

A stylized illustration in orange and white. A hand is shown holding a sword diagonally across the frame. Below the hand, a shield is depicted with several circular patterns on its surface. The background is white, and the text is centered over the illustration.

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*

JANUARY 2026 | VOLUME 6 | NUMBER 8

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Sword and Shield is a monthly periodical published by Reformed Believers Publishing.

Editor in chief

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

All quotations from scripture are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Quotations from the Reformed and ecumenical creeds, Church Order, and liturgical forms are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), unless otherwise noted.

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Sword and Shield does not accept advertising.

Please send all business correspondence, subscription requests, and requests to join Reformed Believers Publishing to one of the following:

Reformed Believers Publishing
325 84th St SW, Suite 102

Byron Center, MI 49315

Website: reformedbelieverspub.org

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JERUSALEM MEASURED

I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying,

Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon.—Zechariah 2:1–7

His saints delight to search and trace
His mighty works and wondrous ways;
Majestic glory, boundless grace,
And righteousness His work displays.¹

So it is also for the prophet!

It is still the night of the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month in the second year of the reign of Darius.

The Lord already had shown to Zechariah many of God's mighty works and wondrous ways for the confirmation and establishment of his covenant, for the protection of Zion in the midst of this hostile world, and for the fulfillment of all his glorious promises to Zion. Zechariah had seen God's cavalry and had heard of God's wrath against the enemies of his people and of his mercy toward Jerusalem. The Lord had shown the prophet the blacksmiths who had broken the horns of the ungodly world powers.

Now the prophet lifts up his eyes again...

The revelations of God concerning the future of Zion keep the prophet wide awake, move him to think and to meditate deeply, and inspire a longing to see more of

God's mighty works and wondrous ways. Standing at the very heart of the prophet's thoughts and reflections is always Jerusalem—beloved Jerusalem that has all his heart's affection, that he never can forget, that is the object of the eternal mercy of God and the bearer of all the rich promises of the Lord, but that always finds herself in a most miserable condition. Jerusalem's walls lie in ruins; her gates are not repaired; her temple is not rebuilt; and her enemies are full of anger and are attempting to hinder Jerusalem's restoration.

What then will become of Jerusalem?

When the Lord will have fulfilled his promise, what will Jerusalem be like?

And the prophet looks, and behold a man...

Immediately the prophet's attention is drawn to the measuring line in the man's hand. Zechariah's curiosity is aroused, and he asks the man, who is clearly rushing somewhere, "Whither goest thou?"

And the man answers, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof." Then the man moves into the distance and disappears from the vision. The Jerusalem that he will measure is not the city that the prophet knows so well but as she is according to God's good pleasure, the city as she will be when God will have fulfilled all his promises to Zion...

The angel who has been talking with the prophet and explaining the visions to him follows the man with the measuring line.

But another angel, clearly the angel of the Lord, goes out to meet the first angel and sends him back to the young man—that is, the prophet—to bring him a report about the outcome of the measuring of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem will be very great with a multitude of men and beasts in the midst of the city.

The city of God will rejoice in complete safety because God himself will be a wall of fire round about her.

The city will radiate a glory that never was known before.

¹ Hoeksema quoted from the Dutch psalm 111, stanza 2, part 1. The Dutch psalm is stirring. It begins with a loud exclamation, translated as "the works of the Lord are very great!" Where Hoeksema alluded to that Dutch psalm and used that phrase, I allude to psalter 304, stanza 2, and use the phrase "mighty works and wondrous ways," as found 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 glory of the Lord!
Jerusalem full of joy!



Jerusalem's greatness!

Who is there among Zion's children whose heart does not throb with joy as he sees Jerusalem so enlarged?

Who is there among Zion's children who would not follow that man with the measuring line as he goes out and would not thrill to see how great the city of the great King will be in her length and breadth?

Jerusalem!

No, not the city of Zechariah's time! That city still lay in partial ruins. The man does not go out to measure that city, but he will measure the real Jerusalem—Jerusalem according to her essence, Jerusalem of the future that in the prophetic vision already stands and is measurable.

In the end Jerusalem of old was only a city as other cities. Yes, Jerusalem was a beautiful city! "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Ps. 48:2). Confidently one might call out to her citizens, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generation following" (vv. 12–13).

But that Jerusalem was a mere city, an earthly city made with hands and no different in that way than Babylon. And during the prophet's time, there was no reason to boast of Jerusalem's greatness and beauty, for Babylon far exceeded Jerusalem in power and glory.

That Jerusalem would never be great.

She had been destroyed just as Babylon was destroyed and just as Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed.

Yet Jerusalem is still beautiful!

Jerusalem never shall be destroyed!

Jerusalem shall be enlarged and be the joy of the whole earth!

But then you must behold the city as she is the city of the great King, as she really is with God in her palaces, great and greatly to be praised, and in whom the citizens boast: "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death!" (Ps. 48:14). That is Jerusalem in her essence, the city built by God himself, indwelt by God, ruled by God, blessed by God, and glorified by God. There on Mount Zion is God's throne, his eternal and divine rule; there is the Lord's Anointed, his most excellent Friend-Servant, revealing God and glorifying him alone. To God both the Anointed himself and all things are wholly consecrated; in God's name he rules over all the

works of his hands. There is God's house, his covenant of eternal and heavenly friendship and most intimate fellowship because Jerusalem's God is the friend of her citizens. He rules over them, but in boundless grace; he commands them, though in eternal love; he is highly exalted on his throne, yet to live with them and to walk with them, to take them as his sons and daughters, and to cause them to taste the blessedness of his friendship. And there dwell his people, knowing him as they are known, seeing him face to face, having peace in righteousness, eternal peace, serving him in love, and finding their reward in doing his commandments through Jesus Christ, their Lord.²

That is Jerusalem!

And that Jerusalem shall be great!

On account of the multitude of men and beasts, Jerusalem will be inhabited as a town without walls! In place of the fortress once surrounded by walls, Jerusalem will be expanded and spread out over the whole land. It will be a place where there is room for men to have not only their houses but also many cattle.

And perhaps you think of this future expansion and greatness of Jerusalem in terms of the land of Canaan, but this would be too narrow and restrictive. Jerusalem will spread out as the four winds of heaven! Four is the number of the earth in her expansive breadth. If the city of God is expanded as the four winds of heaven, then this can mean nothing else than that she will take up the whole earth.

Jerusalem shall fill the earth!

Overwhelming vision!

In the beginning Jerusalem is manifested as a single, limited, earthly city. Jerusalem in that earthly form is destroyed; yet in order that in the cross, resurrection, and glorification of the Anointed of the Lord, she is realized in her essence. Then in principle Jerusalem is in heaven where Christ has entered into the most holy place and sits at the right hand of God. Through Jerusalem's children on the earth in the church from every tribe, tongue, and nation, she is inhabited as a town without walls.

At last, she will descend out of the new heavens to the new earth.

Then she will fill the whole earth.

Then in the whole earth, there will be no room for Babylon.

Then also the creation itself will be freed from the bondage of corruption, in order to share in the glorious liberty of Jerusalem's citizens.

A multitude of men and of beasts!

The metropolis of the new creation!

2 The reader should notice in light of the Protestant Reformed corruption of the idea of the reward of grace that Hoeksema defines the reward that God's people find as the obedience itself, not something additional to their obedience. To love and serve the Lord in perfection and glory is the reward of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. For the Protestant Reformed Churches, the reward is the greater or higher place in glory based on works. The conception is crass mercantilism: The more you work, the more you get.

Jerusalem's safety!

The prophetic vision lays emphasis on this.

Although the city of God will be inhabited as a town without walls, nevertheless, she will be secure, perfectly secure.

This security also had to be shown to the prophet, for an inhabited and unwallled Jerusalem could be in danger.

The old Jerusalem was a fortress with strong walls, heavy gates, and mighty bulwarks. That had to be because Jerusalem was an earthly city that could be attacked and threatened with extinction by earthly powers and earthly means. Men could shoot their bows and arrows against the city of God. With their steel swords they could fight against her, destroy her, pull her temple to ruins, and kill her citizens or carry them as captives to Babylon. That was not only possible but also was a reality because Babylon always hated and harassed Jerusalem. Therefore, Jerusalem of old took the form of a strong fortress with huge walls, bulwarks, towers, and massive gates that could be shut tight against the enemy.

And now the prophet hears that Jerusalem shall be inhabited as a town without walls!

Certainly this means not only that the city of God will be expanded on all sides to make way for the multitude of men and beasts but also that she will no longer be a strong fortress. She will be open on all sides to the enemy, without walls and bulwarks, and without an army and earthly means of defense.

But then will Jerusalem be safe?

Will not the enemy infiltrate her and with either stroke or blow overwhelm and overthrow her, so that Jerusalem's name is blotted out of the earth?

God forbid!

Jerusalem will be completely secure, even as she will be inhabited as a town without walls in the midst of a hostile world!

Round about the city of the great King, the Lord will be a wall of fire!

The Lord! Jehovah! Israel's God! The eternal one, who from the beginning has known all his works and who does all things after the counsel of his own will! He has purposed to clothe Jerusalem with eternal glory! He is the unchanging and faithful one who never forsakes the works of his hands! He has taken Jerusalem into his eternal covenant; he is the almighty one, whose is all the power in heaven, in earth, and in hell...

He will be a flaming wall round about the city!

Why then does Jerusalem need a wall of stone?

The stone wall around the old Jerusalem can be pulled to ruins and destroyed, but this wall stands fast forever. The enemy could still infiltrate the stone wall of the old Jerusalem, but this fiery wall consumes the might of the wicked world. No enemy can ever overtake Jerusalem.

The city of God is perfectly secure!

That is the way the city is essentially in the new dispensation.

So far as Jerusalem is now above, no enemy can launch an attack on the city of God. And so far as her citizens dwell on the earth in a town without walls, no wicked power can overwhelm them.

It is true that according to the flesh men can persecute Jerusalem's citizens, speak all manner of evil against them falsely, make them suffer, and put them to death. But men cannot touch them as citizens of Jerusalem, for nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The Lord is to them a fiery wall...

They are preserved by the power of God through faith...

And soon the gates of the city will not be closed by day.

For there will be no more night!

Perfectly secure!

Zion, the joy of the whole earth!

Because Jerusalem shall be unspeakably glorious!

I will be the glory in the midst of her!

Oh, yes! The Lord speaks here! And he does not say that he will make her glorious. He does not say that he will pour out his glory upon her. But he says that he himself will be her glory in the midst of her.

The glory of God is the glory of Jerusalem!

God is the glorious one! Because he is excellence itself. He is all virtue! The eternal good! Infinite perfection! He is light, and in him is no darkness at all. The living God! Therefore, he alone is glorious! His is the glory eternally!

And in Christ, God has revealed all his glory because in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The glory of Christ is the glory of God. And out of Christ this glory radiates in the church, which is his body, in which he dwells and to whom he imparts his own life. The glory of the church is the glory of Christ is the glory of God!

"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23).

I will be the glory in the midst of her!

Eternally and forever!

Oh, look!

Are there still citizens of Jerusalem in Babylon?

So it was at the time of the prophet: Not all had returned out of Babylon. So it is also in the new day: Some never are called out of Babylon; others are lost in Babylon.

But if Jerusalem will be the joy of the whole earth, then there is no other place for Babylon than in outer darkness!

Get out of her! Escape!

Hurry!

—Herman Hoeksema

It has snowed! That beautiful white dust covering the ground reminds us that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). Across the landscape is the God-wrought miracle of sparkling whiteness, indicating the God-wrought miracle of the forgiveness of sins, except where God’s work is fouled by the passage of man as he goes on his way in the streets.

“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” was the Lord’s thesis in the debate that he proposed with Israel through the prophet Isaiah. The Lord’s thesis was the free and gracious justification of an ungodly people, who are like Sodom and like Gomorrah, who are a rebellious people, a “sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters” who “have forsaken the LORD...provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, [and] are gone away backward” (Isa. 1:4). In this thesis there is nothing of man. There are no activities of man, no works of man, and no thoughts of man. But the Lord’s thesis is a promise of pure grace concerning free and full justification proceeding from God’s eternal thoughts and purposes in love toward his elect people in Christ.

Such was the thesis that the Lord proposed several years ago to the Protestant Reformed Churches, who like Israel had departed from the truth. When that thesis came, then far and away the majority of the members utterly rejected that word of the Lord in unbelief and in favor of their own thesis that there is that which man must do to be saved. They shouted down the Lord in their arguments with him just as loudly as Israel had shouted at the trial of Jesus Christ before Pilate.

But the Lord will not be shouted down. He will have his thesis heard. In January 2021 and later in May 2021, two acts of separation were signed by officebearers and members of the Protestant Reformed Churches to form God’s church anew in two congregations. Then those two churches signed an *Act of Federation*, and a new denomination was formed. Later, churches in Northwest Iowa; Southern California; Loveland, Colorado; and Alberta and Ontario, Canada joined the denomination.

It became apparent and is still becoming apparent that many who had joined the new denomination also rejected the Lord’s thesis in favor of a thesis of their imaginations: some arguing for this point and others arguing for that point. But the thesis of the Lord stands sure and steadfast in his counsel and in the cross and the resurrection of Christ for all his elect in Christ: God justifies the ungodly! That is the word that we trust will be at the heart of the message of *Sword and Shield* for another year by the grace of God alone. Will any stop shouting their own thesis and listen to the thesis of God? This only God knows and only God can work.

Of note for the reader is that Rev. Tyler Ophoff will give a lecture in January 2026 concerning the *Act of Separation* that was written and signed by those who were organized as First Reformed Protestant Church. The speech aims to prove the contentions of the *Act of Separation* and thus the righteousness of the cause of those who separated from the Protestant Reformed Churches. Attend in person or tune in online for what is certain to be an informative and invigorating speech. The reader will find more information about the speech in this issue.

Regarding the meditation, the reader should be aware that Herman Hoeksema originally wrote the meditation in Dutch as part of a series of meditations on the book of Zechariah published in *The Standard Bearer* in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The editor has translated the meditation into English. The first two translated meditations in the series can be found in the November and December issues of volume six of *Sword and Shield*.

This month the editor continues his treatment of three speeches given at a Protestant Reformed officebearers’ conference hosted by Crete Protestant Reformed Church. The speech analyzed this month was given by Rev. Richard Smit. His speech is a repetition of and an expansion on the abominable theology of justification by faith and repentance that was delivered by Rev. Joshua Engelsma in his speech, which the editor analyzed last month. The speeches show clearly that the theologians of the Protestant Reformed Churches have rejected the Lord’s thesis of justification by faith alone and are still shouting their own thesis of justification by faith and repentance.

Will any hear? Will any consider? God knows.

Reverend Ophoff in *Understanding the Times* takes on the wicked work of that slippery McGeown in his preaching to twist the word of God regarding the antithesis so that it has no real application to the life of the church.

Mr. Craig Ferguson in the *Running Footmen* rubric reflects on an implication of the Lord’s thesis in the antithesis with all that belongs to the theses of the world and of the false church. When the Lord’s thesis was recovered in the Reformed Protestant Churches, then the truth of the antithesis was also recovered. That antithesis is the Lord’s work when he saves his people and justifies them freely. He makes them of his party in the world and sets them in opposition to all who oppose the Lord and his thesis. He said that through Isaiah too: “The daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant...” (Isa. 1:8–9). Being of the Lord’s party, the church is surrounded as a remnant by those who would overthrow her. Such is the position of the true church always in the world.

—NJL

THREE BLIND MICE (2): JUSTIFIED THROUGH REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Introduction

The editorial this month is a continuation of my analysis of three speeches that were given at an officebearers' conference hosted by Crete Protestant Reformed Church in September of last year. The speeches were given by Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Rev. Richard Smit, and Rev. Daniel Kleyn. The speeches made plain that the Protestant Reformed Churches have forsaken the gospel of grace. At the heart of that gospel is the justification of ungodly sinners through faith alone as that is rooted in God's eternal decree of election and justification.

Engelsma's speech ostensibly was given to explain the difference between a so-called once-for-all forgiveness and daily forgiveness. What became plain in his speech is that there is no such thing as once-for-all forgiveness. This is because for Engelsma there is no justification in eternity and there is no justification at the cross. There is only justification when—and you must say *if*—the sinner repents and believes. So for the baby at baptism, the grand promises of God the Son—that “He doth wash us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins and accounted righteous before God”—are not true for the baby until he or she repents and believes (Form for the Administration of Baptism, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 258).

This is abominable theology. It is conditional covenant theology. Protestant Reformed ministers and professors can use the word *unconditional* in connection with the covenant all they want to, but it is just deception. Their theology is thoroughly conditional. If one's justification is hinged upon his acts of repentance and faith, then the covenant and all its promises are hinged upon faith and repentance, and one's whole salvation is likewise hinged upon his acts of faith and repentance.

What the Reformed Protestant reformation has made plain is that the unconditionality of the covenant stands or falls with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. If justification is by faith alone, then the covenant and all its blessings are unconditional. If justification is by faith and by repentance, then the covenant and all its blessings are conditional. Then the cross of Christ is made of none

effect, and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are made impotent and liars. Nothing less than this is the seriousness of the issues for which we contend.

Justification Through Repentance and Faith

The abomination that is the theology of these three speeches continued—and if it is possible, became worse—with the speech of Rev. Richard Smit. The relationship between faith, repentance, and remission is the subject of his speech. He titles the speech “Repentance and Remission of Sins Through Faith in Jesus Christ.” He is obviously nervous. He states that he is going to stick close to his notes! He wants to be clear and precise and he has a lot of quotes!

Afraid of stepping on a landmine, Richard?

Those who do not know and love the gospel have a very hard time speaking about it, and Reverend Smit neither knows nor loves the gospel.

I must reiterate what I said previously about these speeches. The three speakers together spoke a little over twenty thousand words. In the entirety of their speeches, the phrase “faith alone” was spoken five times. Josh Engelsma used the phrase three times, but in all three instances, he simply used “faith alone” as a description of the doctrine of justification. Richard Smit does not use the phrase at all! Mind you, part of his task is to describe the relationship between forgiveness and *faith*! In a conference on justification and with the task of describing the relationship between justification and *faith*, Smit does not say “justification by faith alone”—not even once! He cannot, does not, and will not say “justification by faith alone.” Daniel Kleyn used the phrase “by faith alone” two times in his speech, and both times he denigrated the doctrine. In one reference he made sure to remind his listeners that the doctrine of justification by faith alone does not negate the need for admonitions, and in the other he made sure to remind his listeners that they know that justification is not the end goal of God in saving them. So much for justification by faith alone as the heart of the gospel. The three speakers do not believe in justification by faith alone, and they apparently saw no need to use the phrase except as a kind of tagline.

Though he neither knows nor loves the gospel, Reverend Smit is very concerned about the word order that the minister uses in his preaching.

Let the Reformed preacher and missionary proclaim the promise of the holy gospel and the call of the gospel to repent from sin and to believe in that promise of the gospel and expect that to come to pass in that divinely approved word order.¹

What Smit means is that the preacher must first preach “repent” and then preach “believe.” The preacher must preach this because according to Smit’s doctrine there is no forgiveness or justification apart from repentance and believing. Smit believes what Josh Engelsma believes: Repenting and believing are unto forgiveness.

Smit first defines *repentance*, and then he hacks that wonderwork of God all to pieces as if he were butchering a cow. He says,

Repentance is not a good work, which is the realm of sanctification. Good works are actions of love and obedience unto the Lord out of true faith according to the ten commandments and to the glory of God. Good works are evidence of sincere repentance...

Rather...we understand that repentance is the sincere sorrow of the elect, regenerated, called believer for his sins before God and is evident in a turning from his sins and a turning unto God for the remission of his sins.

Now the question is, why is it so necessary for Reverend Smit that repentance not be a good work? Really, who cares if repentance is a good work or not? But he cares, and the Protestant Reformed Churches care because the churches make repentance that through which man is justified, and if repentance is a work, they fall under the condemnation of teaching justification by faith and by works.

Of course, in this insistence that repentance is not a good work, Smit is in a bit of a quandary because he admits that Calvin viewed “repentance broadly as conversion.” And Smit admits that Bavinck recognized that “these biblical terms for what we call repentance or conversion are not defined logically or dogmatically but are used variously in a broader or more restricted sense.” In other words, when scripture uses the word *repentance*, scripture does not simply and strictly mean sorrow for sin. But scripture has conversion in the broadest sense in view and sometimes refers to this conversion by one of its parts, which is sorrow for sin.

Herman Hoeksema in his *Reformed Dogmatics* treats repentance in the section on preservation and perseverance! He gives this definition: “Repentance is a state of mind, a turning of the mind from the love of sin and unrighteousness unto the love of righteousness, and therefore unto a true sorrow over sin.”²

Smit will not say that repentance is a good work, but his spiritual father says that repentance belongs to the category of love. Now the whole law is fulfilled in one word, *love* (Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14). Repentance then involves a whole new love. Formerly man loved sin. Now he loves righteousness. And what is more righteous than God, his Christ, his law, and his glory? Repentance is to renew a man to love of God, love for Christ, love of God’s law, and love for his glory. Repentance very definitely belongs to God’s work of renewal, which is out of the realm of justification, for in justification God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). In other words, repentance cannot be restricted to a narrow sorrow over sin. Even if you restrict repentance to sorrow over sin, sorrow for sin implies love of God. It is an aspect of Christian love. Just as scripture sometimes speaks of forgiveness and means justification, so scripture frequently speaks of repentance and means conversion.

I have to be honest, I cannot understand why this is so hard for these men, why they are so insistent that repentance be strictly sorrow for sin, and how that definition of repentance somehow saves their insistence that forgiveness is by faith and by repentance from being a denial of the gospel. Let us grant for a moment that repentance is not a work. One thing it is not is faith. Repentance is not faith! And because repentance is not faith, justification is not by repentance, through repentance, or in the way of repentance. But repentance is conversion, and conversion is repentance.

And let us hear how the Heidelberg Catechism defines conversion in Lord’s Day 33:

Q. 88. Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?

A. Of two parts: of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.

Q. 89. What is the mortification of the old man?

A. It is a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them.

Q. 90. What is the quickening of the new man?

A. It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

1 Rev. Richard Smit, “Repentance and Remission of Sins Through Faith in Jesus Christ,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LY5t2A2VWNI&t=1128s>. All quotations of Reverend Smit are from this speech.

2 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association), 2:173.

Q. 91. But what are good works?

A. Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 121–22)

Repentance is the evidence of one's standing in a whole new relationship with the kingdom of God. That one is in the kingdom and a partaker of the kingdom's grace, mercy, and life; and the power of that kingdom shines out in his attitude toward sin, God, and one's whole life.

Very important to Smit's definition of repentance as well is that repentance is a seeking of remission: "Repentance is the sincere sorrow...for his sins before God and is evident in a turning from his sins and a turning unto God for the remission of sins."

However, seeking remission of sins does not belong to the Catechism's definition of conversion. To seek remission is faith, plain and simple. Faith alone seeks remission in Christ, and faith alone finds remission of sins in Jesus Christ. That seeking of remission is not a seeking for something that the believer does not have because the truth of God's kingdom is that whoever seeks shall find, and before we ask God answers us. It is evident that the believer seeks remission in faith in the confidence that everlasting righteousness and eternal life are his merely of grace and only for the sake of Christ's merits (Lord's Day 7). Such is the divine order.

Smit adds seeking remission of sins to his definition of repentance because there is one thing that he will not give to the sinner without his repentance, and that is his forgiveness. He will not have the ungodly justified by faith alone.

Having massacred the meaning of repentance, Smit moves on to define *believing*. To his credit he defines faith as a bond. There is no agreement on this in the Protestant Reformed Churches among the ministers and professors, and there does not have to be because faith as a bond has no meaningful place in any of their theology. As far as their theology is concerned, they could say that faith is a pig. So it is with Smit. He says that faith is a bond, but faith as a bond has no part in his explanation of faith and justification.

But the place of faith as a bond in justification is easily stated. The great benefit of faith as a bond in connection with justification is stated by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." There is no condemnation to those who are *in* Christ Jesus. *In Christ* means faith as a bond. Simply by virtue of the fact that they are *in* Christ, there is no condemnation, which means the glorious news that they are justified and have peace with God through their Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

This is part of the explanation of an unforfeitable state of justification even in deep falls into sin. Justification is secure in Christ. The children of God cannot be separated from Christ, and so they cannot be separated from their justification in Christ. In union with Christ, Christ is made by God unto them righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). This is the explanation of the justification of infants, who believe nothing and repent from nothing. They are in Christ, their savior. This is the true explanation of being justified by faith. Faith puts the children of God in connection with the justified corporation of Jesus Christ. He was delivered on account of their offenses, and he was raised again because he justified them at the cross (Rom. 4:25). Righteousness is in Christ, and the children of God are declared righteous in their connection with Christ through faith.

With his definitions out of the way, Smit finally gets to the real message of his speech. He could have saved a lot of words and been kinder to the ears of the listeners in his long-winded speech if he had come to the real message right off the bat. He asks, "What is the relationship between the Lord's remission of our sins and our activities of repentance and believing?" For him there is a "close relationship" between these activities. But he does not mean a close relationship. He means that unless and until a man repents and believes—as his activities, by grace, of course—the Lord will not and cannot forgive him. A man is not justified by faith alone but through faith and through repentance as his activities.

So Smit says,

Repentance is the required way in which the Spirit leads the regenerated and called child of God to seek and find by believing the remission of sins in Jesus Christ alone...

When the saving call of the gospel goes forth with its efficacious power by the Holy Ghost, the logical order is that he repents from his sins and receives remission of sins through believing in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It must be this order: First by repenting and then by believing, man will be forgiven. For Smit these two—faith and repentance—are man's twin activities by which he is justified.

Somehow, Smit then pivots to a discussion of conversion. He finds in scripture and the creeds that conversion involves two things: repenting and believing. He says in connection with Canons 3–4.10, "The Canons there combine repenting and believing in that activity of conversion."

That is not true. Article 10 actually distinguishes faith and repentance and further makes repentance to be conversion. The article says "faith and conversion" and later "faith and repentance." If Smit is right that the article on

his reading combines faith and repentance as two parts of conversion, then he must also add obedience and good works because the article goes on to say that God's chosen ones "show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light," which at least includes their lives of obedience (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168). Smit's reading is plainly nonsense and self-serving. But Smit's point is that repenting and faith belong to conversion.

I find this to be a curious development: Conversion consisting of faith and repentance? Conversion is in fact the fruit of faith. There are two things that happen by faith. One thing is that the ungodly sinner is justified by faith alone. The other is that by faith the ungodly sinner is turned from sin to God. Conversion is not the two things that Smit claims: faith and repentance. But according to Lord's Day 33, conversion is these two things: sorrow for sin and love for God. Smit is not teaching a mere "close relationship" between faith and repentance, but he is teaching that both faith and repentance belong to conversion. And since for Smit we are justified by faith and by repentance, then for him that must mean that conversion is the means to justification. Conversion is indispensable to justification.

Previously the Protestant Reformed theologians have said that faith and repentance are two sides of one justifying coin that the sinner slips into God's vending machine of forgiveness, but now Smit says that faith and repentance are two sides of the conversion of the sinner and thus he must mean that the sinner is justified by his conversion. This is nothing different than the theology that Hubert De Wolf preached: "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom." According to Lord's Day 31, entrance into the kingdom *is* justification. But for De Wolf conversion was prerequisite to justification.

This is what Herman Hoeksema said about De Wolf's theology:

This sermon [of De Wolf] emphasized very strongly [that] our act of conversion is a condition or prerequisite to enter into the kingdom of God. This, whether it is applied to our first entering into the kingdom or to our repeated conversion, is pure Arminianism. The question is: what is a prerequisite? The answer is: a prerequisite is something required beforehand, i.e. as a preliminary to any proposed end or effect.¹

And Smit teaches nothing different than De Wolf. Conversion consists of faith and repentance, and by that conversion man is justified.

And for Smit these two, repentance and faith, must be preached in that order. So he tells us that Jesus taught

this in Mark 1:15 when he said, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." For Smit this is the "divinely approved word order." But this insistence on preaching repentance first and believing second and remission third gets a little sketchy for Smit when he has to find this "divinely approved word order" in the Canons of Dordt. He begins to quote the Canons, and then he realizes that he has a problem with word order:

The Canons there combine repenting and believing in that activity of conversion. Canons of Dordt 3–4, article 12 teaches that because of the work of the Spirit and his grace, "man is himself rightly said to believe..."

Smit recovers quickly and continues,

Let me read that again: "Man is himself said to believe and repent by virtue of the grace received." Here in article 12, believing is first, and repent is second, indicating a relationship between the two. Not that one is less necessary than the other. One can be done a little later. It's not important, but together they are both the fruit of the call of the gospel in the elect, regenerated sinner. And the one cannot be present without the other.

Now this is comical. Smit has insisted that the preacher *must* preach repentance first, then he can preach believing, and then he can preach remission. It must be in that order, for so taught Jesus, and such is the "divinely approved word order." And that word order for Smit has theological implications because it points out that a man cannot be justified without his prior repentance. But oops, the Canons has a different order! Well, he can just fudge that a little bit. "One can be done a little later." You know, you can believe and get around to repenting a little later! Or I suppose you could repent—that is the important one anyway for Smit—and then you can get around to believing a little later. "It's not important."

Sounds a little antinomian!

But for Smit the order *is* important, and he must be chagrined that the Canons does not back up his supposedly necessary and "divinely approved word order."

And that is not the end of the folly. He has to fudge a little more on his "divinely approved word order." He says, "When scripture and the confessions use the word order—you can find this: repentance and faith or sometimes faith and repentance. They do both."

But he is not allowed to flip-flop like that. If his "divinely approved word order" of first repentance and then faith means that one must first repent and then be forgiven by faith, then when scripture says believe and

1 Herman Hoeksema, as quoted in H. De Wolf, "Those 'Heretical' Statements," *Reformed Guardian* 1, no. 3 (August 29, 1953): 6–7.

repent, it means that you are first forgiven by faith and then you repent. Then also the scriptures contradict themselves. I say this only for the sake of pointing out the ridiculousness of Smit's position about word order.

The words—whether in the order of repent and believe or believe and repent—teach the same thing. There are two works of God when he translates his people into the kingdom of his dear Son. He works faith—by which alone we are justified in Christ and have applied to our consciences the verdict of eternity and of the cross and are reconciled to God—and he renews us to repentance, or converts us, so that we might show forth our thankfulness as children of the kingdom and of the light.

Further, while it is true that one—repentance—cannot be present without the other—faith—that is not Smit's point. Anyone who is truly Reformed knows that faith cannot be without its fruits. But Smit's point is that in justification it is not faith alone but faith and repentance as the two parts of conversion that justify. Indeed, his point is that first there is repentance, then there is faith, and then and only then can there be remission. So he says about faith and repentance, "They are consistently interconnected and reciprocally support and promote one another."

Except in justification!

Justification—and the forgiveness of the sinner—is by faith alone. Faith always works by love, but in justification faith does not need either repentance or love to justify. We are justified by faith alone!

You will say to me, "Does Reverend Smit really say that we are justified through faith and through repentance?"

Listen:

One cannot think that he can enjoy forgiveness by *only* believing but *without* any repenting from his sins... John preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, which indicates the need for the presence of repenting when receiving by believing the remission of sins (Mark 1:4).

Oh! Really! Let me rephrase what Smit says: One cannot think that he is justified by faith alone! One must also repent to be justified by faith alone, which then means that he does not have justification by faith alone.

Here is another:

The Spirit, you see, leads him [the elect sinner] in the divinely determined right way of repentance and sorrow for sin and in true believing, whereby we receive forgiveness, pardon, justification, and peace with God.

Smit says "whereby." What is that *something* "whereby" the elect sinner is forgiven, pardoned, justified, and has peace with God? That *something* for Smit is the way of repenting and true believing. In the way of repentance

and believing, the sinner is justified. Repenting and believing are both necessary to be justified, in which case again there is no justification by faith alone.

Does Smit really believe this chilling, fearful, and damning theology?

In his carefully choreographed performance, he slips up, and his true belief comes out plainly. He draws an analogy between a human father and his child, who has sinned against him, and God the Father and his sinful child:

Having sinned against mother or father, a child whose conscience is yet healthy, knows his guilt, soon discovers that the face of father and mother is not disposed to them in approval of what has been done but is disposed to them in an angry look of holy displeasure for the sin that has been committed and brought into the relationship. The loss of that favor in the face of the father and mother for the little child is most dreadful, tormenting. But the return of the parents' smile is most comforting, pleasing, and is accomplished, brought about, *through the way of* the child's repenting and believing and expressing expressions of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Now, this shows that when Smit uses the term "through the way of" in connection with repentance and justification that there is no meaningful difference with "instrument of" justification. Protestant Reformed ministers always try to defend their theology of justification by faith and by works by saying, "No, no, we teach that we are justified *in the way of repentance* and by faith. Repentance is the way, and faith is the instrument."

So Smit says that man is forgiven "through the way of...repentance and believing [faith]." But this quotation shows that there is no meaningful difference for Smit between "through the way of...repenting" and by faith. Get the words "the way of" out of there. He just as well could have said through repentance and through faith or by repentance and by faith. If he had said that, he would be making clear that both repentance and faith are parallel and instrumental in justification. The child is forgiven by the parent through repentance and through faith or in the way of repentance and in the way of faith. It really does not make a difference how Smit says it. He means that repentance and faith are coordinate in justification.

Then he also imputes that brutal theology of his home to God the Father and his home:

Similarly, through the child of God's repentance from sin and through his believing in Jesus Christ, the Spirit works, and the believer receives and experiences the remission of sin and peace with God in Jesus Christ alone.

Either Smit wrote this in his manuscript and reads it—because he says that he is going “to stick very closely... to the wording of my manuscript”—and thus he is the more inexcusable for it, or it becomes so grating to his spirit constantly to deny that he is teaching justification by repenting that he finally just comes out with it. His whole speech is building to that point. It must have been a relief for him to get that off his chest without subterfuge and evasion. He just lays it out there: The child of God is forgiven, justified, and enjoys peace with God through repentance and through faith! No Roman Catholic priest would have any problem with that. That is Rome’s doctrine. And that is the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

He should have entitled his speech “Justified Through Repentance and Through Faith.” Then he would not have kept his audience waiting so long to hear his point. I have no doubt that those in the audience were expecting him

to make that point. I do not think anyone there batted an eye when Smit said that justification is through faith and through repentance. That man is justified through repentance and through faith is what the Protestant Reformed Churches mean when they say that repentance is the way unto forgiveness, that man repents in order to be forgiven, and that man experiences fellowship with God by faith and in the way of repentance. That is what Smit means when he says, “Repentance is the required way in which the Spirit leads the regenerated and called child of God to seek and find by believing the remission of sins in Jesus Christ alone.” He means justified through repentance and through faith. To be forgiven through repentance and through faith is to be justified through good works and through faith!

And that is anathema!

And all who teach that are anathema maranatha!

—NJL

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

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

MCGEOWN’S FABLES (1)

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine;
but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

—2 Timothy 4:3–4

Introduction

Such is the fearful warning that the apostle Paul exhorted upon his spiritual son Timothy. The members of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) have itching ears and heap to themselves teachers to tickle those itches. The people desire ministers who tell them what they want to hear and not what God’s word declares. Rev. Martyn McGeown with his four recent sermons on the *antithesis*—although he never uses the term—does exactly that. In his sermons he tells his

congregation exactly what he thinks about doctrine, the covenant, the antithesis, and God himself. All his sermons are attacks against the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and her doctrine of the antithesis. Without ever once mentioning the RPC by name or interacting with her preaching and writing, he labels, slanders, and vilifies the church of Jesus Christ.

McGeown does not teach sound doctrine as the apostle Paul instructed Timothy but minimizes doctrine in favor of friendly relations with members of the United

Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the generally Reformed and Presbyterian community. He minimizes and dismisses doctrinal differences as if they were not serious at all. Certainly those differences are nothing that should separate families, churches, and denominations. And for McGeown, if you believe that doctrine is what separates families, churches, and denominations—which is what the Reformed Protestant Churches have taught from the beginning—then you are a bigot and a fanatic.

But doctrine is the lifeblood of the church. That is why the apostle so urgently exhorted Timothy, “Preach the *word*, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and *doctrine*.” And as the reason, he states, “For the time will come when they will not endure *sound doctrine*...and they shall turn away their ears from the *truth*, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:2–4, emphasis added).

God is hastening the destruction of the Protestant Reformed Churches through this wicked and profane man who teaches fables. The word “fables” is a translation of the original Greek word *mythos*. You hear in *mythos* the English word *myth*. McGeown’s sermons are nothing but myths! They are inventions of his own mind and wisdom. He dreamed them and presents them as wisdom from God on high. He dares to preach these sermons as if they were the living Word of the holy God. He rips the holy God down from heaven and makes him to sit at a table with those who teach and believe that God’s grace is common to all men; that God has a well-meant offer for all men, if only they believe; that the covenant is conditional; and that not infants but believers must be baptized. He calls those who teach such lies brothers and sisters in Christ. He makes a mockery of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the sacred scriptures, and the Reformed confessions. But the Lord is judging in heaven. That he has given to the PRC such a false teacher is a testament of God’s hatred of that denomination. To watch the judgment being wrought makes me tremble. It is worse than any natural disaster or any calamity on earth. I am watching God carry out his righteous judgment on ungodly men and women who will not turn from the lie. They love the lie, and they will perish with the lie. McGeown and all who believe his doctrine will find nothing but destruction and damnation in it.

I intend to address McGeown’s four recent sermons one at a time, expose his fables, and declare the truth of God in each of the sermon texts. McGeown’s sermons are meant as a distraction for members of the PRC. No

man can come against the doctrine of the RPC, and so McGeown sets out to make doctrine unimportant and to deride anyone who teaches sound doctrine. He minimizes the doctrinal differences that so deeply separate the Reformed Protestant Churches from the Protestant Reformed Churches, and in doing so he seeks to heap scorn on the church of Jesus Christ for being faithful to the sharp, clear word of God.

The Sword of Christ

McGeown’s first sermon was on Matthew 10:34–36 and the sword of Christ.¹ The text reads,

34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.
35. For I am come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.
36. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.

McGeown begins by explaining Christ’s warning in Matthew 10. Regarding the message that the disciples must preach, McGeown says that Christ warns them that

they must prepare themselves for opposition and persecution. Indeed, they must prepare themselves for this. The message that they bring, the gospel of Jesus Christ, brings or causes division.

One would think that with such a beginning that McGeown would have preached the gospel of the text and applied it sharply to the lives of the members of his congregation. But one would be mistaken. He is about to go to work reducing Christ’s sword down to a pool noodle. What is a pool noodle good for? It is something fun to play with in the pool and float around with on a hot summer day and to whack your friends and family with. McGeown has a fun toy noodle, but will he define the “sword” in the text as an instrument that spills blood? Hardly.

In all seriousness, I would like to hear one sermon by a minister in the PRC that has been in any way offensive. The gospel itself is offensive to man. If a minister would come up to a Protestant Reformed pulpit today and say to the congregation, “Beloved, you are ungodly and carnal, and this is why, and your only hope is Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life,” all the members would rise up in horror over the defamation of their names and honor. I personally have witnessed that offense of the gospel in sermons where I was not seeking out trouble. My aim and

¹ Martyn McGeown, “Christ Sending a Sword,” sermon preached at Providence Protestant Reformed Church on October 19, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8im-TJpZfBw&t=2271s>. All quotations from McGeown in the article are from this sermon.

purpose always have been unity and peace. God is my witness to that. Men rose up in horror over their names when sermons made them to be nothing. In the PRC there would be a massive uproar over that, along with a slew of “but we are regenerated,” “but we are good people,” “but, but, but...” I can say this because that is what the Protestant Reformed Churches already did with the Truth. The Truth came and said, “You have displaced me. Repent!” And the whole denomination arose and kicked out the Truth. Protestant Reformed preaching today is nothing but watered-down Christianity that offends no one. The preaching in the PRC offends no one because her ministers do not preach the gospel. Protestant Reformed preaching carves out room for all sorts of ungodly relationships and makes the members very comfortable in their sins. None of the four sermons that McGeown preached are offensive to anyone, as we will see.

McGeown explains that Christ comes to bring peace according to the promise of God. He explains that Christ’s coming brings division. He explains the division between the elect and the reprobate. He explains that Christ is the one who brings that sword. So far, so good.²

But then he weaves in a fable.

We do not send or throw the sword. Christ does... If there must be division, let us not be its authors or its promoters. And that is important to note because there are some who seem to think that it is their calling to throw the sword, and they relish, it appears, fighting everyone about everything. And they seek to be as obnoxious as possible to stir up opposition against themselves, to destroy the relationships they have with other people, and then try to claim martyrdom as a badge of honor, saying that they are victims of the sword.

Without naming names, he is calling out the Reformed Protestant Churches. Ironic it is, for as he makes his charge against the RPC that she throws the sword, he engages in the same activity himself. Regardless, this is a slander. The RPC does not throw the sword of Christ wherever she likes. Never has the RPC said that she throws the sword of Christ. The RPC does not believe that she is throwing the sword. All her warnings are not bluster. We in the RPC mean exactly what we say. The PRC has displaced Christ, which is too gross a blasphemy. The PRC is the whore of Babylon. She has departed off the path of the truth and become false. Her doctrine is that there is

that which man must do to be saved. Her doctrine is that there is no forgiveness unless or until man does something—by grace. We are not saying these things for the sake of making a racket and to be obnoxious. We have been clear from the beginning that our issue is strictly doctrinal. Our issue is not first with the rampant hierarchy that is a prominent feature of the denomination. Our issue is not even with all the sexual abuse riddled throughout the churches. But our issue is with the lie that gives man a place in salvation. The Protestant Reformed false doctrine is the root and cause of the sexual abuse and the hierarchy. False doctrine has always been the issue and will continue to be the issue that separates the Reformed Protestant Churches from the PRC. All the sermons, lectures, and writings of the RPC have been declaring that for years. The message has not changed. The message has not been altered. McGeown slanders the RPC by making it seem as if she were simply fighting over something trivial and meaningless. But doctrine means something to the church, and it should mean something to the PRC. McGeown slanders Reformed Protestant preaching and writing as if it were petty squabbling. That is not true. We in the RPC are concerned with nothing less than the salvation of those who are on a path to utter desolation. We are consumed in the hope that there is maybe, maybe, one child of God in the PRC whom God has yet to pluck out of these wretched churches.

The Athanasian Creed is profound, giving this warning in regard to confessing the doctrine of the Trinity: “This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully and firmly he cannot be saved” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 15). That is a massive statement by our early church fathers. If a man does not believe the doctrine of the Trinity, there is no salvation for him. The early fathers made believing and confessing the doctrine of the Trinity an issue of salvation itself. Imagine now the church as she made this statement—there were Arius, Nestorius, the Manicheans, who all in one form or another denied some aspect of Jesus Christ and therefore denied the Trinity.

You can hear Arius from the grave in McGeown’s sermon: “Those church fathers relish in throwing the sword about the Trinity and fighting everyone about everything. They are obnoxious and making a racket.”

The early fathers made this striking condemnation: “If you do not believe the doctrine of the Trinity as it is confessed here, you *cannot* be saved.”

2 Except not so good. In his explanation of who the promise of peace is for, McGeown says that “peace is for believers. Peace is for those who cease their warfare and rebellion against God.” Peace is not for the wicked and the rebels and the sinners of the earth. Two times he emphasizes that peace is for *believers*. Does not God speak peace to the heathen (Zech. 9:10)? Does not God justify the ungodly (Rom. 4:5)? So casually McGeown tramples underfoot the doctrine of justification by faith alone as he plods on to the heart of his sermon. For justification is not the heart of his sermon—it is only a footnote.

Doctrine is serious. It was serious for the early church. The church today ought to be dead serious about the sin of false doctrine. McGeown is not at all serious. Doctrinal differences are something trivial and meaningless to him.

In Lord's Day 8, before the Heidelberg Catechism's exposition of the Apostles' Creed even begins, our Reformed fathers inserted an article on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Q. 24. How are these articles [of the Apostles' Creed] divided?

A. Into three parts: the first is of God the Father and our creation; the second, of God the Son and our redemption; the third, of God the Holy Ghost and our sanctification. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 92)

By this insertion the Lord's Day teaches that the knowledge and believing of the Christian faith is the knowledge and believing of the truth of the triune God. The Christian faith in its entirety is nothing else than the truth of the triune God, from the doctrine of creation to the doctrine of the resurrection and everything in between. Connect that with the Athanasian Creed and the fathers' serious warning comes into full view: "Except a man believe faithfully and firmly [this doctrine] he cannot be saved." If a man believes common grace, he cannot be saved. If a man believes the well-meant offer, he cannot be saved. If a man believes there is that which man must do to be saved, he cannot be saved. If a man corrupts the truth of creation, he has corrupted God the Father and cannot be saved. If a man corrupts the truth of redemption—that God the Son fully accomplished our salvation—he has corrupted the doctrine of the Trinity, and he cannot be saved. If a man corrupts sanctification—adding a work of man to the work of God the Holy Spirit, he has corrupted the doctrine of the Trinity, and he cannot be saved. Corrupt any doctrine of the Reformed faith from creation to the final resurrection, and you corrupt the doctrine of the Trinity. The words in the creed "he cannot be saved" do not mean that he is absolutely depraved and that salvation is impossible for him, but they mean that if a man holds to that doctrine willingly or in ignorance, he will perish, lest he repents and believes.

What is criminal in McGeown's sermon, and what contributes to its being a poor sermon, is that he never defines his terms. Defining terms is important. Defining

terms makes the preaching clear to the audience. Friend and foe know exactly what is meant when the preaching comes. There is no ambiguity; there is no room for one's own interpretation. The truth comes clearly, so that no one can say, "I do not know what he meant here." The first point of his sermon ought to have explained what Christ's *sword* is. McGeown says only, "The message that they bring, the gospel of Jesus Christ, brings or causes division." He states this in the introduction, but he never develops, defines, or comes back to that thought.

What is the sword of Christ? The *sword of Christ* is the gospel itself. The gospel is the good news of the promise. The gospel is Jesus Christ in his person, natures, words, works, and significance. He is the fulfillment of the promise of God to save sinners. There you have the offense of the gospel. The gospel is offensive because salvation stands outside man's willing and running, his choosing and his doing. The gospel is that the triune God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit justifies ungodly sinners in their hearts and lives apart from their activities, so that they have peace with God. God reconciles his enemies unto himself. He speaks peace to the heathen. The gospel is that there is nothing that man must do for salvation. The gospel is that man's activities, working, labors, and faithfulness do not matter at all for salvation. Or as the apostle Paul wrote, "I count all things but

loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). The gospel is that "it is finished." That should have been the center of his sermon, but for McGeown it is not.

The next thought of the sermon ought to have been that the sword is the word of God. We read in Ephesians 6:17 of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." With a simple review of Thayer's Greek lexicon, McGeown could have seen that "sword" in Ephesians 6 stands in connection with Matthew 10. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. At Christ's ascension he and the Spirit simply became synonymous. They are identified together. Jesus Christ the man received the Spirit and poured out that Spirit upon his church. The Spirit does not bring anything else except the Word. The Spirit brings Jesus Christ crucified. The Spirit only works by the Word.

The minister teaches true doctrine, and sound doctrine is elicited from scripture. God's word teaches doctrine. This is what scripture means when it adds "the,"

McGeown slanders the RPC by making it seem as if she were simply fighting over something trivial and meaningless. But doctrine means something to the church, and it should mean something to the PRC.

a definite article, to “faith.” For example, holding the mystery of “the faith” in a pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9) or to earnestly contend for “the faith,” which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). “The faith” is the doctrine of the word of God; the whole body of truth that God has revealed, beginning in Genesis 1 and ending in Revelation 22; the objective content of the scriptures, which faith believes entirely and unquestioningly. According to Lord’s Day 7, faith holds for truth all that God has revealed in his word. Lord’s Day 21 teaches that the church agrees in true faith.

Christ sends a doctrinal sword upon the earth by the Spirit. He sends the sword of the word, which contains all the doctrine that God has revealed. And God has revealed clearly in his word who he is and what kind of God he is. Men do not get to pick and choose. Their opinions or thoughts about God are not decisive. The truth is an objective fact not subject to the capricious whims of men, who may try their best to get things right about God. There is no ambiguity in the scriptures. God through his Spirit leads and has led his church into all truth, so that the church has the Reformed confessions. Jesus Christ sends the sword when the scriptures are preached, when sound doctrine is taught and applied in general as well as in particular, and when the Reformed confessions are exegeted and explained, so that what comes from the pulpit is not the word of man, but as it is in truth the very word of God.

Still more, in John’s vision in Revelation 1, he saw standing in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, whose head and hair were white like wool and snow, with eyes as a flaming fire and feet like fine brass burned in a furnace, who had seven stars in his hand, and out of his mouth went a two-edged sword. The sword, the word, is in Christ’s mouth; it is Christ’s message; it is Christ himself. Christ comes with his gospel as the speaker of his own message and throws that sword on the earth. Jesus Christ comes today with a sword when the gospel is preached that man is nothing and God is everything.

McGeown does not preach the gospel to his congregation. He never comforts his congregation with the truth of Christ’s sword. Yes, he speaks some truth about the gospel, but he never *preaches* the gospel. It is striking how comfortless the sermon is. McGeown tells his congregation a lot of true things about the Bible and about the passage he is preaching on, but they are never in the service of the one message of the text: the gospel! Preaching is the official proclamation of the King to his subjects. To preach the gospel is not simply to say some things about what Christ did, but it is to declare that Christ did that for you really and truly.

Christ’s sending of that sword is your salvation! The sword came when Christ came into the world. No man could take a neutral position toward Christ. Men either hated him or believed in him. That hatred of Christ God determined to use for the salvation of his people. The false church and the world hated Christ. All men forsook him. And he was crucified for your salvation. That was the sword that pierced through Mary’s heart.

Christ’s sword today is an instrument that cuts you out of Adam and places you into saving communion with Christ. That is the gospel of the text. Yes, the sword divides families, churches, and denominations, but Christ’s sword cuts out his people from the guilt of their sins and declares to them the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Christ tells his people of his perfect work and obedience over against all their sins and depravity. God’s people come to church to hear Christ comfort them in their lives. They come to hear God’s verdict concerning them, to hear that they are righteous by faith alone in Christ and that God does not impute to them their sins. That is preaching the gospel. There is none of that in McGeown’s sermon.

The Division the Sword Causes

McGeown then tells his congregation how this sword divides when it comes.

His coming is designed to break up close family relationships... “I came not to send peace but a sword”—and a sword that cuts even through family relationships, breaks up homes and marriages and relationships between the closest of family members.

And he tells his congregation to imagine some scenarios as he brings them to the land of make-believe. He spends a quarter of his sermon describing various scenarios where this sword of the gospel could potentially have an effect. There is a household of unbelieving Jews, and the gospel comes and converts one of them. There is a family of Muslims or pagans who were previously united in their unbelief, and then one is converted. Now there is division between mother and daughter, wife and husband, or children and parents, where previously there was carnal peace.

Do you see what McGeown does there? He carefully limits this division to the early church or to the mission field. Here is another one of his myths: He makes this division take place a long, long time ago but not now. He makes this division take place far, far away on the mission field but not here. He dreamed this up. Does the word of God make that distinction in the text at all? Is that

anywhere to be found in Matthew 10? McGeown never applies the word in particular to his congregation, and thus his preaching does not offend anyone.

Then McGeown moves on to a Christian family as his next example in the case of the sword's exposing an adulterous husband. The sword of the gospel comes, and it exposes the heart of the husband, so that though he appeared to be a Christian, he now commits adultery. Thus there is division in the home. It is peculiar to me how suddenly the division caused by Christ's sword is that a man commits sin. Is that what the sword does? It exposes a good family man as an adulterer? McGeown's example is superficial. As far as sin goes, the elect child of God is a totally depraved sinner. And because he is totally depraved even after being regenerated, he is prone to hate God and his neighbor. He can fall into the same grievous sins as the man of the world. The child of God, in his flesh, can perform all sorts of wicked acts that would make even the world blush. For McGeown the gospel is really only for good, obedient, and repentant people.

However, the gospel is not for good people. The gospel is for sinners. The division that the sword causes manifests the eternal division between the elect and the reprobate. Christ comes with his fan in his hand, and he thoroughly purges his floor and gathers his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with an unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).

Then McGeown goes on to the child of a Christian family who apostatizes and says, "I reject Jesus Christ. I reject God. I reject a godly life. I want to live like the world." Even this example, which is supposed to be the one that hits the closest to home, falls short. While perhaps the apostate child could come out and say "I hate Christ," that is so far from what actually takes place. It is never that cut and dry. Apostasy is seen when a child leaves the true church for a false church. He still goes to a church and claims that he believes in Jesus, but he leaves the truth and his actions tell the story. This is what the apostle John explains clearly in 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." It is never so stark and obvious like McGeown tries to convey. All this belongs to not making these sermons offensive to anyone in his congregation.

But now we come to what McGeown has been after all along in this sermon. He has been chomping at the bit for what he says next.

But the sword of Jesus does not justify the behavior of some who cut off family and friends for

theological differences or differences in church membership. It does not justify the shunning that occurs in some circles. It does not justify the refusal of family members to attend baptisms and weddings and confessions of faith and even funerals. It does not justify parents cutting off their children or grandchildren or those who will not permit their parents to see their grandchildren. It does not justify those who refuse to include family members at Christmas or Thanksgiving simply because there are some theological differences or differences in church membership.

Now, if a family member is openly walking in sin, some such measures may be justified at times and used wisely. But that is not what I am speaking of here. Not those who forsake the Christian faith. I'm speaking here of those who elevate theological differences as if they were the gospel itself, so that there is a cutting off of fellowship and relationships. You hold to common grace, I cut you off; you hold to the well-meant offer, I cut you off; you hold to a conditional covenant, I cut you off; you deny infant baptism, I cut you off; no more fellowship is possible between us; I view you as an unbeliever; the sword of Jesus has separated us—that is not what Jesus is speaking of here.

What a massive minimization of false doctrine! McGeown calls the well-meant offer, common grace, and the conditional covenant "theological differences." He scoffs that anyone could ever consider these heresies to be touching on the gospel. If there ever were three false doctrines that touch on the heart of the gospel and that give the PRC her right to a separate existence in the world, these would be it!

What McGeown so casually dismisses and chides at is exactly what Christ is talking about in Matthew 10. The sword is a doctrinal one because it is the word of God. That should have been proved and explained earlier in the sermon. Christ's point is that the gospel, which has real objective content, divides families. The sin of holding to and confessing a lie is dead serious. McGeown does not get to brush that away. For holding to false doctrine and disobeying the first commandment and then crafting an image after their own conception of God, three thousand Israelites were cut down by the Levites at the foot of Mount Sinai. The Levites heeded Moses' call—"Who is on the Lord's side?"—took up their swords, and cut down those Israelites who believed the lie. That was the Israelites' sin.

The New Testament reality is excommunication. If a man holds to a lie in disobedience to the first

commandment, he is disciplined. The Heidelberg Catechism in its exposition of the first commandment states among other things that “I...learn rightly to know the only true God.” The knowledge of the triune God is by the doctrine that God reveals in his word. The doctrine that a man believes shows what God he believes in. The Heidelberg Catechism in its exposition of the ninth commandment states among other things that “I love the truth, speak it uprightly, and confess it” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 124, 133). Holding to false doctrine is sin against the first and the ninth commandments. That is dead serious.

Lord’s Day 30, question 82, asks, “Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 117). The first thing listed is “confession.” The question is, confession of what? Confession has to do with doctrine. A believer confesses doctrine. He confesses the truth. He speaks the truth. His confession is what God says about himself in the word. If a man’s doctrine is a lie, he may not be a member of the church. He walks in a lie, and he needs to repent of that lie. He cannot come to the Lord’s table with me. If I cannot eat at the Lord’s table with such men and women, how can I eat with them at the table in my home and go to their weddings, confessions of faith, baptisms, funerals, and holidays? As the Catechism says, eating and drinking at the Lord’s table is fellowship with Christ. Because I eat and drink at the Lord’s table, I am not going to eat and drink at the table of devils.

McGeown invokes the name of Rev. Herman Hoeksema to prove the point that “shunning” those who hold some doctrinal differences is something that must be rebuked and is unchristian. McGeown buries Hoeksema six feet down on every doctrine that Hoeksema taught, wrote, and preached but resurrects this little excerpt. When it suits his fable, McGeown appeals recklessly to Reverend Hoeksema.

Here is the quotation from Reverend Hoeksema that McGeown uses:

For although I certainly did not agree with him [Dr. Klaas Schilder of the liberated churches] in regard to the question of the covenant and the promise, I nevertheless esteemed him for his works’ sake, esteemed him too as a highly gifted scholar, and above all as a brother in Christ.

The sword, the word, is in Christ’s mouth; it is Christ’s message; it is Christ himself. Christ comes with his gospel as the speaker of his own message and throws that sword on the earth.

I wondered when someone in the PRC was going to bring this up. I have had a long time to consider this. I love Reverend Hoeksema, and I love his theology and doctrine. I lean on them heavily in my preaching and writing to glean definitions and ideas on certain subjects. But I must subject everything in the Reformed tradition to the withering critique of the scriptures and the Reformed confessions. To do this, instead of blindly following what men have said in years past, is exactly what Reverend Hoeksema did in his ministry. That is what made him such an excellent theologian. He took the then Reformed idea of the covenant, critiqued it by subjecting it to the teaching of scripture and the confessions, developed it, and brought the churches to a correct understanding of the covenant. Out of that doctrine of the covenant came his doctrine of marriage. I subject Reverend Hoeksema’s teachings to the critique of the scriptures and the confessions. That is not dishonoring him but honoring him. If he were alive he would expect nothing less of the church today. I expect the next generation, when I am dead and gone, to take what I have written, said, and preached and to critique it according to the scriptures and the confessions.

Now, looking back on this period of history before 1953, I have the advantage of hindsight. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. What Reverend Hoeksema did

in cozying up with Schilder almost destroyed the entire PRC. Hoeksema pushed for relations with the liberated that completely undermined the entire reformation and development of the truth at that time. The liberated theology festered and sizzled like leaven in the PRC. Very telling it is that the liberated ministers were allowed to preach on Protestant Reformed pulpits but not the other way around. The PRC’s ecumenical relationship with the liberated and Schilder ended in two-thirds of the Protestant Reformed members and churches leaving the denomination.

The calling of the PRC was to be a separate nation from all the other nations that surrounded her, like Israel in the Old Testament. When Jehoshaphat was determined to have a relationship with apostate Ahab, Jehoshaphat brought the nation to her knees. The effects of false ecumenical relationships are devastating to the church. God in his mercy saved Judah, and in his mercy he saved his church in 1953. The effect was a devastating split in the denomination, but God was purifying and refining his church.

McGeown takes Hoeksema's words and further thrusts them into the service of his theology:

Klaas Schilder, the conditional covenant theologian of the 1950s, a brother in Christ—can you say that about those with whom you disagree theologically? Or will you cut off family members because they're not members of the—in your view—correct denomination, the PRC? Or if they join another denomination of true Christian churches—the URC, the OPC, the PCA—do you cut them off because they deviate from the PRC's doctrinal convictions? I hope not.

I hold to the PRC's doctrinal convictions. I reject the three points of common grace. I reject the well-meant gospel offer. I hold to the unconditional covenant of grace. But I will not refuse fellowship with a member of another denomination. I'll not call him antichristian because he disagrees with me on some points of theology, as important as they are. Nor am I saying that theological differences are unimportant or should be ignored. But shunning a family member who attends a different church or denomination is not the sword of which Jesus speaks. That's the sword of a fanatic who inflicts damage on the church of Jesus Christ and destroys relationships with reckless abandon. And don't try to justify that by looking at Jesus' sword of division in the text.

McGeown calls us in the RPC “fanatic[s] who inflict damage on the church.” McGeown does not call merely the ministers and the members of the RPC fanatics, but he also calls Jesus Christ a fanatic. *Fanatic* is not a scriptural label or term. But if McGeown means irrational, insane, extreme, intolerant, or zealous, the meaning is the same as what the religious leaders said of Jesus: “He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?” (John 10:20). The religious leaders would have said what McGeown said: “Jesus is a fanatic. He is insane. He is mad and extreme.” McGeown stands in bad company with those who would soon put Christ to death and nail him to the cross.

Let me use a few biblical terms for him. McGeown is a whitewashed sepulcher that garnishes the tombs of the prophets, but kills the prophets. He is an agent of the devil for the destruction of the PRC. McGeown displaces Christ in his preaching and writing. He is a dreamer of dreams. McGeown by his preaching is not only being actively destroyed by the Lord, but McGeown will be responsible for the souls that perish under his preaching. The Reformed Protestant ministers, officebearers, and

members have not destroyed in God's house, as McGeown claims, but he by his fables has destroyed. Woe unto him and to the PRC in that final day.

In his sermon McGeown proves nothing from the scriptures or the confessions. He crafts a fable out of his own mind and his own wisdom. He claims to hold to certain doctrines. He says that some points of theology are important—after minimizing doctrine in his entire sermon—but he never identifies which doctrines and says why they are important. Let me fill in the gaps as to why holding to right doctrine is important. Doctrine reveals about the worshiper who he worships. Does he rightly know God? Does he confess the truth? Because to hold to a lie means that you do not have faith, and if you do not have faith, then you will not be saved in the day of Jesus Christ. Let McGeown explain to his congregation why doctrine and doctrinal distinctives are important.

The Purpose of the Sword

McGeown garnishes the remainder of his sermon by speaking about the purpose of Christ's sword. He talks about election and reprobation, but he does not ground the separation that the sword brings in election and reprobation. He talks about separation between the church and the world and also about separation within the church. But that is all lip service at this point. He guts the whole text of its significance.

Christ's sword comes and divides family relationships. The gospel comes according to God's eternal counsel and saves one of a city and two of a family, and the rest are hardened. This division really happens still today between those who confess the Christ of the scriptures and the unbeliever who confesses a universal Christ, a grace common to everyone, and a God who is not sovereign to save sinners but who depends upon man.

Every time the gospel is preached, Christ comes to save his elect and to harden the reprobate. Some believe the gospel because they are appointed to belief of the truth. Many do not believe the gospel because they are appointed to destruction. There is the divine reason for belief and unbelief all through the church and until the end. God in the gospel carries out his eternal will of election and reprobation. He infallibly saves his people, and they confess the truth. And many others perish in the lie. The preaching of that gospel through human instruments is a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death.

Next time, the Lord willing, I intend to take up McGeown's second sermon, titled “Hating Our Family.”

—TDO

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

NO CONTINUING CITY: REFORMED AND REPROACHED

Antithetical from the Start

In the year 2021 the early congregations of the Reformed Protestant Churches were formed when members of the Protestant Reformed Churches signed various acts of separation, following the pattern of Hendrik de Cock and his fellow reformers in the Netherlands in 1834. For the most part the *Afscheiding* Act of Separation provided the structure and many of the phrases found in the various acts that were adopted and signed to formalize the signatories' separation from the Protestant Reformed Churches of America (PRC), the doctrinal nature of their separation, and marking their stance with the historical Reformed faith.

The relationship between the covenant and the antithesis has been evident from the beginning of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The signatories were mocked for signing these acts of separation, for what the acts declared, and for the grave weight with which the acts were treated. The mockery was no great surprise since in the formulation of their acts of separation, the officebearers had included some version of God's call to his church to go without the camp and bear the reproach of Christ (Heb. 13:13). The Spirit put the words of verse 14 into the hearts and mouths of many of God's people on those days: "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

Reformation is inherently antithetical. The acts that constituted Reformed Protestant churches were acts of *separation*. As clearly as baptism, and circumcision before it, is a sign of God's separating his own out of the world and the false church, those early actions of the signatories were God's work to separate out his own. God is not the great synthesizer; he is the one who unites the elect to himself in Spirit and truth, and he carries out his judgment against every unbeliever. Christ is a great warrior who leads his people to the great city and whose sword flashes in the heat of battle and cleaves a way through the foe.

Those who remained in the PRC despite God's command to come out wasted no time in scorning and mocking the acts of separation and those who signed them. No sooner had the acts been announced and signed than various Protestant Reformed congregations celebrated their so-called unity and the departure of the Reformed with praise evenings and parties. These were cruel and evil gatherings, confederacies of wickedness, carnal celebrations of their attempts to silence the Word. Their unity was decidedly negative, as remains evident from their persistent doctrinal divisions. Although they have no unity in truth or shared confession, they certainly have a unity against the Reformed Protestant Churches and her doctrine. Faithful to none of her many idol gods, the PRC is nevertheless united in provoking Jehovah by her faithless harlotry.

Under God's hardening the PRC immediately understood and behaved according to the antithetical separation that God had established. How could she do otherwise? God would expose her as false: "As for the false church, she...persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry" (Belgic Confession 29, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 64). The PRC identified her enemy and proceeded in enmity against that enemy, for she was completely opposed to the gospel. Even before the separation was formal, she identified the leaders of the reformation and did her utmost to destroy them and by hook or by crook to remove their voices from her midst, resembling so much her mother before her. The PRC was brutal, a characteristic she easily forgets in her own fabricated history of the controversy. And her judgment, if it can be called that, was godless.

What a revealing juxtaposition our mother manifests! As zealous and eager as she is now to make common cause with the broader church world, minimizing every distinctive that ought to separate her from it, she was even more

eager to do away with the gospel and those who would not be silent in its proclamation and defense.

Clear it is, then, that the enemy quickly accepts the reality of the antithesis and acts according to it. Why then have some in the Reformed Protestant Churches wrestled with the doctrine of the antithesis almost from the beginning of her existence? Why does that doctrine chafe the most, even to those who signed their names to the above-described acts of separation?

As a fellow pilgrim on the way, I urge all my brothers and sisters in Christ to truly consider the traitor that is within: Our old man of the flesh. The following are a number of ways in which my flesh has chafed at the antithesis, and I hope I may aid you by exposing a few techniques that our threefold enemy employs to make us despair of the covenant and despise the antithesis. And in the end I hope I may encourage you to carry on, with hope and joy in your heart, to run with patience the race God has set before you in the world.

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them [the antichristian spirits]: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

No Stomach for Scorning: Shimei

Why does God will that his church be beset with reproaches and cursing? Why is it our place to be afflicted and rejected in the world? What is God’s purpose in it?

It is true that the reproach of the wicked can come in many forms, some more acutely painful than others. The hatred of former friends and estranged family is one kind of pain—quite different from the more general hatred of the world.

Both forms of hatred are bitter, and both are real hatred. That being said, the Reformed Protestant Churches are hardly of any note to the broader world today, and the world has taken little, if any, notice of her existence and the word that Jehovah has placed in her pulpits. That is God’s apparent will in her immediate time in history, though her members know that the time fast approaches when they shall be delivered up for persecution at the world’s hands.

What of the false church, then? Oh no, we see no such indifference from her. She stands at the ready, verily panting with the desire to deliver us up for death. She prepares the most venomous evils on her lips, lying in wait to ambush and to ridicule, wielding an insider’s knowledge of all the most cunning traps to lay. She is well-versed in the sounds and phrases of the Reformed faith, and she knows how to make her barbs dig deep, to cut and to maim, and to target our most vulnerable members with her insidious lies. She seeks our despair, so that it may echo her own.

It is easy to develop tunnel vision when it comes to your loss or suffering. “No one else has suffered what God has required me to suffer,” you say. You imagine that your experience is an entirely novel one, giving place to a subtle arrogance that infiltrates your suffering and makes it even more miserable, for you block your ears from the witness of the church that has gone before you and from the fellow pilgrims at your side.

Let me remind you of David, the man after God’s own heart, when he bore the reproaches and cursings of Shimei of Benjamin, an Israelite.

5. When king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came.
6. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.
7. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial:
8. The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. (2 Sam. 16:5–8)

Over the last five years, we have endured much mocking and cursing in the spirit of Shimei. For a while he was very loud, his stones whizzing by our ears almost daily. His evil spirit is very much evident in the PRC and in her spiritual children who infiltrated our ranks: the exclusive psalmodists, worship law-wranglers, covenant-haters, school-scorners, and antithesis-deniers. Some post internet mockery of us and our God, others cast stones from a once-noble magazine, and still others harangue us even in the courts of law, bringing us before magistrates because they are infuriated by God’s own word against them.

At the time of Shimei’s slander, King David stood for righteousness and God’s promise to his chosen people, even while being rejected and despised in Israel and his silver-tongued traitor-son being anointed with men’s favor. That being said, David was a sinner as we are—his wickedness against Uriah and Bathsheba was not a long-distant memory when Shimei cursed David. Yet he stood firm and hopeful, not in his own working and doing but in his anointing—that is, in God’s promise to his people in Christ Jesus, especially as that promise was delivered to them in relation to David (2 Sam. 7).

The simple, wonderful, covenantal truth of this moment and all its circumstances was that God was with David-the-sinner, and God was not with Shimei-the-false-accuser. God's sovereignty was David's refuge in the face of the knowledge of his sin and of Shimei's cursing. God's word of judgment over David was his defense and vindication in the face of all those in Israel who with Shimei cursed David and wished him dead.

Note that Shimei's cursing was an enormous and wicked lie, designed to turn David's faith against him. Shimei's wicked claim against David was literally the opposite of the truth and a vicious slander: He claimed that God was judging David for David's alleged rebellion against Saul, that Absalom's rebellion was God's just judgment against David and proof of Shimei's false claim against him. This was a malicious lie, dipped in hellish poison and shot at David's humbled heart. It turned the very work of God into a sinful act of man.

The truth is that David had not rebelled against Saul but had steadfastly refused to lay a hand on the Lord's anointed, which was astounding in the face of Saul's murderous hatred for David. David had not destroyed Saul's house, but the Lord had visited judgment on Saul by Saul's own hand and the hands of other wicked men. And when a young Amalekite appeared before David, seeking to curry favor with the claim that he had taken Saul's life, David justly put the man to death. Grieving for Israel's sake, David penned the great lament regarding Saul and his house: "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!" Cut to his heart by the loss of his dearest friend Jonathan, David wept in his deep distress and bade all Israel to weep with him (2 Sam. 1).

And then Shimei dared to curse David. When pressed by Abishai to permit him to kill Shimei, David's faith concluded instead: "It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Sam. 16:12). David carried on his way, not choosing vengeance but trusting in God's will, knowing that Jehovah would bless him for all Shimei's cursing, that Jehovah's sovereign will to bless David was the ultimate purpose for Shimei's cursing. Though weary, David continued on his way out of the city, came to a place where he might rest, and waited on the Lord's deliverance. By faith David did not despair of

God's mercy nor cave before Shimei's rebellious and craven mockery.

Shimei is cursing now—do you hear him? Do you entertain the idea that perhaps God's reformation of his church was really an ugly thing, a gross thing, a perverse thing, a thing of man and no wonder of grace? Do Shimei's curses make you wilt and doubt God's wonderful word of promise to you in Christ? Do you forget the token of his word, which is preached faithfully to you week by week?

If you do wilt, know that it is the weakness of your flesh and that this wilting is not born of faith. Be encouraged that God, by the gift of faith that he has given to you, will strengthen you to regard the mockery and hatred of men as nothing. Be confident in God's sovereignty, that the stones that are thrown to maim and destroy must instead serve God's purpose to bless you. Be reminded of God's faithfulness, his promises, and his power to keep them.

Resting in him, go without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach and treasuring his intimate fellowship over the cruel kindnesses of the wicked. Remember the words of David in the psalm he composed as he fled from Absalom:

Be reminded of God's
faithfulness, his promises,
and his power to keep them.
Resting in him, go without the
camp, bearing Christ's reproach
and treasuring his intimate
fellowship over the cruel
kindnesses of the wicked.

1. LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

2. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.

3. But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.
4. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.
5. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.
6. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.
7. Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.
8. Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah. (Ps. 3)

No Earthly Kingdom: Pilgrims

13. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and

were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.
15. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.
16. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:13–16)

Who does not often call to mind the comforting truth that we are pilgrims and strangers in the world? Indeed, it seems that every day we are reminded of that fact by some new and outrageous development in the world. Moreover, as the church is forged by God in times of reformation, this truth takes on new depths of understanding and comfort. God is pleased through reformation to make the place of his people in the earth exceedingly narrow. And what is more, he makes them happy in it and for it.

Make no mistake—the flesh craves an earthly kingdom. Sometimes this particular strain of unbelief manifests by demanding that earthly circumstances verify spiritual realities. We have heard that, have we not? If we have not heard it from the mouth of some other person, the thought has frittered its way across our minds.

“If only we were bigger, more numerous, and overwhelmingly successful in persuading others—that would be proof of the righteousness of our cause.”

“If only we were bigger, it would be easier to maintain our witness against the lie.”

“If only we had a demonstration of our prosperity—a large, luxurious school or a breathtakingly beautiful church building—then we would have something for people to hold onto, something for people to believe in.”

It is hard to write these phrases down, so contrary to God’s word as they are. But I do not doubt that we and members of God’s true church in the past have uttered or thought such words in weakness. I do not doubt it because scripture repeatedly addresses the temptation, pierces through its lie, and equips us with hope. I do not doubt it because many are the writings of our Reformed fathers on the topic; sometimes it seems that there was no nearer and dearer topic to their souls than God’s preservation of his pilgrim people.

I have no better way of encouraging you than to quote from Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who knew the pilgrim’s way most intimately and wrote of it in 1924, at the dawn

of God’s reforming work to free him and our fathers from the Christian Reformed Church:

The reason for this sojourner-attitude and pilgrim-spirit is that they are citizens of another country, the heavenly. For they are born from above, they have been begotten again unto a lively hope thru the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Of the life of the Risen Lord they partake. That new life is not of this world. Neither [is] it a resuscitation of a life in days of yore, in Paradise Lost. But it is the life of a New City, of the heavenly Jerusalem, of the eternal Kingdom, still to be revealed in the full splendor of its beauty. It is a life, not from below but from above, not earthy but heavenly. It is not mournfully glancing back upon a lost estate, but hopefully looking forward to an eternal inheritance. It is decidedly other-worldly. Not by any external method of naturalization but by the inner process of spiritual renewal, they became citizens of another country. And thus they became strangers and sojourners on the earth, pilgrims with their faces set toward the City that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Of these strangers on the earth the author of Ps. 105 affirms that in their earthly pilgrimage they always were well protected and safely guarded. For God “suffered no man to do them wrong.” And as it was in days of hoary antiquity and of patriarchal fame thus it is with these pilgrims throughout the epochs of history and thus it will be till the last one of them shall have appeared in Zion before God.

Sojourners they are, travelling safely!

How wonderful is this safety of God’s children in the world.¹

The craving of our flesh for an earthly kingdom is at least a twofold unbelief: It denies that we are safe in our pilgrimage, and—in preferring the earthly over the heavenly and our present earthly lives over our destination—it denies the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Do you feel safe? You have never been safer. You are not safe because you have done enough. You are not safe in the way of your obedience. You are not safe because you are a repentant and good person. But you are safe in Christ Jesus, the risen and ascended Lord, who is our flesh in heaven and our mediator and covenantal head. Keep your eyes forward, then, and look up. These are the last days, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Dear pilgrim, Christ suffers no man to do you harm (Ps. 105:14–15).

¹ Herman Hoeksema, “Sojourning Safely,” *Standard Bearer* vol. 1, no. 2 (November 1924): 1.

No Family but Christ

Finally, we come to perhaps the most stubborn chafing of them all. The antithesis in the family is, in a way, a combination of the implications of the first two ways that our flesh chafes against the antithesis but with a rather pointed and narrow application.

Of course, it is true that the family is pictured after God's intimate fellowship and communion within himself, and it is also true that "the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). It is true that God loves the marriages of his people in his name, gives fruit to those marriages in the bearing of children, and loves to call many of his own unto himself in the line of continued generations through the covenant home and its place in the church under the preaching of the gospel.

But I have heard from some that they are mystified by the reality of the antithesis in their earthly, flesh-and-blood family. At times it has mystified me as well. I was raised in a home with nine siblings—four of us children remain in the truth, by God's grace alone. There is for many, perhaps rooted in some generational sentimentalism, the expectation that everyone in their families will see and know and love the truth as they do, that enemies of the gospel and antichrists may come from some families in the church but never from their families.

Those expectations, however, are not rooted in scripture but in the foolishness of our flesh. For in his word God repeatedly draws our attention to exactly this context—the family—as the place where both the covenant and the antithesis are clearly manifested.

The examples are as plain and numerous in scripture as the leaves on the ground in autumn: Did not faithful Abel's sacrifice testify against his brother Cain's wicked sacrifice, and did not Cain slay Abel for that testimony (Gen. 4)? Did not Noah pronounce a curse on his grandson Canaan for his wickedness (Gen. 9)? Did not Jacob strive against Esau in the womb and all his life, and did not Esau seek to kill Jacob, driving him into decades of contention with his wretched and unbelieving uncle Laban (Gen. 27)? Did not Joseph's brothers strive against him in jealousy and envy, plotting to kill and later to sell him into slavery (Gen. 37)? Did not Athaliah seek to end David's line by murdering her grandchildren (2 Kings 11)? Did not our Lord's flesh-and-blood family oppose him in unbelief, despite their knowledge of his wonders (John 7:5)?

Keep your eyes forward, then, and look up. These are the last days, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Dear pilgrim, Christ suffers no man to do you harm.

Oh yes, the family is a wonderful context in which to see the covenant. And that is precisely why we see there, too, the keenest and most treacherous betrayals, the most distressing confrontations, and the most tempting of sibilant whispers of the serpent to set down the heavy cross and to take up the heady wine of indifference and blood loyalty.

"But what about my home life?" one asks. Do not forget, dear brother, our savior had no home: "Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).

"But what about my family?" Do not forget, dear sister, our savior founded his family in election:

48. He answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

49. And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. (Matt. 12:48–50)

Indeed, Christ addressed the matter of the family frequently in his earthly ministry, which is striking given that such divisions of family likely would have been very rare in the context of the theocratic nationalism of Israel. Such divisions would not be rare for his people in the years to come, however, and they frequently would be one of the first tests of his people's faith. Especially when it came to those seeking discipleship under him (which is really about whether one is truly united to Christ by faith), Jesus did not hesitate to bring the gospel-light to shine on family ties, and he did so bluntly, with very little care for persuasion:

21. Another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

22. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. (Matt. 8:21–22)

In Matthew 10 Christ further developed this doctrine:

34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

36. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.
37. 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. (Matt: 10:34–37)

Do not misunderstand—the antithesis is not a faucet that one can turn on and off. But rather, as we have heard in sermon after sermon, the antithesis is a reality that is revealed, a battle that is manifested between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, between believer and unbeliever, between Christ and Belial. Christ teaches us here in Matthew 10 that there is a mark of those who are in Christ, one that can be clearly seen in the context of the family: The believer is marked as one who will lose all things—all things—for Christ's sake. The unbeliever will not—*will* not—lose all things for Christ's sake.

Lest we think it is all loss and sorrow, and lest we think our God does not care for the suffering that we endure as members of Christ's party in the world, our savior's teaching on this antithetical reality does not end with its implications for our families. No, he has more to say. In Matthew 19:27–30, we have the inspired word to pilgrims and strangers such as we are, a word that is more than enough to lift our heads and cheer our hearts.

27. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28. And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
29. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.
30. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

Dear brethren and fellow footmen, in this new year that lies before you, set your eyes on that reality.

And, when you are stricken with your own weakness and troubled by the chafing of your own flesh, remember that lovely and hopeful word that Christ gives us only a verse earlier in the same chapter: “Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

Glory be to God alone; glory to the Lamb, who establishes, maintains, and keeps his covenant; who gathers, defends, and preserves his church; who alone is able to keep us from falling and presents us faultless before the presence of his glory. Yea, “to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever” (Jude 24–25).

“Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

—Craig Ferguson



The congregation of Cornerstone Reformed Protestant Church

A NEW MINISTER FOR THE REFORMED PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Sword and Shield is an independent religious paper published by the independent organization Reformed Believers Publishing. Our independence is that we are free from all ecclesiastical control. The magazine is free to criticize any ecclesiastical decision, and no church decision will bind us and our writing. Because we believe that the Reformed Protestant Churches at present have and promote the truth, we support those churches. Our little paper was the midwife that helped deliver the baby, and so we are interested in how the little girl grows and in the developments in her life.

There has been another exciting development in the life of the Reformed Protestant Churches that, because of our own enthusiasm, we eagerly report to the readers. The development has to do with our congregation in Canada, Cornerstone Reformed Protestant Church, which meets for worship in its church building in Teeswater, Ontario.

The members of Cornerstone came out of the Protestant Reformed Churches early in the history of the Reformed Protestant reformation. The congregation has its roots in the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church in that area of Ontario and later became Wingham Protestant Reformed Church. The congregation of Cornerstone has endured its own growing pains and struggles regarding the school and the antithesis. That congregation too has had faithless members leave but has been unwavering in its support of the truth.

The congregation has not had a minister since its organization but has soldiered on using the means of technology and the occasional pulpit supply of the other busy ministers of the Reformed Protestant Churches.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven has given to the congregation of Cornerstone the gift of a minister.

10. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.
11. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
12. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
13. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a

perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Eph. 4:10–13)

That gift of a minister is Earl David Kamps, now Rev. Earl Kamps. Earl's parents are Earl and Gloria Kamps, who were founding members of Second Reformed Protestant Church. Earl was in seminary training in the Reformed Protestant Churches since her formation. He did an internship at Second and a residency at Cornerstone before being examined by the Reformed Protestant Classis in September 2025. Reverend Kamps was installed into the ministry of the word and sacraments on November 23, 2025. He is young, but so was Timothy. And Paul said to Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth." Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit can use youth as well as the grey head. We commend him to the grace of God and pray that Reverend Kamps may have a long and fruitful ministry in the truth.

—NJL



The laying on of hands



Deacon Craig Ferguson, Rev. Earl Kamps, Elder Henry DeVries, Elder Travis Hanko

NOTICE OF UPCOMING EVANGELISM LECTURE

The evangelism committee of First Reformed Protestant Church invites you to a lecture to be held on January 22, 2026, titled “God’s Work of Reformation.” Scan the QR code below for a flyer regarding more details of the lecture.

In 2021 God began a work of reformation by forming his church anew. The reformation began at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on January 19, 2021, with the *Act of Separation*, by which two elders and three deacons separated from the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and called her members to come out of her and to flee from the coming destruction. Two days later members of the Protestant Reformed Churches gathered to sign the *Act*, and God formed his church anew. The *Act* set off an ecclesiastical firestorm. Protestant Reformed ministers gave numerous lectures, penned articles, and delivered sermons to assure her members that what was contained in the *Act* were not doctrinal differences but the ragings of troublemakers and schismatics. The Protestant Reformed Churches and her ministers declared “peace, peace” when there was no peace. The peace that the PRC enjoys now is not the peace of justification by faith alone, but it is the peace of dead men lying in a graveyard.

The *Act* is short and declarative in nature. It was not meant to be a full proof of all the false doctrine that then ravaged the denomination. The charge that came was that the *Act* did not prove itself in its statements. In response to that charge, work was begun on a document titled *Annotations on the Act of Separation* to demonstrate the assertions made in the *Act* and to prove, minister by minister, the PRC’s corruption of the gospel in her preaching and writing. This thirty-four-page document was never finished and published. This lecture intends to follow the spirit of the *Annotations* and prove how the PRC has corrupted the gospel far past what the

Annotations had considered up to that point. The lie in the Protestant Reformed Churches has far developed and advanced in tandem with the development of the truth in the Reformed Protestant Churches. The divide, which appeared to be small five years ago, has been shown to be an infinite gulf of disparity.

This lecture is for the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The object of this lecture is you and your children. Are you troubled by the state of the PRC? By her doctrine? By what is preached off the pulpits in the denomination? Do you shudder when you hear that certain activities of man are necessary for blessings of God? Are you troubled by the man-centered preaching that is all about what you must do and not about what Christ has done for you and in you?

The man-centered theology of the PRC is hopeless, soul-crushing, and comfortless. But God-first theology is comforting, liberating, and glorious. It is the preaching and teaching of God’s eternal, sovereign counsel, that he infallibly carries out, by his power and according to his will, the salvation of his elect and the damnation of the reprobate. God does not justify good, repentant, or obedient people. He justifies ungodly sinners. It is this doctrine that the Reformed Protestant Churches declares, and it is this doctrine alone that is “the happiness of man” (Belgic Confession 23). Being justified by faith alone without the activities of man, the sinner is at peace in his heart and life with the living God.

The Lord Jesus Christ stands outside the doors of the PRC and knocks. He calls to his people, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.”





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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear;
but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. — Romans 8:15*

A bba, Father!
The cry is an intense expression of love for and trust in God triune as our Father. *Abba* means *Father* in Aramaic. And Father is the translation of the Greek word meaning the same thing.

Christ cried that in the garden of Gethsemane in his unspeakable anguish and sorrow while looking into the cup of God's wrath that awaited him at the cross.

Christ has sent forth his Spirit into our hearts, and the Spirit cries "Abba, Father" in his will for our perfection and glory in heaven and in his hatred of our sins.

And we cry "Abba, Father" in the power of the Spirit. We cry it because of what Christ did and because he sends forth his Spirit into our hearts, crying.

It is a cry that arises out of the Spirit-worked assurance that we are sons of God. Where there is no assurance, there will be no cry "Abba, Father."

The apostle Paul says that we cry "Abba, Father" in our assurance of being sons because we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the Spirit of adoption.

When the apostle says that we have not received the spirit of bondage again, he means that the spirit of bondage is the spirit that all men have by nature; and since we are justified, we have not received that spirit again. God did not justify us in order to give us the spirit of bondage. The work of the spirit of bondage is fear in men's hearts. The spirit of bondage to fear is the spirit by which men will try to do something for God: to be better husbands or wives, to be better Christians, or to be better members of the church. They do this because they are afraid of God. They do not have the assurance that God is their Father and that they are his children, and so they are afraid of God. Out of that fear they try to do something for God in order to gain his approval. The spirit that moves them is the spirit of bondage: bondage under guilt, bondage under the law, and bondage to sin.

There will never be the cry "Abba, Father" that ascends to heaven out of such souls! Their cry can only ever be the cry "do not damn us!"

But we have received the Spirit of adoption!

The Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of Jesus Christ whom he received at his ascension and whom he sheds abroad in the hearts of his people. He is the Spirit of adoption because he assures us in our hearts that we are the sons of God. Jesus Christ sheds abroad God's love in our hearts! And Christ does this because he assures us of our justification: We as the ungodly are justified and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Where that gospel sounds forth, there the Spirit works assurance in the hearts of God's elect people.

And by the Spirit's power, we cry out "Abba, Father"—a cry that must be on this side of the grave, for it is a cry with tears of sorrow for our sins and confession of our wretchedness and a longing for the perfection of heaven promised to us through the righteousness of Jesus Christ freely given!

In heaven we will sing "Abba, Father" in the perfection of our salvation!

—NJL