithful to this calling. But it also serves to show us the blessing of being faithful, the blessing which God gives unto his people, when one generation does in fact train the next generation in the fear of the Lord, then [the next generation] will not be a stubborn and rebellious generation. They will not forget the ways of God.[12]

Reverend Haveman looked at Psalm 78 and said, "See all these examples of the abysmal failure of Israel? Oh, that is a warning. It is a warning of what happens if you do not train your children well enough and give them the proper instruction." He did not see that all these examples of Israel's abysmal failure demonstrate the necessity of God's appointment of his servant David "to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance," who then "fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands" (vv. 71–72). Reverend Haveman did not see that Psalm 78 emphasizes how necessary it is that the seed of David, Jesus Christ, be our chief prophet and teacher. No. Reverend Haveman simply taught that parents today must be more faithful than the people of Israel in the old dispensation.

Ask this question of Reverend Haveman once: "How well do you have to train your children?" For according to Reverend Haveman, Israel did not meet the standard that was necessary to have faithful children. "Israel's failure in Psalm 78 is a warning," he said. "But if you train your children faithfully…" How faithfully? Give it your best shot? Do your best, and Jesus will fill up the rest? Reverend Haveman does not say. But this much he makes clear: If you train your children faithfully enough, God is going to bless that, and then your children will be happy.

Thus there are more soul-crushing burdens for the members of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church. They must not only be very diligent in the way of obedience in order to have full happiness, but they must also be very diligent to train their children in order to keep their children happy too. It is a wonder that every member of Loveland church is not mentally depressed! How are the members not crawling on their hands and knees into church to worship? How are they not weeping when they leave church? In his sermon even Reverend Haveman recognized the burden that he had just loaded upon his congregation:

"The reality is although that calling is hard, although it's daunting, although it's intimidating, intimidating for the parents and intimidating for the whole church…"[13]

Well, of course, it is daunting and intimidating! Yet Reverend Haveman did not even preach the full weight of what God requires in the instructing of covenant children. Reverend Haveman made the law doable. Here is what the law of God requires:

> 6. These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:
> 7. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou

12 Arend Haveman, "Teaching the Generation to Come," sermon preached in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church on March 30, 2025, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/330251523381289.

13 Haveman, "Teaching the Generation to Come."

> sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. (Deut. 6:6–7)

God requires that you teach your children every single moment of every single day. God requires that you teach your children without fail and without failing to point everything to God and how all things relate to Jesus Christ as the first begotten of the dead. Do not fail to do that because God always demands perfection! He is righteous. Anything less is not righteous.

What Psalm 78 teaches, if it teaches anything, is the impossibility for parents to instruct their children as God requires. Parents realize that they cannot sooner enter hell in themselves than by the instructing of their children. Each and every child would be like a millstone hung about the parents' neck to sink them down into destruction. If parents are honest with themselves, they admit that they fail abysmally. They fail daily. They probably realize their failures mere minutes after their children get out of bed.

Now, of course, there are parents who heard Reverend Haveman's preaching who will sit back and think, "You know what? We have done a pretty good job. We have been faithful according to our own standard of faithfulness." And that standard of faithfulness is usually this: "Those parents over there are not so faithful, so at least we are more faithful than they are. We have faithfully trained our children. Now we can expect that God will bless that, and our children will walk in the fear of the Lord."

What about Rebecca? What about Rebecca, who gave the same covenantal instruction to both Jacob and Esau, who taught Jacob and Esau all about God's promise and of God's intent to destroy the serpent with the seed of the woman? What about Rebecca, who, after giving all that instruction, had one profane son who forsook God's glorious promise for a measly bowl of pottage, while the other son strove for God's covenant? How do you explain that, according to Reverend Haveman's sermon?

What is the happiness of the parents who must raise their children according to the demands of God's covenant? Their happiness is that Jesus Christ is their righteousness, so that no matter how they have failed—and I mean it—when they come before God as miserable failures, through faith God always declares to them, "What sin? I do not see any sin. You have loved me perfectly. I declare that to you for the sake of Christ to whom you belong. He is your righteousness. You are perfect." That is the parents' happiness.

And the happiness of the parents concerning their children is that God promises in Christ to gather believers and their seed. That was God's promise—his holy oath—through Peter on Pentecost. What is a promise? A promise is this: It is God's holy oath that he will save the seed of believers. And when God gives a promise, he does not take into consideration any doing of the recipient of the promise. For example, consider marriage. Marriage involves a promise. The promise of marriage is "I love you. And though it comes to pass on the day after we are married that you become a vegetable, lying on a hospital bed for the rest of your life, I am going to love you, and I am going to cherish you, and I am going to seek your good. And though you suddenly begin to turn against me and hate me, though you consider me the most despicable person that has ever lived, I am going to love you. I made a promise to you, and that promise does not take into consideration anything that you are going to do." That is a promise. And when God says "I am going to save believers and their seed," that promise does not take into account how well parents instruct their children.

So why is one child saved, and another is not saved? (This was completely missing from Reverend Haveman's sermon.) Why does one child inherit the promise and another becomes profane? Because God in his love elected one, and God in his hatred rejected the other. That is the truth. But for the parents who sit under the instruction of ministers like Reverend Haveman and have a child who departs, then that becomes an unconsolable grief for those parents. Their failures as parents sink them down their whole lives. And this is the doleful tune that resounds in their minds:

> Trust and obey, for there's no other way
> To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

And now for Reverend Haveman's sake, I have expanded on that refrain:

> Trust and obey, for if instructing your sons
> Is not faithful enough, then you won't save a one.

Believing that he properly set forth the urgency to give faithful instruction to the next generation, Reverend Haveman actually has become an addendum to the list of faithless instructors in Psalm 78.

## *The Conclusion*

Now we must draw a conclusion. We must judge this preaching at Loveland Protestant Reformed Church. All are called to judge. And if you have the Spirit, you judge all things. If you have the Spirit, you have the truth and you know the truth and that truth grips you because the truth reigns in you. By the Spirit you can judge all things. If you do not have the Spirit, you cannot judge anything. What is our conclusion?

Our conclusion is that the preaching at Loveland Protestant Reformed Church is not in agreement with Belgic

Confession article 23, which declares this to be the happiness of man: "That God imputes righteousness to him without works." Our conclusion is that the preaching of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church is in harmony with that wretched hymn: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way / To be happy in Jesus." And because the church that Jesus Christ gathers—the church that is chosen to everlasting life—agrees in true faith, and because Loveland Protestant Reformed Church has departed from the three forms of unity, Loveland church not only manifests herself as un-Reformed but also as not church. Satan came, even years ago, and erected idols in the front of Loveland church—that is what he did when that false teaching was being proclaimed—and those idols have never been torn down. Those idols are only multiplying, and the people love to have it so.

To speak specifically about the ministers of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church: They are antichrist. They belong to the movement of antichrist because they displace Jesus Christ. They detract from the saving glory of Jesus Christ and his sufficiency for man's happiness, and they ascribe the glory to man and man's obedience. Such teaching is not the work of the Holy Spirit. Such teaching is the work of a spirit out of hell.

You must remember the description of the apostate church and her ministers in Revelation 13, that beast that comes up out of the earth. That beast looks like a lamb, which implies that you cannot distinguish the apostate church with your eyes. The apostate church has preaching and sacraments. She appears enthusiastic about worship. Her ministers and professors seem very kind, pious, and helpful. You cannot recognize the apostate church with your eyes, for she looks like a lamb. But she speaks like a dragon. You must distinguish her by her speech, for even Satan dresses himself as an angel of light. And what does Loveland Protestant Reformed Church say? She says that man's happiness is not Christ alone through faith alone. She says that man may not and man cannot be happy apart from man's obedience too. Loveland church detracts from the saving glory of Jesus Christ, and she ascribes it to man's doing. And right there you have something that looks like a lamb but speaks like a serpent. That speech is fundamentally antichristian.

## *The Call*

And so this call comes to the members of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church: Come out from among them and be ye separate. It is your duty to separate from all that is not church and to join yourself to the true church, whithersoever God has established her. And God has established that church: She is Faith Reformed Protestant Church.

Faith Reformed Protestant Church does not preach "trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus," for that is not the gospel. She preaches the gospel that is Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life; the gospel that is Jesus of Nazareth—who was born of the virgin Mary, who suffered all his lifetime, who was crucified on the cross of Calvary, who was buried, who descended into the depths of hellish agonies, and who was raised again on the third day—that he is the Christ and the seed of God's promise. Jesus Christ is the seed of Genesis 3:15, the seed of Abraham, the seed of David. As God's promised seed, Christ suffered, died, fulfilled all righteousness, and rose again the third day as a real, righteous man. And at his resurrection Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power, so that all he did in his life—all his obedience and all his suffering—he did as God. Jesus' whole life was the divine work of God in human flesh. God obeyed in man's flesh. God suffered in man's flesh. God died on the cross to pay God what God was due. Jesus Christ is himself very God and very man.

Faith Reformed Protestant Church preaches the gospel that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all God's promises. Christ is every last jot and tittle of the law of God—its fulfillment and perfection. Christ is the end of the law of God for righteousness. Christ is righteousness himself, so that a man needs no more righteousness than Christ. In Christ God accomplished all God's promises. All God's "I will do this" and "I shall do this" are found in Jesus Christ and in him alone. Therefore, Christ is all that matters for man's happiness. Man's happiness consists in nothing that he does. Man's happiness consists in Christ. That is what is preached at Faith Reformed Protestant Church, a church that the Son of God has gathered, agreeing in true faith, chosen unto everlasting life.

If you are sick of going home unjustified, unsatisfied, and unhappy; if you are sick of being made miserable and of burdens being heaped upon you that you cannot bear; if the truth that I have preached to you tonight has stirred your heart, flee! Flee, because God's judgment has already come upon Loveland Protestant Reformed Church. God's judgment is her ministers. Flee! And join the true church.

—LB

*Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.*—1 Chronicles 12:32

# THE ANTITHETICAL EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH

## *Introduction*

I want to thank the council of First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan (FORPCB) for granting me the opportunity and privilege of speaking to you on the topic "The Antithetical Existence of the Church."[1] This subject that I was asked to speak on puts us squarely in the locus of ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is the study of the doctrine of the church. Or to put it differently, ecclesiology is the study of *where* the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the elect sinner. Ecclesiology follows the locus of soteriology, which is the study of the application of the benefits of Jesus Christ to the elect sinner by the Holy Spirit. The subject of this speech is a necessary one. Not only does the doctrine of salvation suffer assault by the false theology of justification by faith and works, but the doctrine of the church suffers assault as well. Those who refuse to leave a false church and join a true church and who reject the headship and authority of Christ in the preaching and discipline deny the doctrine of the church.

Up to this point in my ministry, I have committed much of my time, preaching, and writing to the doctrine of the antithesis. However, I have not had the opportunity until now to consider the doctrine of the antithesis from the view of the church as the body of Jesus Christ separated out of the world and called into communion with him. The antithesis is the spiritual separation of the light from the darkness. To understand the antithesis one must understand the covenant as a relationship of friendship and fellowship with God in Jesus Christ. The antithesis is simply the other side of the covenant. God took you into his own covenant life in Jesus Christ and separated you out of the fellowship of the world. How can light have fellowship with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? From beginning to end the existence of the church in the world is antithetical. Her very name *church* indicates her spiritual separation from the world and consecration unto the living God. Implied in the mother promise of Genesis 3:15—"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"—is the promise of warfare and hatred between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. It is the promise of warfare that God has placed between his church and the world.

The antithetical existence of the church is bound up in the high calling of God, as is taught in 1 Peter 2:9: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The source and foundation of the church is the election of God, not as a scattering of individuals but as she is chosen to be a holy nation in Jesus Christ, her head. God calls by his saving call in the gospel and gathers his elect people by his word and Spirit. The purpose is that the church shows forth God's praises and glorifies him. Her name *church*, her gathering, her essence, her purpose, her message, her battle, and her weapons all indicate powerfully the position she is to assume toward the world of the ungodly and the apostate. The Reformed confessions, especially Lord's Day 21 and Belgic Confession articles 16 and 27–29, and many passages in scripture including but not limited to Genesis 3:15; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; 1 Peter 2:9; James 4:4; and Jude 3–4 all teach the antithetical existence of the church. God called his people out of the world of darkness, gathering them into a manifestation of the body of Christ and drawing them into saving fellowship with himself. The church, being of the party of God in the world, assumes a position against all that glorifies man and not God.

1 This article is the script of the author's speech given on June 14, 2025, on the occasion of the anniversary celebration of First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan. The speech has been edited for publication. The original speech can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIlciN9qtGU.

## *The Church's Name*

The name *church* in the New Testament means *called out*. In the Greek the word is *ekklésia.* We hear in that Greek word the word *election*. The very essence of the church is the election of God. We make a distinction between the church invisible and the church visible. The church invisible is the total number of the elect chosen by God to be Christ's body, which at any point in time is the totality of the church latent, militant, and triumphant. We sometimes call this the universal church, as she is made up of all nations, tribes, tongues, and people from the beginning to the end of the world. This church is invisible, known only to God, and each member is joined in spiritual union to Christ her head.

The church visible is the body of Jesus Christ as she is manifested in the institute. She has members, office-bearers, creeds, and preaching. For both the church invisible and the church visible, the essence and heart of the church is election. The church is the company of the predestinated. Although tares—ungodly, unbelieving reprobates—are mixed in the institute, that does not take away from the essence of the church, but God places those tares in the sphere of the church so that they serve the growth of the wheat.

Election is not just God's choice of some mere individuals, but it is God's choice of individuals to be the perfectly formed body of Jesus Christ, the head of the church. That is what the apostle is teaching in 1 Peter 2:9 when he says, "Ye are…an holy nation." Peter references national Israel as she was the church. Israel was God's peculiar people. The heart of Israel was election. In Israel was Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the temple, the priests, the sacrifices, the holy of holies, the king, and all the subjects and citizens of the kingdom. Israel was a nation joined together as one body and one kingdom. She stood in a position of hostility to all the nations that surrounded her. There were the apostate Edomites. There were the uncircumcised Philistines. Later there were the apostate ten tribes that had departed from the kingdom of David. Always true Israel was at war with the surrounding nations. When Israel refused to war and tried to make peace with them, there was trouble. When the church tried to form alliances and peace treaties, she just about brought the kingdom of Judah to her knees. I would argue strongly that there is no greater danger than false ecumenism. Such false ecumenism at the hands of Martin Bucer almost sold out the entire Reformation in the sixteenth century.

The church of the New Testament is the Israel of God, "an holy nation." This is the death-blow to all dispensationalists, who would seek to divide the people of God into a kingdom-people of the Old Testament and a church-people of the New Testament. The church is one as her head is one, her faith is one, the Spirit is one, the covenant is one, and salvation is one. She is made up of those who were chosen by God in eternity in love and grace to be tempered together as the body of Christ. Not one of God's elect can be plucked out, and not one more can be added, otherwise the beauty of that perfectly decreed and ordered body would be marred and disfigured.

That the church is a "royal priesthood" does not refer to the priesthood found in the ceremonies and laws of the Old Testament. Instead, believers have access unto God and his communion and fellowship through the new and living way, that is, through the flesh of Jesus Christ, their head. Believers are consecrated unto God in true faith, by which faith they live antithetical lives over against the darkness out of which they have been called. The church has been called out of darkness. Darkness is all men as they fell in Adam. Darkness is sin, lust, wickedness, perversion, and hatred of God and the neighbor. Darkness is the nature of all men, believers included. When the light came into the world, the darkness comprehended not that light, Jesus Christ. The darkness is the threefold enemy of sin, Satan, and the world, which includes the rank ungodly and the apostate ungodly. The church, made up of believers and their seed in the institute, has been called out of darkness. God's people had condemnation in Adam. They have been called out of the damning fellowship with their first head. They are called into saving fellowship with their head Jesus Christ, judged righteous in him, and given his quickening Spirit.

The church is called into God's light and into fellowship with God by his Spirit and word—by the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified. This body is gathered out of the world by that gospel according to the election of grace. Christ Jesus comes as the good shepherd, and his sheep hear his voice and follow him. The gathering of the church is implied in this calling of God. The church's very existence and gathering as a spiritual body of Christ in a world that cannot comprehend the light indicates her spiritual separation. This separation is in principle spiritual. Yet we cannot divide man into two parts. Man is one creature, created by the one act of God's forming him from the dust of the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of the life. This spiritual separation manifests itself in a physical way. The child of God knows it to be his duty and obligation to join the true church wheresoever God has established it. The child of God worships in the true church with his family. He does not remain in the false church. He does not worship in a false church where God is made nothing and man is made something. That would be the outward manifestation of his consent

and agreement with the lie. The outward manifestation of membership in a true church is the indication of consent and agreement with the truth as it is preached and confessed in that church.

The denial of the doctrine of the church often begins at the point of the church's gathering. The implication of the doctrine of the gathering of the church makes men scoff. Lord's Day 21 teaches that God by his word and Spirit gathers his church. Election demands calling, and calling requires the gathering of all those whom God has elected and called. God's people will be gathered into true churches. If God does not gather men and women into true churches, the ultimate explanation is that he has reprobated men and women, and he will judge them for their unbelief of the gospel and all their sins. In an attempt to console themselves against that fact, men argue that there is some Christ and some Spirit in other churches. They say, "There are drippings of the gospel in the false church" and "God saves in an apostatizing church." These men refuse to separate themselves from that which calls itself church but has departed from the cardinal doctrines of God's word. These men are the "fearful, and unbelieving" of Revelation 21:8. The doctrine of the church forces believers to judge those who stay in a false church, often loved ones and family, as unbelievers. "Though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus" (Heidelberg Catechism A 30, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 95). "Deeds" in part is the refusal to stand in a position of hostility against the world, therefore denying the covenant, the church, and the antithesis. If one confessed Jesus Christ as the only savior and truly believed in him, that one would join the church where Christ speaks.

The Reformed churches faced this issue early on with those who professed to believe the same doctrine as the Reformed churches but stayed in the Roman Catholic Church. John Calvin sharply condemned what he called the Nicodemite error—the view that church membership was something optional when to join the true church meant loss, hardship, and even death at the hands of the state. The Nicodemites participated in all the outward rites and worship of the Roman Catholic Church while professing to renounce it and believe the gospel of justification by faith alone without works. Calvin pointed out that the outward manifestation of their lives indicated their consent with the doctrine and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin called for the Nicodemites to separate from all that called itself church and to join the true congregation in Geneva or to form the church anew, even though the edicts of princes be against it and though the Nicodemites would likely suffer death. Many mocked Calvin for this conviction. The Nicodemites responded to Calvin with a slander: "One cannot get to paradise except by way of Geneva."[2]

The same slander is hurled against First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan and against the Reformed Protestant Churches for their high estimation and love of the doctrine of the church. Family and friends who stay in a false church or go to no church make that slander against the church. They do so in order to deflect the application of Belgic Confession article 28 that it is the duty of all believers to join the true church wheresoever God has established it. "You think that you are the only ones saved." "You think that in order to be saved, you must be a member of the Reformed Protestant Churches." "You think that one cannot get to paradise except by way of the Reformed Protestant Churches or First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan." It is a wicked slander that is intended to avoid applying the doctrine of article 28.

God calls the church out of darkness and into his marvelous light. He gathers his people by his word and Spirit. He forms them into true churches that are visible in the earth and are complete manifestations of the body of Christ in each place. The church agrees in true faith. Her members have the same judgment concerning spiritual matters. That is what sovereign, particular, efficacious grace accomplishes. God not only joins his people to Jesus Christ and gives to them every saving benefit, but God also gives to his people one mind, one will, and one mouth to speak the one truth that has been spoken since the beginning. In that sense the church is apostolic—she is founded on the doctrine of the apostles. The one voice of the church is heard off the pulpit, in the catechism room, by the officebearers in their work, in the Christian school, and among believers in their homes. The church speaks nothing less than the truth of the whole counsel of God found in the sacred scriptures. The church today speaks what the church spoke one hundred years ago, five hundred years ago, two thousand years ago, and six thousand years ago. The church speaks the truth of the sacred scriptures and the Reformed confessions. The word *confession* in scripture means *to say together with*. The church, being led into all truth by the Spirit, has confessions. "I believe, therefore I speak," said the psalmist. The church systematizes the truth and brings that truth to a higher state of development. She takes hold of and lays out the doctrine of God's word. And the church defends her confessions with her life, as they do fully agree with the word of God.

2 John Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them: 'Anti-Nicodemite' Writings of John Calvin*, trans. Seth Skolnitsky (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001), 192.

Having this one faith, the church desires and seeks unity with other true churches. This unity is not created but manifested. That is important. If the view is that the church creates unity, then she is left constantly having to compromise on the truth in order to create unity. But if the church maintains the view that this unity already exists by grace, because of her union with Christ and the one faith of the scriptures, then the church desires to manifest that unity where God reveals it.[3] That the church desires to manifest the oneness of the faith takes form in denominations and sister-church relationships. It is the desire of the Reformed Protestant Churches and the desire of First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan to manifest that oneness of the church in a sister-church relationship. Although the church often appears very small in the world—as she did in the world before the flood, during the persecution of Ahab, and as she will during the coming persecution before the return of Jesus Christ—the church is mighty in number if you consider her from the viewpoint of faith and the great cloud of witnesses that has gone before her.

The name *church* indicates where there is communion of the saints. Members have been called out of the world and called into fellowship and communion with God in Christ. The communion in the church is in Christ alone. There are no communion and fellowship with the world. There is communion among the brethren who believe in Christ by faith. The church and members of the church are the family of believers. Your family is not those who have not been called out of the false church and remain outside the true church. But your family is those who are called by God into the true church. The implication is that we serve one another with our gifts. God brought us into a body in order that we serve one another in the body with all our gifts and abilities. That is the Christian school. The Christian school is the living reality that the church stands antithetically over against the world. We band together to raise our children in the fear of God's name and to teach them all things from the view of Reformed doctrine.

## *Not Church but "Sect"*

The church of all ages serves the same God, has the same faith and same high calling, the same purpose and goal, fights the same fight with the same weapons, and speaks the same message of the gospel. There was no unity within First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan, now called First Reformed Church of Bulacan (FRCB). The Belgic Confession gives a searing condemnation of this church. Article 29 states that she takes to herself the "name of Church," but the article denies that she is church at all.[4] The beginning of article 29 does not use the adjective *false* before the word "Church." The Belgic Confession will use that adjective later in article 29 but not here. Here it says that the false church is not only false, but she is also not church. A church is one that is separated out of the world and unto God. That which is not separated unto God is not church but "sect." The world labels First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan and the Reformed Protestant Churches as sects. The world says that as churches they are schismatic and that they have arrogant, radical, insane, mentally deranged men whom the members blindly follow. But in reality all those who call themselves church, yet who have departed from Christ, are not church but actually are sects, a charge they so flippantly assign to the Reformed Protestant Churches and First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan. Rev. John Flores and his church are not church but are what the Confession calls "sect," which assumes to itself the name of church.

Reverend Flores and FRCB slander First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan by calling her a sect with the purpose to sow doubt among the congregation and bolster FRCB's membership rolls. They are beating a drum about FORPCB's officebearers, that they are not officebearers, and about FORPCB, that she is not a church. This officebearer did that wrong. This one did that wrong. Reverend Flores and FRCB try to find ground for their assertions in Church Order articles 22, 24, and 38, which they grossly misapply, as none of the articles have anything to say about church reformation when an institute has departed. The Church Order is a tool for the truth's sake, but often it is used as a cudgel against the truth. The main principle of the Church Order is that one has membership in a true church. There can be no Church Order in that which calls itself church but is not church at all. The sect that left my congregation loves to champion the Church Order, but those who left deny the fundamental and underlying principle of the Church Order—church membership in a true church!

What Reverend Flores really rejects is the office of all believers. The believer is anointed with the Spirit of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. The special offices arise out of the office of believer. To apply that, I do not care if Elder Baguhin was not an elder. I do not care if Deacon Matt was not a deacon. I do not care if Reverend Pascual was not a minister. You should not care either. You did not need officebearers in order to carry out the reformation

3 David J. Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019), 2:135–51.
4 Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession*, 2:148.

in the Philippines. Yes, there must be qualified men to serve in the special offices for a church to organize, but if there had not been one single elected officebearer to lead you out, it would not matter in determining whether you now are called a church. The glory of the office of all believers is that that office itself could form the church anew if the church departs. If every officebearer in FRCB was corrupt and there were none to lead you out, an election could have been held that same night after your Act of Separation was signed, and all three men could have been elected right then and there. It was the grace of God that he gave you men to serve in those special offices and to lead you out, but strictly speaking it was not necessary and not determinative of whether you are a church or not. You are a church because there are qualified men who have been chosen and equipped by God himself. God himself is working through those men in his church. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). The two qualifications of a church are that believers are gathered in God's name and that there are at least two officebearers.

FRCB is not Reformed and therefore not even scriptural. The classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches took a decision in September 2022 that they "suspend pursuing a sister church relationship with First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan" on the ground that FRCB "disparaged the Reformed confessions."[5] Quoted also was an excerpt from Reverend Flores' sermon on Lord's Day 21:

> And you must not forget this: When the Apostles's [*sic*] Creed was made, there was no Reformed yet. There was no Calvinism yet. There were no confessions of faith like the Three of Unity! Don't place forcefully something which is timely but that is not the intention of the Apostles' Creed!

And again, a statement made by the council of FRCB: "Article 28 of the Belgic Confession of Faith will not stand the test of historic faith." Also included was the following: "In the meeting of June 28, 2022 between the committee and members of the consistory of FRPCB, an elder in FRPCB made several statements to the effect that the churches need to get away from the confessions and get back to *Sola Scriptura*." This decision was significant and monumental. The Reformed Protestant Churches said that FRCB was not one with them in the confessions of the church, and neither were the Reformed Protestant Churches and FRCB one in the Reformed faith and the word of God.

FRCB's doctrine of the church explains why FRCB thought it was entirely proper to baptize the baby of parents who were not members. FRCB broke down the Reformed faith to the lowest common denominator of Christianity, the Apostles' Creed, and then on that basis baptized the baby because although the parents were not members, the council had judged them as believers. That baptism really revealed FRCB's hatred of the Reformed confessions and especially of Reformed ecclesiology. Reverend Flores and company had pitched the truth out, and Elder Mescallado was the one who let the cat out of the bag. The Protestant Reformed Churches are doing the same thing today, voiced by Reverend Spronk in a letter of correspondence in *Sword and Shield* to which the undersigned has responded.[6] Previous members of my congregation now also say the same, that everyone who says "I believe in Jesus Christ" is a believer, no matter their church membership or lack thereof.

Those who say that anyone who boasts of Jesus with their words is a believer deny the antithetical existence of the church. The believer's church membership is an antithetical confession that here Jesus Christ speaks and over there he does not. Here is salvation because Christ is present. Out of the church there is no salvation. Here God uses the means of grace to feed and nourish his people unto everlasting life. Out there is no Christ and no Spirit working. Here we confess the doctrine of the scriptures and the Reformed confessions. There they do not confess the truth but take away from and add to the scriptures where they see fit. And to them God will add the curses written in that book and take away their part out of the book of life (Rev. 22:18–19).

Life flows out of doctrine, and flowing out of the wretched doctrine of Reverend Flores and FRCB is all manner of sin and wicked way of life. Reverend Flores and his church are carnal. If members of his church are listening to this speech and have concerns, I want them to listen carefully. In the course of a year and a half, Reverend Flores and his church received around ten million Philippine pesos from the Reformed Protestant Churches. I do not know if that number has ever been said before. I was on the committee that worked with Reverend Flores and his church. We never talked about doctrine with them. The conversation was always about money, whether at the council level or diaconate level. And it was never ending. Toward the end there seemed to be a new crisis every other week that demanded immediate attention. There were new crises regarding Flores' son's health, missions, cars, and debts. FRCB was like a black hole that sucked time

5 Reformed Protestant Churches in America Agenda of the Classis Meeting to be held September 15, 2022, 27–28.
6 Tyler D. Ophoff, "Set for a Defense," *Sword and Shield* 5, no. 10 (March 2025): 16–18.

and resources from the Reformed Protestant Churches. A black hole is a collapsed star that shines brightly toward the end of its life and then collapses on itself. It then sucks all the light and energy from nearby stars. Money went in to FRCB, and we never knew where it went or how it was being spent. The black hole always needed more. It was never satisfied. The Reformed Protestant Churches saw that they were being used and stopped the funds, and that was right around the same time that FORPCB split off from FRCB. Through the Reformed Witness Committee of the Reformed Protestant Churches, there have been more doctrinal discussions with FORPCB in a month than we ever had with Reverend Flores and his church.

Reverend Flores visited the first Reformed Protestant Churches Family Conference in August 2022. I do not know how he thought the visit went. Perhaps he thought it was very successful. I, along with anyone else who was there, can tell you that his visit was a miserable failure. One morning he led the devotions. Afterward there was an opportunity to ask questions. In an attempt to get to what should have been the heart of Flores' visit, a member of the audience asked a simple question to the effect of "What did you hear or read in Protestant Reformed preaching or writing that caused you to understand there was false doctrine?" Flores stood there, fumbling around for words. Another audience member restated the question. Flores' answer was that he had to consult his notes, and he did not have them with him. The young people in the audience could have answered that meatball question! But Flores had nothing to say! No rousing defense of the Reformed faith. Instead, we later got a pathetic plea about how the people in the Philippines go to bed hungry while in America we go to bed with full bellies and fluffy pillows. Translated, keep giving us money because people are starving. Maybe this would have passed as a good missions update in the Protestant Reformed Churches, but the whole audience at the family conference saw right through it. A month earlier financial support had ended for the Philippines, and there were some people who had questions about whether that was right or not, but by the end of the conference, no one questioned the fact that Reverend Flores and his group were not one with us in doctrine and that the support should have ended much sooner than it actually did.

## *Glorifying God Alone*

The church's antithetical purpose is the glory of God. The apostle Peter says, "That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The church was eternally determined by God for that purpose. She is called and gathered by God for that purpose. Her salvation itself is for that purpose. She exists in the world to glorify, praise, honor, and serve the living God. And eternally in the glory of the new creation, that will remain the purpose of the church. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever" (Rom. 11:36).

The church glorifies God by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified. Jesus Christ is eternally with the Father and by whom and for whom all things are made. Jesus Christ is the eternal Word, the second person of the Trinity, the only-begotten Son of God. Jesus Christ is Jehovah come down in our flesh to save us poor sinners from our sins, who was conceived by a wonder of grace in the womb of the virgin Mary; suffered his whole life long; and was crucified on the accursed tree of Calvary to make satisfaction, to atone for our sins, to pay our ransom price to God, and to redeem us. Christ is the one who went into the grave in his body, upheld every moment by the divine God, and rose again from the dead. God sealed Christ's redemptive work, so that in him we are justified and declared righteous. Christ ascended into heaven, poured out the Spirit he received, sits at God's right hand, and will soon come again to judge the quick and the dead and to make all things new. That preaching alone gives God all the glory and honor.

And man? His name must be made nothing. Man thinks himself to be glorious. He thinks himself to be something. Man's purpose is his own glory. Man sees himself as his own god and serves himself. But man is a sinner. And he brings the root sin of Adam to its grossest expressions. On man lays the blame and responsibility for sin. The wages of his sin is death. Man is a dead, ungodly, guilty sinner who is sold under sin. Man casts himself far from God. Man hates God, and man hates the neighbor. Man pushes God away from himself and holds the truth down in unrighteousness. Man serves Satan and sin and fulfills all the lusts of his flesh. Man had no part in the incarnation of Christ. Neither did man have any part in salvation. He had no part in the cross, except to condemn, excommunicate, and crucify the Lord from glory. Man has no salvation and no hope apart from Jesus Christ.

The church proclaims that glory be to God alone and to man be no glory at all. She preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ and so shines forth her light in the world of darkness as a beacon of hope to the dispersed, those yet to be gathered, and as comfort to believers assembled on the Sabbath. She preaches Christ crucified, which is drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry. The church proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. This is the way, beloved! Believe in him. Do nothing. Believe, rest, trust, rely upon him alone!

When the church shows forth God's praises, understand that God is carrying out warfare in the earth. The

church on earth is called the church militant. She is the church at war for the sole reason that the world is in darkness and praises itself and the church exists to praise God. The antithetical position that the church assumes toward the world, including the false church, is one of warfare. In Ephesians 6 God calls the church to put on the whole armor of God. Lord's Day 52 is fundamentally the prayer of the believer that God grant us his grace and Holy Spirit in this spiritual battle. The believer does not fight with weapons of flesh but with a weapon more powerful than any two-edged sword. It is a weapon—the only weapon—that cuts, divides, and pierces through the thoughts, intents, desires, and purposes of men. Not your country's bombs, tanks, and planes but the word that comes off the pulpit of your church through the mouth of the man God gave to you is the most powerful weapon. Jesus Christ himself uses mere human instruments yet today to speak powerfully in his church. The world hates that weapon. The false church does everything she can to avoid the power of that weapon. Reverend Flores is actively disparaging that weapon by calling for a debate and moving the battleground away from the pulpit.

The church is for peace, but when she speaks, the world is for war (Ps. 120:7). Persecution is the lot of the church in the world as she is in the minority as far as numbers in the earth. The church as she is persecuted fills up the sufferings of Jesus Christ that he left behind. God's cup of iniquity is filled by every word and action of Reverend Flores and his cronies against FORPCB. There is no need to vindicate yourself. God will vindicate himself in the day of judgment. It will be a judgment according to works. God will bring up those works, whether good or evil. You are not going to bring them up in that day, but God will. All the idle words and evil deeds of men will be brought forth, and your cause will be shown to have been the cause of the Son of God. And you have a judge who is also your savior. A savior in whom you are righteous before God. That day ought not to terrify you, but by faith you look forward to that day. It will be an awesome day of the Lord.

I want to end with a word of comfort to the saints in FORPCB.

> 11. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
> 12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matt. 5:11–12)

Blessed are you when men persecute you. It is a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. We do not often think like that. We often think that it is the worst thing in the world. But when you are persecuted, you do not have a victim mentality, but you count it as a privilege, and you "rejoice!" as the apostle says. How antithetical to the carnal, worldly man who does all he can to avoid the harming of his name and reputation and who cries and weeps for himself when he suffers loss.

Men speak all manner of evil against you falsely. But the fact that you are persecuted is comforting. Men can say what they want. I read what they write. It is wicked, and God will judge them for it. He already is judging them with thieves, robbers, and hirelings, who pass for Reformed men. Blessed are ye, beloved! When the reward is mentioned in scripture, it is in connection with persecution and suffering. There is a reward of grace. The reward is God himself and eternal life.

Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren that are with me in First Reformed Protestant Church salute you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Thank you for your time. Let us close in prayer.

Our God and gracious Father, we thank thee that we might dwell for a moment together on the doctrine of the church and her antithetical existence in the world. We thank thee that thou hast called us out of darkness, the darkness of our sins and the lie. We thank thee that thou hast called us into saving communion with thee through thy Son, Jesus Christ. Wilt thou speak through thy church the gracious gospel and good news of the Lord Jesus Christ crucified, gather those whom thou must yet call into this congregation, and use that gospel to comfort and preserve us unto life eternal, where we shall see thee face to face in thy beloved Son and dwell with thee forevermore. Uphold the congregation in the Philippines. We give thee thanks for their powerful witness to the truth. Wilt thou cast down all the counsels of the ungodly that are devised against thy anointed one and thy church to silence this antithetical witness. Forgive us of our sins. Lord, be merciful to us poor sinners. Send unto us the Spirit of our Lord to dwell in us and comfort us as we walk our pilgrims' way. Empty us of ourselves and fill us with Jesus Christ. Hear our prayer for his sake alone. Amen.

—TDO

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

# THE ANTITHESIS OF THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

In 1951 the Protestant Reformed synod adopted "A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches"[1] as a uniquely Protestant Reformed document. The Declaration of Principles is a distinctive document because the Declaration sets forth the truth of the unconditional covenant against the conditional covenant and all its implications. The Declaration is a document that God used to purify his church.

The Declaration has a rich history that we can apply to the church today. Just as she is now, the church of the 1940s and 1950s was full of controversy. In the years leading up to the adoption of the Declaration, there was an antithetical separation between not only the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) but also among fellow members of the PRC.

The years following the decision were also characterized by division and separation within the PRC. That division was a historical fulfillment of the promise that Jehovah God had given to Adam and Eve in the garden: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This promise God fulfilled by his grace alone. He worked in his church a love of the truth and a hatred of the lie. He worked in his church by his Spirit a love of God that was appalled by false doctrine and that stood antithetically over against all false doctrines regarding particular, sovereign, irresistible grace.

In order to understand properly how the Declaration relates to the antithesis, we need to first understand why the Declaration was necessary. The idea of the Declaration of Principles was born when the Protestant Reformed mission committee requested that a document be made that expressed the official, binding Protestant Reformed view regarding the covenant. Dutch immigrants coming from the liberated churches had been encouraged by both the liberated ministers and ministers within the PRC to join themselves to the PRC even though the immigrants' doctrine of the covenant was different than Hoeksema's and thus different than the historical Protestant Reformed position. The ground of this encouragement to join the PRC was that there was room in the PRC for a different covenant view than Hoeksema's. The Dutch immigrants were told that their view of the covenant was well supported by current members and ministers of the PRC. The clearest example of this is found in a letter from Professor Holwerda, a liberated professor, to a member of the Protestant Reformed mission field in Canada. What follows is a portion of the letter:

> I received your letter yesterday, and a direct reply per airmail is in order. Day before yesterday we held a meeting with Rev. Kok and Rev. De Jong [Protestant Reformed ministers], the purpose being mutual discourse. We had a wholly open-hearted exchange of thoughts. They said this: Indeed, we have much to be grateful for to Rev. Hoeksema. But his conception regarding election, etc., is not church doctrine. No one is bound by it. Some are emitting a totally different sound. Their opinion was that most (of the Prot. Ref.) do not think as Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff. And sympathy for the Liberated was great also in the matter of their doctrine of the covenant. They do accentuate differently in America, considering their history, but for the conception of the Liberated there is ample room.[2]

Another example that demonstrated the room for liberated theology in the PRC was the visit of Klaas Schilder. Schilder, a leading theologian of the liberated churches, came to America and had the opportunity to meet and

1 "A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches," in *Acts of Synod 1951*, 148–54.

2 "Translation of the Letter by Professor Benne Holwerda Sent in 1949 to a Mr. Koster of Chatham, Ont., Canada," in Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 432.

fellowship with almost every minister in the PRC. He also gave speeches and preached on Protestant Reformed pulpits. In addition Schilder and Hoeksema had multiple conferences during which they laid out their views of the covenant and debated which view was correct. The result of these debates was that there was quickly a clear doctrinal divide between Schilder and Hoeksema and thus between the liberated at heart and the PRC at heart. Many in the PRC received the doctrine of Schilder. Soon there were articles in *Concordia*, a magazine that was birthed due to the differing covenant views, beginning to defend Schilder's views and to question Hoeksema's. In this tumultuous atmosphere the liberated, Dutch immigrants sought the possibility of membership in the PRC, and the Protestant Reformed mission committee requested the synod's help in stating the official Protestant Reformed doctrine of the covenant.

Let us now focus on the two opposing covenant viewpoints that were taught. First, there was the liberated view as taught by Schilder. Schilder's view of the covenant was of the same cloth as Prof. William Heyns' view. Heyns was a Christian Reformed professor in Calvin Theological School who applied the heresy of common grace to the covenant pre-1924. Schilder and the liberated were guilty of the same doctrinal heresy. Schilder's doctrine said that there were conditions in the covenant that all baptized members of the church had to fulfill in order to maintain the covenant. He taught a two-track theology in the form of a bilateral covenant in which man and God cooperated for man's salvation. Schilder believed that all those who were baptized were brought into the covenant but that it depended on each baptized child—by grace—to stay in the covenant. The condition for staying in the covenant was faith. Faith was made to be man's act by which man fulfilled—by grace, Schilder would say—the condition of the covenant that God set before him in the preaching. In Schilder's doctrine the essence of the covenant was first a promise, then a condition, and finally a penalty or reward, depending on whether the baptized child fulfilled the condition of faith. The promise was that God would save his elect, the condition was faith, and the reward was eternal life or, for those who did not fulfill the condition, the penalty was eternal judgment. At the heart of this covenant view is a well-meant offer of God to all those who hear the word preached. God wills to save all men, but his will is frustrated by those who reject his well-meant offer. Ultimately, Schilder's doctrine was that God is a weak and beggarly God who has no power to save a man. God might promise salvation to those who hear the word, but he cannot fulfill his promise. Instead, God pleads and pleads with man to believe, so that man might be saved. In opposition to such a conception of God that was held by the liberated and many in the PRC, the Declaration was born.

The second viewpoint was the historically Protestant Reformed view of the covenant as taught in the Declaration. The Declaration brought no new doctrine into the PRC. The Declaration was definitely not a new creed. Rather, the Declaration simply expounded upon certain creedal doctrines taught in the already-binding three forms of unity and the Reformed liturgical forms, such as the Form for the Administration of Baptism. The Declaration was formatted with small sections of doctrinal positions each followed by a plethora of clear and irrefutable confessional grounds. The main points that the Declaration covered were the rejection of the three points of common grace; the doctrines of election, the covenant, and faith; and a small portion on the autonomy of a local congregation. The following quotations are some of the doctrinal positions found within the Declaration.

> Over against this [the three points of common grace] they [the PRC] maintain:
>
> 1. That the grace of God is always particular, i.e., only for the elect, never for the reprobate.
> 2. That the preaching of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.[3]
>
> This article [Canons of Dordt 2.8] very clearly teaches:
>
> 1. That all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone.
> 2. That God's promise is unconditionally for them only: for God cannot promise what was not objectively merited by Christ.
> 3. That the promise of God bestows the objective right of salvation not upon all the children that are born under the historical dispensation of the covenant,

3 "A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches," 148.

> that is, not upon all that are baptized, but only upon the spiritual seed.[4]
>
> It follows from this that both the sacraments, as well as the preaching of the gospel, are a savour of death unto death for the reprobate, as well as a savour of life unto life for the elect. Hence, the promise of God, preached by the gospel, signified and sealed in both the sacraments, is not for all, but for the elect only.[5]

The doctrine laid out in the Declaration does not need a lengthy explanation. Instead, the Declaration speaks for itself. The Declaration made clear the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches on the doctrine of the covenant as it is taught in the creeds. The Declaration left no room for conditions within the covenant. Instead, the Declaration trumpeted that *election* governs the covenant. Election. Election. Election. Election is why some people are in the covenant, and reprobation is why some people are not. The Declaration taught that God is sovereign in his eternal counsel and that he promised salvation to some, while he promised eternal destruction to others. The Declaration taught that God's eternal, unchangeable, and everlasting will establishes and maintains his covenant. The Declaration set forth the beautiful truth that man is nothing. There are no conditions that man needs to fulfill in order to stay in the covenant. Rather, man is in the covenant because God works according to his own will of election.

Additionally, the Declaration made the antithesis the work of God alone. The Declaration taught that from eternity God loved some and hated others. The Declaration taught that God uses the gospel to draw his elect unto him, while the same gospel damns the reprobate. The Declaration taught that only for the *elect* infant is there God's undeserved favor. Upon the reprobate there is only God's everlasting hatred. The Declaration explained the sole reason that some hate the truth and others love it. The Declaration gave a solid foundation for the child of God who sees family or friends depart from the truth almost inexplicably. Why is there this hardening? It is because of *God's* work of election and reprobation as he carries out his decree in time. The same is true when a child of God observes in himself the work of the Holy Spirit. Why does the child of God hate sin? Why does the child of God love his neighbor? It is because God elected that child. That is the only reason. God saw that child in Christ from eternity and deals with that child in mercy.

The logical conclusion of the liberated's doctrine of the antithesis differed drastically from the Declaration's. The liberated taught that man maintained the covenant. It was up to man to be a friend of God and of his church. Therefore, man also maintained the antithesis. It was up to man to be an enemy of sin and an enemy of God's enemies. More than that, the logical conclusion of liberated theology is that man decides who are the enemies of the church. If it is not God's will that makes a divide between the elect and the reprobate, then it is man's will. This is true of all those who teach conditional covenant theology.

When the Declaration of Principles was adopted in 1951, in principle it put an end to the covenant controversy within the PRC and between the PRC and the liberated churches. The Declaration made clear that the doctrine of the PRC was antithetically opposed to the doctrine of the liberated. The Declaration left no room for an honest liberated man to have his papers in a Protestant Reformed church. A liberated man could no longer make confession of faith or baptize his child in the PRC because each Protestant Reformed church, minister, officebearer, and member was bound to uphold and defend the doctrine of the Declaration. The history following the adoption of the Declaration proves this.

In the same year that the Declaration was adopted, Schilder wrote an article in *De Reformatie* that brought an end to his relationship with the PRC. Among many other things he wrote about the binding nature of the Declaration. The following excerpt is his words with my own emphasis in italics. I believe Schilder's words do not need to be commented on but that they speak for themselves regarding the antithetical position of the Declaration.

> He [Hoeksema] helped to draw up a "Declaration" and recommended it to the church—a "Declaration" which I dealt with at great length (you will soon be able to buy what I have written about this matter in the form of a separate publication) arguing that it is not necessary, that it does not represent a good interpretation of the Confessions, and that, insofar as it proposes to sharpen or clarify the Confessions through new formulations, it labors under certain delusions which, *if the "Declaration" is once accepted, will create a little church with a narrow basis. The basis would be so narrow that, note well, because of what has "ecclesiastical validity" for this small group (I can already hear the jeers from the Dutch synodocracy in*

4 "A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches," 150.
5 "A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches," 152.

> *The Hague!), this small church would have to start "dealing with" people,* people who simply want to affirm what our revered fathers affirmed before us and placed in the preface to the Statenvertaling's New Testament.
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> And it has come to pass. The Declaration has been definitively accepted. The able theologian Hoeksema allowed himself to become entangled in a system in which contra-Kalamazoo manipulations (rather than anti-Kalamazoo achievements) could be produced—and those manipulations became unavoidable. *Alas, we are already hearing about discipline exercised* against people who dared to continue speaking the language of the Statenvertaling and have not a drop of Arminian blood in their veins. I do not propose to pass judgment on all the possible stories of which the ins and outs are not known to us here in the Netherlands. I am passing judgment only on the consequences of accepting the Declaration.[6]

It took a decision of Classis East regarding protests against sermons that were Protestant Reformed in name yet liberated in heart for the spiritual divide within the PRC and the members who were not truly Protestant Reformed at heart to be manifested. This brings us to the well-known history of the split of 1953. In 1953 Classis East condemned Rev. Hubert De Wolf's statements to be literally heretical. The two statements were "God promises every one of you that, if you believe, you shall be saved" and "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom of God."[7] The classis tied these doctrinal statements to liberated doctrine, and thus stood with the Declaration, when it decided that De Wolf's statements were not concise statements of the truth and were literally heretical with one of the grounds being that "we believe this is necessary for us to state in the light of our past experiences and history with the Liberated Churches who use these Arminian expressions."[8] When the classis said this, it really condemned the statement of De Wolf as liberated theology. This condemnation confirmed the spiritual divide that was within the PRC. As a result, quickly thereafter the PRC split physically. About half the churches left with De Wolf, while the others stayed faithfully in the PRC.

Today, as we analyze and apply the doctrine and events surrounding the Declaration, we come to one conclusion: The covenant and the antithesis are the work of God alone. It is God who elects some to be in his covenant and who passes by others. It is God alone who establishes and maintains a relationship of friendship and fellowship according to election. It is God alone who works in the elect a love for God and a hatred of sin. It is God alone who creates a spiritual warfare within his elect children. God gives to his elect the holiness of Christ so that his children might delight in holiness and hate and flee from all wickedness. It is God who creates and maintains the unity or division between churches, family, and friends. It was God who made certain men his friends and led those men to create the Declaration of Principles. It was God's doctrine that was laid out in the Declaration, and it was God's division that he carried out within and without the PRC.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty in election and reprobation gives unspeakable comfort to us today as we go through our lives. Without this doctrine we would surely despair. We would despair when we consider how sinful we are. We would despair when there is any controversy in the church. To know that the division in our lives is because of sovereign election and particular grace is a joy to the child of God. When we see the infallible fruits of the Spirit, such as a hunger or thirsting after righteousness or a hatred of sin, we know that it is God's work. When we see the differing reactions to sermons, we know that God is working a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death. We rest in that. We rest, knowing that we do not create the antithesis between us and the world. We rest, knowing that we do not create unity within the church. We rest, knowing that no matter how much we have sinned, no matter how weak our faith is, God is faithful to his elect.

—Travis Kamps

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6 "The Stocking Is Finished (by Schilder)," in Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, 464.

7 For Reverend De Wolf's two quotations, see "De Wolf's Examination," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 (April 2022): 8–9.

8 "Minority Report," in Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, 502.

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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*—John 19:26–27

There hung the crucified savior at the place of the skull. During his crucifixion a small band consisting of his mother, her sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalene, and his beloved disciple John arrived at the scene of the cross. Jesus saw them standing near and cried out to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" And to his beloved disciple, "Behold thy mother!"

Profound words from the lips of the suffering savior. For he loved his mother and had a close bond with her. He had come from her flesh and blood. He had been taught and raised by her. He of all men had entered into the perfect love of a son for his family. And Mary loved him as her child.

She saw the suffering of her son on the cross. Standing helpless, she watched the mob taunt and mock him. Saw the nails piercing through his flesh. Observed the crown of thorns plaited on his head and the blood and sweat pouring from his body. Witnessed the cruelty of it all.

And in that moment Jesus committed his dearly beloved mother to the care of his disciple John. Jesus could not come down from that cross, even though he felt the temptation to give his mother one more hug and kiss and to console his dear mother who saw his suffering. Even his close, earthly bond with his mother could not stand in the way of his doing the will of his Father who had sent him. Jesus' time was at hand. He was going about his Father's business, and Jesus had to sever his earthly relationship with his mother. Thus he said, "woman," not mother.

The earthly mother-son relationship had to be dissolved in order that the heavenly communion with God in Jesus Christ and the true communion among the saints could be ushered in. The earthly relationship had to give way for the heavenly, immortal life of heaven in glory. Jesus came as the elder brother of the family of God to take all his own into the covenant life of God. That life could only come by a perfect payment for sin and by the blood of atonement and reconciliation. That life had to have righteousness as its cornerstone.

Significant words and a marvelous act of the suffering mediator! Jesus had to forsake all for the sake of the gospel. He was like us in all things, sin excepted. He is a high priest who is touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Jesus lived the doctrine that he taught his whole ministry. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37–38). Jesus felt that. He lived that. He suffered that. He endured the pain of that loss. He had to for the salvation of thousands upon thousands of his brethren.

Jesus brought us into the covenant life of God as our elder brother. And when we must forsake family and friends for the gospel's sake, we will not come down from that cross either. But we will suffer it as he suffered it, until at last we will enter into the heavenly perfection of the only fellowship that has ever mattered—covenant fellowship with God.

—TDO