

The background features a stylized, orange-toned illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. To its right, a shield is depicted with a circular border and several smaller circles inside, representing rivets. The sword and shield are rendered in a simplified, graphic style with white outlines and orange fills.

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

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JOSHUA'S EXALTATION

He shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by. — Zechariah 3:1–5

Will Jerusalem become beautiful? Will the city of God be so established, spread over the whole earth, and glorified with the glory of God that the enemies no longer can molest her?...

But, O God of the covenant, how will that be possible?...

Still the enemies rage as a storm round about her. Jerusalem still lies in ruins. The temple is not rebuilt. There is no sanctuary in which the priests can function. Israel is returned from captivity but only to bear the reproach of all.

And then, how shall it be possible for Jerusalem to stand?...

Will not Jerusalem be redeemed by righteousness alone? Truly Jerusalem's citizens are still full of unrighteousness, and thus they stand guilty and damnable before the face of the Lord. The blood of many bulls and goats has been shed, but it has availed nothing. O Lord, our righteousnesses are as filthy rags!

Yet there is still this promise: "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."

And that promise shall certainly be fulfilled, for the Lord is as faithful as he is strong.

His work begun in me, he will finish.

His is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

Yes, his alone.

Amen and amen.



Will Jerusalem become beautiful?

Will the cause of God's covenant have the victory in the world?

"I swear by myself, it shall be," saith God," says the angel of the covenant.

"So let it be, O Lord. Come quickly," says the high priest who stands at the head of God's people.

"It shall never be," says Satan, who also swears by himself.

Oh, the misery!

And here they stand, all three: the angel of the Lord; Joshua, the high priest; and Satan, the adversary and accuser of the brethren. It is very clearly a judgment day because Joshua does not stand before the face of the angel of the Lord as high priest to serve in the holy sanctuary, but he stands there to be judged. At Joshua's right hand and also before the face of the angel of the Lord, stands Satan in the place of the accusers.

The angel of the Lord is also called the Lord, Jehovah. But the angel is clearly distinguished from Jehovah. The angel is the Old Testament revelation of the God of the covenant and the revelation of the Anointed of Jehovah, the Christ of God. He is set over the whole house of God, and to him judgment is given. So the angel appears here as greater than Moses, as God's Anointed over the house...

God's house is the issue here!

That is because Joshua stands before the angel. Yes, truly Joshua stands before the angel, right in front of the angel's face. And Joshua stands there in reality always and not merely for a moment in this vision. For Joshua is the high priest who is set over the house of God, indeed, as the head of the whole priesthood and of all the people of God. Israel was a nation of priests, though in and through her own priests culminating in the high priest. Therefore Joshua stands before the face of the angel of the Lord. Because the angel is the high priest and not Joshua.

Joshua can be the high priest only until the Lord himself comes to his temple. Joshua can only declare him who comes, represent him, stand before his face, and in his name perform the things that pertain unto God.

So in that official capacity, Joshua stands in the vision.

This is how we must view Joshua. The issue in this judgment is not the person of Joshua—that is, what kind of man he is, whether he himself is righteous or guilty, and what will happen to him personally. No, Joshua stands in the vision as the high priest.

And look, he is wearing filthy garments!

These clothes too do not belong to Joshua himself as a man. They are his priestly garments. How does he dare to put on these priestly garments before the Lord? Does he not know that he cannot enter God's holy place with such clothes? These filthy garments are not symbolic of the sins of the man Joshua, but the filthy garments are symbolic of Joshua's high-priestly sins, his official uncleanness and guilt, and therefore of the sins of the whole nation of Israel. Oh, terrible situation! For "who, O Lord, with Thee abiding, in Thy house shall be Thy guest? Who, his feet to Zion turning, in Thy holy hill shall rest?"¹ Certainly not this high priest and the people whom he represents. The house of God, these vile people whom this high priest represents, certainly cannot stand.

So it thus appears.

And Satan so judges too.

Oh, as the adversary, Satan also stands before the face of the angel of Jehovah. Satan as the accuser walks up to the right hand of the high priest to oppose Joshua, to press charges, to point out Joshua's filthy garments, to damn him, and to demand that he be deposed from his office.

When Satan brings up those filthy garments, he appeals to God's righteousness. No, not because he loves God's righteousness and is zealous for the name of the Lord. The opposite is true: Satan hates God's righteousness. Satan is the adversary of the Most High and of his cause in the world. But Satan knows that God never can deny himself and that he will always accede to an appeal to his own righteousness, even when it is Satan who argues for that righteousness.

Thus Satan sets Joshua with his filthy garments in the light of God's perfect righteousness.

Throughout the whole Old Testament too, Satan always stands in the position of an accuser, as long as the clothing of the high priest is filthy.

And, O God, Satan is right!

Thus it cannot be. Thy holy name and perfect righteousness must judge that this priest cannot abide in God's house.

What then shall become of God's house, his temple, and the cause of his covenant?

Will Jerusalem become beautiful?

"Oh, let it be, O God," says the high priest. But he has on filthy garments, and all his sacrifices cannot wash away the stains.

"Never shall it be," says Satan, and he appeals to God's very own justice.

But wait! There is the promise.



There is tension in the courtroom.

Tension for Satan. Oh, yes. He argues his case with an appeal to God's justice and the high priest's filthy garments.

Tension for Joshua, who with his filthy garments knows no way of escape, and he speaks no word of self-defense before the face of the angel of the Lord.

Tension at the back of the courtroom too, where the brethren of the high priest wait for the verdict and wonder in themselves why their representative does not plead his and their case. There stand the demons too, hoping that their prince will win the case. There also are Michael and his angels, deeply concerned with the situation of the brethren...

Now, listen. The angel speaks. The angel of the Lord—not as God, though he is God, but as the anointed servant, who is appointed over God's house—pronounces the verdict in this trial.

The tension is suddenly elevated.

Just listen to him. "The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee."

To rebuke Satan, the angel appeals to Jehovah, the God of the covenant. The case of this high priest is God's own case. Jehovah will have to judge the high priest to be righteous. Jehovah will have to rebuke Satan, condemn him, reject his appeal to God's most holy justice, damn Satan, and drive him away with rebukes until he falls from heaven as lightning—falling, falling, falling into hell, outer darkness, his own rightful place, where he will be tormented forever.

Listen!

"Do you not know, Satan, that Jehovah has chosen Jerusalem? Are you so utterly mad—such a lunatic—in your satanic darkness and folly that you imagine that you

1 Hoeksema quoted from the Dutch psalm 15, stanza 1. I quote psalter 24, stanza 1, 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).

can change the eternally electing God? Do you not know and are you not even aware of history? Has it not occurred to you that this Joshua is a brand plucked out of the fire? Was he not with the remnant in Babylon? And has he not returned to Jerusalem? Has it not occurred to you, Satan, that many priests who returned could not find their registry among the priests, and thus they could not prove their right to the priesthood?² And has it not occurred to you that as a divine wonder of grace there is still a high priest remaining from the house of Aaron? And if that has impressed itself on you, then are you so full of folly as to suppose that I, Jehovah, will pluck a brand from the fire only to damn and depose him?”

Yes, yes, but then what of those filthy garments?

“Take away the filthy garments from him.”

“Put clean raiment on him.”

“No, still more, let it be a different kind of clothing—gorgeous apparel. And put a new, fair, and princely miter upon his head. Because I will not only justify him and take away from him his unrighteousness, but I will also exalt and glorify him at the head of chosen Zion and beautiful Jerusalem that God has elected. I will clothe him with power and dominion, for God’s Servant must be king and God’s Friend must reign.”

Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan!

Yes, but what then becomes of God’s justice? Can you so capriciously change Joshua’s filthy garments for clean and elegant clothes?

Silence, Satan!

The angel of the Lord has spoken!

He who has spoken is the Anointed of the Lord, the Servant of Jehovah par excellence, with whom God has centrally established his covenant, the elect one among all the elect, and the firstborn of every creature.

Soon the Anointed himself will come.

He will come in the form of a servant, clothed with the filthy garments of his people, of the elect Jerusalem, but beautiful himself and without sin. Then, Satan, you may gather all your henchmen and go to stand at his right hand before the face of the Lord, and in your hour—also his hour—bring him to the place of judgment. Then he too, as Joshua in the vision, will not open his mouth, but he shall willingly enter into death, descend into hell with those filthy garments, to the bitter end endure the wrath of God against those filthy garments, and bear them away.

And God will take away his filthy garments.

Justify him.

Clothe him with the beautiful garments of the resurrection.

Set on his head the fair and royal miter.

All in perfect harmony with his perfect justice.

And you, Satan, the accuser of the brethren, shall fall like lightning from heaven when you see the Anointed of the Lord ascending and being exalted to the right hand of the Father.

Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan.

The tension is gone.

Hallelujah!



God be praised, for of him, through him, and to him are all things.

Or does it not strike you that in this whole vision that the Lord through the angel of the covenant does everything alone—perfectly alone?

Or does it escape your attention that this high priest, this man Joshua, who stands at the head of God’s people, does absolutely nothing? He stands before the face of the angel of the Lord with his filthy garments and apparently does not know what to do about them. Satan—no wonder that this spirit of outer darkness is so good at finding the filthy specks on the garments of Joshua—resists him, points to his uncleanness and unrighteousness, and argues for his judgment and deposition as high priest. And Joshua says nothing. He does nothing. He does not remove his vile clothes. He does not exchange his raiment. He does not set the fair miter on his own head. He asks no questions. He does not plead his own case.

Everything is done for him!

The garments are taken off him; new clothes are put on him, and a fair miter is set on his head.

And then comes the word to him: “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” And later, another word: “If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house...”

Joshua is a high priest only by faith.

And therefore in obedience.

This means that God does everything for Joshua.

Because God has chosen Jerusalem—no, not Jerusalem that is in ruins but *his* Jerusalem. Not because Jerusalem in Canaan was more beautiful and better than Babylon but because God wills to make Jerusalem beautiful and glorious for the glory of his name.

There is the fountain.

And from the fountain all things flow to us.

By grace.

To God be the glory!

—Herman Hoeksema

² Hoeksema refers to the history recorded in Ezra 2:61–62.

Professor Brian Huizinga is a nasty theologian of works, and he is God's judgment upon the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). God raised up Huizinga because he was determined to give those churches over to a strong delusion that they might believe a lie and be damned, who received not the love of the truth. Huizinga will teach his wicked theology to a generation of Protestant Reformed ministerial candidates, ensuring that his wicked theology is taught from every Protestant Reformed pulpit.

Ashley Cleveland, in the *Running Footmen* rubric, analyzes Huizinga's wretched and miserable theology of rewards. His worthless and damning doctrine is rightly ridiculed by our writer, like Elijah ridiculed the ridiculous idol Baal on Mount Carmel. "Maybe he is sleeping! Maybe he is on a journey!" Cha-ching! Cash in those rewards now for a greater place in heaven! The more you do, the more you get! The better you are, the higher you sit! Huizinga's theology of rewards is as carnal as your credit card rewards, Starbucks rewards, or frequent flyer rewards! He is just another Tetzl: a slick salesman.

The fearful thing for Brian Huizinga is that he will leave all who receive his doctrine utterly naked before the judgment of God, and Huizinga will be to blame. He should heed the warning of David and kiss the Son while he is yet near and while there is still time! But I fear that Huizinga is very hardened in his false doctrine and that as God's judgment on him for his role in the demise of the gospel in the PRC. Huizinga's theology is simply the fruit of his doctrine that man has fellowship with God through Christ, by faith, and in the way of good works. Christ and man. Faith and works. Two rails on which your pump trolley to heaven rides!

The PRC is awash in this false doctrine of works. Like a narcissist who is full of himself, the Protestant Reformed ministers and people cannot stop talking about themselves and how much good they can do. Read the editorial on Daniel Kleyn's speech given at an office-bearers' conference hosted by Crete Protestant Reformed Church. His speech is the gospel of the law. It is what man must do. It is how ministers are to help the people out in all this doing by giving them large doses of admonishment to get them the grace they need to work harder!

And if the Protestant Reformed ministers are not promoting false doctrine themselves, then they are busy making sure that the walls of the antithesis that were so carefully built over many years are torn down to the ground so that the PRC can have comfortable and cozy

relations with the broader church world. I do not say broader *Reformed* church world because the PRC is long past that. You can read of this in Rev. Tyler Ophoff's continuation of his examination of Rev. Martyn McGeown's fables in *Understanding the Times*. The PRC's tearing down the walls of the antithesis is an example of what Asaph prophesied in Psalm 74:4–7:

4. Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs.
5. A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees.
6. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers.
7. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground.

The editor has translated another meditation by Rev. Herman Hoeksema as this issue's meditation. Hoeksema asks a pointed question in this meditation:

Or does it not strike you that in this whole vision that the Lord through the angel of the covenant does everything alone—perfectly alone?

Or does it escape your attention that this high priest, this man Joshua, who stands at the head of God's people, does absolutely nothing?

Hoeksema was questioning the readership of his day regarding the salvation of Joshua. Many in Hoeksema's day did miss it! They read the Bible, and they missed that everywhere scripture teaches that man does nothing for his salvation and that God does everything for the salvation of his people. They read the Bible, and all they could find was man, man, man, responsibility, responsibility, responsibility, and works, works, works.

It is the theology that man does nothing for his salvation that once was part of the PRC but is now again hated, despised, mocked, and ridiculed in that denomination. The members are offended by the gospel of Christ that man is nothing and does nothing for his salvation and that Christ is everything and does everything for the salvation of his people. They miss it today in the PRC too. They read the Bible, and all they can find too is man, man's works, man's repentance, man's faith, man, man, man (all by grace, of course).

So for an *Insights* contribution this month, we have a solemn call from the past issued yet again to the PRC. If there are any who have ears to hear, let them come out!

—NJL

THREE BLIND MICE (3): THE GOSPEL OF THE LAW

Introduction

I remind the reader that I am examining the speeches given by Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Rev. Richard Smit, and Rev. Daniel Kleyn at an officebearers' conference hosted by Crete Protestant Reformed Church last September.

In his speech Josh teaches that men are not justified in eternity and that they are not justified at the cross. They are not justified unless and until they repent and believe. Justification is a possibility on the contingency that men repent and believe.

In his speech Smit builds on Josh's wicked denial of the gospel by teaching that men are justified through faith and repentance. In his whole long and convoluted speech, he does not say "justification by faith alone"—not one time. He does not believe justification by faith alone. He is also representative of the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) generally.

In this editorial I take up Rev. Daniel Kleyn's speech.

The Gospel of the Law

Kleyn's speech is a complete hash. He chose for his subject the need for admonitions in the preaching. Yet the most important distinction that he should have made between preaching the admonitions of the gospel and preaching the admonitions of the law, he does not make.

This distinction is easily made. The admonitions of the gospel are the gospel. The gospel comes and declares Christ Jesus, who is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption and who says that he is the only way to the Father. Along with that comes the calling not to be afraid, to come to Christ, to believe, and to repent. All of these say to man, "Be nothing and do nothing." For instance, the command of the gospel to believe does not mean that man must do something. The command is exactly the opposite: that man do nothing! This is the meaning of Canons of Dordt 3–4.17:

The apostles and teachers...neglected not to keep them [the church] in the sacred precepts of the gospel in the exercise of the Word, sacraments,

and discipline...For grace is conferred by means of admonitions. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 170)

The PRC and her theologians are constantly and deceptively making this article teach that grace is conferred by the preaching of the law. But the article is about the gospel and its precepts, which are entirely different from the law and its precepts. Canons 3–4.5 has something to say about the preaching of the law and its precepts:

For though it [the law of the decalogue] discovers the greatness of sin, and more and more convinces man thereof, yet as it neither points out a remedy nor imparts strength to extricate him from misery, and thus, being weak through the flesh, leaves the transgressor under the curse, man cannot by this law obtain saving grace. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 167)

There is no grace in the law or in the preaching of the law. Only the gospel brings grace. The law brings condemnation. The gospel brings salvation, joy, peace, and assurance. The law brings damnation, misery, bondage, and terror. Always the law and the gospel must be properly distinguished.

If that distinction is not maintained, then the preaching of the gospel becomes the preaching of the law, and the preaching of the law becomes the preaching of the gospel. Faith becomes works, and works become faith. And this is precisely what we encounter in Kleyn's speech.

The theme of the conference is "Justification and Forgiveness." Daniel Kleyn uses the phrase "by faith alone" twice in his speech, and both times he denigrates the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In one instance he makes sure to remind his listeners that the doctrine of justification by faith alone does not negate the need for admonitions. In the other instance he makes 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.

Kleyn also takes a worthless swipe at the Reformed Protestant Churches, just like the other two speakers:

Now, there are some, as we know, who argue that [justification negates the need for admonitions]. Those that argue that it does will usually say something like this: “Because we are eternally justified and because we are justified at the cross, we are forgiven before we repent. And therefore, the minister of the word ought not to admonish believers with the admonitions of scripture, nor with the call to believe, nor with the call to repent.”¹

Where in the world today is it taught that the elect are eternally justified if not in the Reformed Protestant Churches? Kleyn has his eyes on the Reformed Protestant Churches. Now, if he can prove that someone in these churches has said that the minister ought not to admonish believers, then I welcome him to it. But his swipe at the Reformed Protestant Churches is just a slander and another one of the straw men that these parade-ground polemicists like to set up to knock down, so that they do not have to contend with the actual arguments of their opponents. So, he too is a coward and a dishonest theological opponent.

There are a couple of hilarious sections in the speech. In one of these Kleyn explains his reason for choosing the topic of admonitions for his speech:

I believe that we have been inclined in recent years to shy away from admonitions, especially to shy away from preaching them.

One wonders what has been going on in the PRC that possibly could have brought about such a sad state of affairs? Reverend Kleyn informs us:

I think we will also admit that it’s been a struggle to preach admonitions in recent years because of the controversy and schism and because of the criticism against ministers and because of the knowledge that there are sometimes listeners who listen simply to find fault.

Now, that is rich! Poor Protestant Reformed ministers! They had to put up with those big meanies and schismatics who are now in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Besides, the tender souls of these ministers have to deal with critical listeners.

I wonder how Protestant Reformed ministers would have fared in Berea?

But the confession that the ministers have shied away from preaching admonitions is laughable on the face of it. Randomly pick a Protestant Reformed sermon, and you will find that from beginning to end the sermon is stuffed full of admonitions. And if the text on which a minister is preaching is not an admonition, then he will turn the text into an admonition.

We who left the PRC and formed the Reformed Protestant Churches did not leave because the ministers were preaching admonitions. But we left because the PRC has completely corrupted the gospel—as the three speeches make perfectly clear—and because all the admonitions preached by the ministers were serving the wicked work of bringing us again under the yoke of bondage. And we stood fast in the liberty wherewith Christ made us free.

Christ cut a hole in the PRC’s net, and so escaped are we. When I read the three speeches, I cannot help but sing a little hallelujah to God for that deliverance. The Protestant Reformed house has become a house of death, wrath, sin, and guilt because it is a house of the law and not of the gospel.

But the question is this: In a conference on justification by faith alone, what is Kleyn all about with this speech on admonitions? It could be just a part of

the Protestant Reformed unbelief in the gospel. Paying lip service to the doctrine of justification, the ministers want to make sure that the people understand that they cannot be careless and profane.

But I suspect in light of the other two speeches, which make clear that there is no forgiveness without prior and prerequisite repentance, that Kleyn’s job is to reinforce that idea and then to instruct the officebearers on how admonitions are to be used to bring about repentance and with it to bring about and bring into reality God’s forgiveness. For it must be remembered that according to Josh Engelsma and Richard Smit, there is no forgiveness in eternity, and there is no forgiveness at the cross. There is forgiveness only through faith and through repentance.

Since the three speakers do not believe in the power of God to salvation—the doctrine of justification by faith alone—they must have another power of God to salvation, and that is the power of admonitions. So Kleyn’s

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1 Daniel Kleyn, “The Necessity of Admonitions and the Work of the Officebearers,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNgn3gKibXs&t=3151s>. All quotations of Reverend Kleyn are from this speech.

speech adds this thought to the other two speeches: Justification is also for working and obeying sinners, not only for repenting and believing sinners. The Protestant Reformed gospel is not God's justification of the ungodly, but her gospel is forgiveness for one day for repenting, believing, and working sinners. My, my, what good people the Protestant Reformed people must be in order to have that gospel of forgiveness preached to them. And tomorrow their repenting, working, and believing to be justified starts over, and the next day, and the next day, until they are dying and wondering if they have repented enough, believed enough, and worked enough. Then they will come to Jesus, and he will say to them, "Depart from me, you wicked evildoers. I never knew you."

Kleyn titled his speech the "Necessity of Admonitions in the Preaching." He should have titled his speech "I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel of the Law, for It Is the Power of God to Salvation to Everyone Who Repents, to the Jew First and Also to the Greek" (Kleyn [Romans] 1:16).

Kleyn's focus on the law brings up an important lacuna in the presentations of the three speakers on justification. The crux of the whole doctrine of justification is the issue of justification and the law and of the justified Christian and his deliverance and freedom from the law. In Romans 3 the apostle Paul relates the doctrine of justification by faith alone to the law. After saying in verse 28 that we are "justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law," the apostle says in verse 31 that his doctrine of justification by faith alone does not make the law void but establishes the law. He insists that his doctrine of the justification of the sinner by faith alone means that God is both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (v. 26).

By that measure any doctrine of justification—such as the doctrine of Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Rev. Richard Smit, and Rev. Daniel Kleyn—that is not the doctrine of justification by faith alone makes the law void. For all their professed interest in the law, by their doctrine they make the law void, overturn it, and militate against it and the place that God gave to the law. Only the doctrine of justification by faith alone establishes the law. But nowhere in their speeches does any one of them explicitly address the matter of justification by faith alone and the law.

Nevertheless I believe that Kleyn's speech does show that he has a doctrine of the law as it relates to justification. However, his doctrine does not establish the law but does violence to it. He does not give his doctrine of justification in the speech, but by virtue of the fact that he spoke last and did not publicly rebuke the wicked doctrine of his colleagues, he shows that he consents to

their wicked doctrine of justification, and I impute their doctrine to Kleyn. For him too there is no justification in eternity, and there is no forgiveness at the cross, but justification is through faith and through repentance. Besides, by the very fact that Kleyn remains a minister in good standing in that hold of every foul spirit and cage of every unclean bird, I know his doctrine. His speech comes right out of that doctrine, for he could not have said the things that he said if he believed in justification by faith alone.

Let us leave aside for a moment Kleyn's mashup of the admonitions and precepts of the gospel and the admonitions and precepts of the law. Let us for a moment focus just on the admonition in the preaching to obey the law and the central gospel truth of justification by faith alone.

The admonition of the law is the preaching of the law. It is the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" of the law. There is no difference in this point between him and us when he says,

Strict preaching [of the law] means making clear exactly what God requires of us, that God means what he says in every admonition, in every rebuke, in every command, in every exhortation that he gives and that, in summary, God requires perfection. What does God say? Love me. But love me with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. With all of that, nothing less.

In this connection I note that Reverend Kleyn has a number of true things to say in his speech. The problem with the Protestant Reformed ministers is not that they cannot say some true things, but they press them into the service of the lie. But here I agree with him. The law preached is not do what is in your power, try your hardest, or work with your best efforts. The law preached is not that God accepts imperfect obedience. But the law demands absolute inner and external perfection.

The only quibble I have is that Kleyn does not make clear that the summary of the law is primarily a requirement that the nature of man be perfect. The law certainly addresses man's deeds, but the law demands that his deeds proceed from a perfect nature. The PRC no longer believes in the total depravity of the nature of the regenerated sinner, and so the law's requirement that man's nature be perfect is not a minor quibble with Kleyn. The regenerated sinner cannot fulfill the law because of the very fact that his nature too is yet carnal and sold under sin (Rom. 7:14). The regenerated sinner by virtue of this fact is guilty before the law even before he performs one deed. Let us grant for a moment the folly that a regenerated man can obey with a perfect deed. His deed is polluted by his sinful nature.

Kleyn also admits that if a minister preaches admonitions as he describes above regarding the strict preaching of the law, “then he has not preached the gospel.” An admonition is not the gospel, and the gospel is not an admonition.

But as Kleyn tries to explain how and why the minister is to preach admonitions, the wheels start to fall off.

I want to remind the reader that wherever Kleyn says “admonition,” I insert “law.” Kleyn himself says that an admonition is the preaching of the law and not the preaching of the gospel.

Now to explain the great and glorious power of the law unto salvation, Kleyn says,

Admonitions [the law] are to be preached. They are given in the word of God, and the minister is directed to preach them by God himself in order that through them as a means of grace that God uses and applies by his Spirit, the people of God are directed to Christ in whom there is pardon for and deliverance from their disobedience and to Jesus Christ, who empowers his people by his Spirit out of gratitude to keep the admonitions that God sets before them, who gives them the desire and ability.

He continues,

And so the faithful minister of the word preaches admonitions [the law] with a view to bringing believers to be thankful and to obey the admonition out of gratitude as their motivation...

Preaching admonitions [the law] involves setting admonitions [the law] forth as being God’s way of salvation for his people...The experience and enjoyment of that salvation is in the way of a holy walk...not a perfect walk but a walk of holiness...The admonitions [the law] of scripture...are used by the Spirit to lead God’s people in that way, so that in that way they experience and enjoy and rejoice in the salvation they have in Christ.

It must be made clear that in this next quote when Kleyn says “the word,” he has in view admonitions [the law].

All who hear, whether elect or reprobate, whether believer or unbeliever, must be confronted with the admonitions [the law] of scripture and the demands of the word of God [the law]...

If those who are unbelievers being addressed at that time are elect unbelievers, he will use the word [admonition/law] and cause the word [admonition/law] to be effective through the

Spirit to turn them from that and to bring them to faith in Christ...

Admonitions [the law] applied by the Spirit serve to stir up God’s people to thankful living.

Then Kleyn asks, “Why do admonitions [the law] benefit God’s people in these ways?” And he answers,

[The] voice of Christ is the voice that is made effective by his Spirit, who applies what he says [in the admonition—the law] to cause the hearers who are his to do it.

Kleyn sprinkles his statements with a good salting of grace and the Holy Spirit and adds in a pinch of Christ to enhance the flavor of his law-pottage. But his point is the benefits that admonitions as admonitions have. His point is the many things that the law as law does.

The law is a means of grace!

The law directs the people to Christ.

The law brings about thankfulness.

The law stirs up to thankful living.

The law brings obedience.

The law leads people in the way of holiness.

The law leads people in the way of holiness in order to give them the joyful experience of their salvation.

The law turns, brings repentance, and leads unbelievers to faith in Christ.

The law sets forth the way of salvation.

If the law does all these things, what need is there for the gospel? There is no need for the gospel.

Then Kleyn cautions ministers: “It is crucial that when admonitions are preached, they are not Christless.”

However, this warning is worthless. Christ included with the admonitions is only to cover men’s disobedience, to empower men to keep the admonitions, and to make their keeping of the admonitions the way of their salvation and their joyful experience of salvation. This is another form of the old saw in the PRC: “And we do this all by grace, beloved.” The minister has preached the law for fifty minutes, and at the end of the sermon, he brings Christ in as the possibility! And that is what Kleyn does here too.

He says that the law demands perfection, but then he contradicts that when he speaks about the experience and enjoyment of salvation in the way of a holy walk (in the law). He says that that holy walk is “not a perfect walk.” Thus he means that one can have the experience and the enjoyment of salvation in the way of an imperfectly holy walk, but he gives no ground for that. If the law indeed demands perfection in nature and deeds and the sinner is unable to live a perfectly holy life, then for the sinner there is no joy in the law but only condemnation, which brings bondage and wrath. Yet for Kleyn all these good

things received by the grace of the law come to those who imperfectly obey the law. Kleyn says that the law does all this wonderful and glorious work by grace, by the Spirit, and by Christ. But therein Kleyn makes Christ serve Moses (the law) and not Moses serve Christ.

This is really abominable theology that parades itself as Reformed.

It is evident that the Protestant Reformed ministers do not know what the law is and that especially they do not know what the law does in connection with justification. There is no excuse for this in light of the Canons of Dordt, the other Reformed creeds, and the clear teaching of scripture.

The apostle says, “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). This means that there is no peace for Christians in the law, and there is no way of salvation in the law because the law brings the knowledge of sin. With the knowledge of sin come condemnation, wrath, and the power of sin and death to rule the sinner. Only in freedom from the law does sin not have dominion over us, and thus we are transferred to another power, namely, the power of the Spirit. Exactly because we are not under the law but under grace is there any holiness, any desire for good, and any longing after God in us at all. That does not come from the law but from the Spirit, who is ministered to us by Christ. Christ ministers the Spirit to us because we are righteous by faith alone, not by repentance and works. Under the law man hates God. Under grace, not under the law, man loves God. The love of God does not come about by the law but by grace. The love of God does not come about by admonitions but by the righteousness of Christ.

So the apostle says, “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). And later he says even more strongly, “Now being delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6). We were held in bondage to the law, and under that bondage we were dead because the law brings condemnation. Wherever the law reigns, there is condemnation; wherever there is condemnation, there is bondage, wrath, and death. The justified Christian is delivered—saved—from the law! This means that if you bring the law back in as the way of

salvation and as the power to work thankfulness, to turn one to faith in Christ, and all the other grand things that Kleyn attributes to the grace of the law, then you have overthrown a man’s salvation in Christ, and that man cannot serve except in the dead and damning service of the oldness of the letter.

The question becomes, what does the law do when it is preached? The question is not, what does the law do sometimes when it is preached or when it is preached to unregenerated people? But what does the law do when it is preached to Spirit-led, regenerated people? What does the law do every time it is preached? And that question is, what does the admonition (the law) do? What do the admonitions be a righteous father, be a faithful mother,

be an obedient child, and be a faithful employer do? These too are the law, for the law is always “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” The law is good, righteous, and holy. The law is spiritual. The law is the revelation of the righteousness of God, and the law’s mission is that this righteousness of God prevails. The law speaks of life too. Wherever the righteousness of God is, there is life also. The law aims at life and the righteousness of God.

But what the law brings about is condemnation and death. The law is a ministry of

condemnation and death. The law is not that according to its nature, but the law is that according to the design of God because the law comes to carnal people. The aim of the law is that the righteousness of God prevails, and the law does that by killing sinners. That is what regenerated Christians are yet. In their flesh they are carnal and sold under sin (Rom. 7:14). They are not carnal in the sense of ungodly, carnally-minded men, for Christians have the Spirit in them. But they are carnal in the sense that in their flesh they are yet rooted in the sinful, totally depraved condition of Adam. Thus when they would do good, then sin is present with them; the good that they would do, they do not; the evil that they would not do, they do. When the law comes to them, it brings the knowledge of sin, sin revives, and the commandment ordained to life they find to be to death. Sin deceives them when the law comes. By the commandment, sin slays them, sin under the law becomes exceedingly sinful, and transgressions abound.

So the apostle says,

It is evident that the Protestant Reformed ministers do not know what the law is and that especially they do not know what the law does in connection with justification. There is no excuse for this in light of the Canons of Dordt, the other Reformed creeds, and the clear teaching of scripture.

8. What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:
9. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3–4)

God will have the righteousness of the law fulfilled in us. When the apostle speaks of the righteousness of the law, the word “righteousness” means *justification*. Righteousness or justification contrasts with the *condemnation* of the law. There is a condemnation of the law that came on the whole human race in Adam. There is also a justification of the law. The justification of the law is that the law and all its demands are satisfied.

The fulfillment of this in us the apostle says is by God’s work of sending his Son, Jesus Christ, in the likeness of sinful flesh to deprive sin of its power by justifying us from all things from which we could not be justified by the law. This the law is impotent to do. The law speaks of the righteousness of God, but the law cannot bring about the righteousness of God. The law speaks of life, but the law cannot bring life. Life and righteousness God brought about in Jesus Christ. This is the life and the righteousness of God without the law that the gospel declares and that is received by faith alone, that is, by doing nothing!

And having brought about the righteousness of God, then God through Christ also brought about life. And this is what the apostle also has in view when he says that the justification of the law is “fulfilled in us.” Because in Christ God fulfilled the righteousness of God, in Christ God also gives life, repentance, joy, happiness, love for God, hope, and patience. These all are things that the law demands. God fulfills them in us—not by the law but by the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

And so we walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh—not by the admonitions of the law but on account of the righteousness of God imputed to us and through the power of the Spirit of life in Christ that we receive because there is no condemnation to us in Christ.

The Canons in heads 3–4 teaches exactly this about the law:

Article 5. In the same light are we to consider the law of the decalogue, delivered by God to His peculiar people, the Jews, by the hands of Moses. For though it discovers the greatness of sin, and more and more convinces man thereof, yet as it neither points out a remedy nor imparts strength to extricate him from misery, and thus, being weak through the flesh, leaves the transgressor under the curse, man cannot by this law obtain saving grace.

Article 6. What therefore neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 167)

Kleyn says that “admonitions [the law] are not preached simply to point out how depraved we are.”

But pointing out man’s depravity is precisely what the law does. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 44 says that God will have his law “strictly preached” in the churches, “[so] that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 134). This is the service of the law to the gospel. But really even in that service, the law depends on the gospel, for if a man is not in Christ, that man never can know truly his sins and misery. When the law comes to a man who is not in Christ, that man will speak about his ability to keep the law, how the law works many good things in the church, and how there is assurance and joy in the law. But when the law comes to a man in Christ, the law shows that man his misery. It is the work of the law to point out and to reveal man’s misery. By the law is the knowledge of sin. Without that, nothing else that is good follows from the preaching of the law.

Further, whatever response there is in the Christian to the preaching of the law is not the work of the law but of faith and of the Spirit by the gospel. In answer to the question, “Why will God then have his law [the ten commandments] so strictly preached?” answer 115 of the Heidelberg Catechism says further that we

thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 134)

The law cannot be heard in the church without the gospel. The law must be kept in its proper place in the church in order that Moses not displace Christ, that the law does not become the gospel, that works do not become faith, and that faith does not become works. When the Christian seeks remission in Christ, that is not the work of the law but the response of faith to the knowledge of sin that the law brings. The law does not become a power to salvation that makes the Christian seek Christ. Christ makes the Christian seek Christ. Christ might use the

law as a goad to destroy man's flesh, pride, and his pretensions to righteousness; to damn all his works as filthy rags, including his miserable repentance; but it is not the law but Christ who does that. To seek the Holy Spirit to conform us more and more to the image of Christ is not the work of the law but of Christ and the Spirit. The law does not do that. The law does not make us want to be holy Christians. The Spirit and Christ, who ministers the Spirit to us by faith and writes the law on our very hearts, do that. Christ, the Spirit, and the gospel are alone the power of God to salvation. The law serves them, and they do not serve the law.

The law (admonition) does not make anyone thankful, holy, or good. The law (admonition) does not make anyone want to be thankful. Only the righteousness of Christ freely given to the ungodly sinner by faith alone makes him thankful and that through the operation of the Spirit. The Spirit also writes God's law on our hearts and causes us to love that law. The law does not make us love the law. Under the law we hate the law. Justified by faith alone, having the Spirit of Christ administered to us, then we also say, "Conform us, O Lord, to the image of thy Son, Jesus Christ, that perfect person!"

Someone will say to me, "But Kleyn is talking about preaching the law to Christians, to regenerated, Spirit-filled believers! The Spirit makes them want to keep the law!"

In response I say that Kleyn is one with Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Rev. Richard Smit, and the rest of the PRC in teaching that man is justified by faith and by repentance. This faith and this repentance are what man must do for his justification. By teaching that, they place their entire denomination back under the law. Paul told the Galatians, who were overrun by these kinds of ministers, "I testify again to every man that is circumcised [for his justification]...ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:3-4). And we say that if you have to repent for your justification, if you have to believe for your justification, or if you have to utter one sigh for your justification that you have fallen from grace and are in bondage to the law. You are not under grace but under the law! And this is precisely what the PRC teaches and what Engelsma and Smit teach. Engelsma says that the gospel of forgiveness is for penitent sheep. Smit says that we are forgiven through repentance and through faith. Kleyn does not refute them. He agrees with them. His doctrine is a doctrine of being under law.

Reverend Kleyn thinks that when he is preaching the law, he is making a holy, good, thankful, and an obedient church. He thinks that if he sprinkles his law-preaching with enough grace, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ that his law-preaching will make his people obey the law. But the very opposite is happening. Because they are not under grace but under the law, the law is giving them the knowledge of sin, making sin exceedingly sinful, causing them to hate God and to come under condemnation and wrath, and binding them under the power of sin and death. That is what the law does to all who are under it. By the law is the knowledge of sin! The law has a power over those who are under it, and that power is to condemn sinners. The strength of that condemnation makes them servants of sin and of death. But the law does not have any positive power in sinners to bring about good things, holy things, and righteous things in them. This is true also of the regenerated. We might say that this is especially true of the regenerated.

But when I say that Kleyn—along with the rest of the Protestant Reformed ministers—wants to make holy, good, and righteous people, then I speak according to their own expressed purpose. The PRC wants to make her people holy, good, and righteous through repentance and faith under the law, speaking according to her own professed purpose.

But the reality of those in the grip of the false doctrine of works-righteousness and those who teach that and damn and mock the truth is much different. The apostle says that false teachers teach what they teach not to make people holy but to bring them into the power of the false teachers: "They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them" (Gal. 4:17). The false teachers are excluded from the kingdom and are not going to be saved, and they will exclude you, will have you not be saved either, and will have you hang on their words and give the false teachers a comfortable existence in this world.

Reverend Kleyn mocks the gospel and says that Christ does not obey for us.

As regards our sanctification, we cannot say, "Christ obeys God for me." It is true that he empowers us to obey God. He empowers us by his Spirit to obey God.

Kleyn also mocks his opponents, who attribute all to Christ, and sets up another straw man—the dishonest polemicist that he is. But Christ does not merely

The response to the doctrine of the PRC is that all repentance done in order to be justified and forgiven is nothing but wickedness, and all obedience performed in order to be pleasing to God by it is iniquity.

empower man to obey. He “works in man both to will and to do [of his good pleasure], and indeed all things in all” (Canons 3–4.14, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169). By his mockery Kleyn shows that he does not understand justification by faith alone and the relationship of justification to the law (admonitions) and that he does not understand sanctification either. Paul says about all his abundant labors, “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10). And in Galatians 2 Paul confessed about his whole Christian life,

19. I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.
20. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

You see, the PRC is ignorant of what faith is. Faith is the elect believer’s union with Christ. By that union the elect believer is made one with Christ. By that union the believer is in Christ and is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and Christ is in the believer. Through faith alone the believer is righteous before God and an heir of eternal life simply by virtue of his connection to Christ and his righteous corporation. By that same faith the believer lives in and out of the Son of God by his Spirit. The believer’s life is such the product and work of the Spirit of Christ that Paul simply attributes the whole thing to the Spirit:

17. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
18. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. (Gal. 5:17–18)

The response to the doctrine of the PRC is that all repentance done in order to be justified and forgiven is nothing but wickedness, and all obedience performed in order to be pleasing to God by it is iniquity. The PRC mentions the Spirit, but she has put her people under the law, so there cannot be the Spirit in the PRC. The apostle says that you cannot be led of the Spirit if you are under the law. The law to people who are under law is a ministry

of condemnation, so that they must be judged by that law for their imperfections, and they must be sold into slavery to sin and death.

In Christ by faith alone, the justified believer is delivered from the law because in Christ he is justified from all things from which he cannot be justified by the law. He was one with Christ in eternity, and thus he was always justified by God. This reality God made manifest when he raised Christ from the dead. And because this is true, the gospel comes and says, “Repent, believe, be reconciled to God, have peace with God through Jesus Christ.” And by faith as knowledge and confidence produced in the justified believer by the Holy Spirit through that gospel, he is made aware of and assured that those things spoken in the gospel are true for him, and he rests in his Lord and in his everlasting righteousness for time and for eternity.

Because the justified believer is righteous in Christ, he can be admonished because that admonishment (law) can no longer condemn him and hold him in bondage to condemnation and because in Christ the justified believer has the Spirit. When the law increases sin in the believer, makes sin exceedingly sinful, and makes him cry out, “O wretched man that I am,” then he is not turned to Christ by the law, but he is turned to Christ by Christ because the justified believer is one with Christ. Christ by his Spirit comforts the believer that he belongs to Christ, and Christ by his Spirit lives in the believer, and he walks in the Spirit by the power of the Spirit. The law can speak of the righteousness of God, but admonitions (the law) cannot conform anyone to the law. Only the gospel of justification by faith alone and the Spirit of Christ conform one to the law.

The three speeches at the officebearers’ conference were given by three blind mice.

If the blind lead the blind, then both will fall into the ditch.

So these blind leaders have proved the undoing of the once-grand Protestant Reformed Churches. Once she was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, but she was rich with gold and clothed with white raiment bought by Jesus Christ. Now she is rich and increased with goods and has need of nothing, and she sits clothed in purple and scarlet and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls of her own works—a gaudy whore with her golden cup full of the abominations of her false doctrine.

—NJL

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

MCGEOWN'S FABLES (2)

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

In this series of articles, I am examining Rev. Martyn McGeown's recent sermons on the antithesis. I think I have never read or listened to anything more absurd and Christless than Reverend McGeown's second sermon on the antithesis.¹ How does this pass as a good sermon in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC)? It is a reflection on the elders of Providence Protestant Reformed Church that they even shook McGeown's hand after this dumpster fire. It is a reflection on the congregation that the members eat this garbage for spiritual nourishment. The sermon is filled to the brim with applications and examples. Applications take up so much of the sermon that I cannot profitably mention most of them. And yet with all the applications that fill space in the sermon, somehow, mysteriously, none of them ever really come close to offending anyone. The word of Christ in Luke 14 was highly offensive to the multitude, and it is highly offensive to the flesh. Christ offended the sensibilities of his would-be followers.

Reverend McGeown's definitions are weak at best. He does not begin in God, continue in God, and finish in God. McGeown holds the gospel out to the congregation at the very end of the third point after spending most of the sermon telling them what man must do and what Christ did as an example. He continues to weave his tall tale and to conjure his myth, daring to put the name of God on his lips and contradicting the clear instruction of Christ in Luke 14. McGeown chose verses 25 and 26 as his text and "Hating Our Family" as his theme. Verses 25 and 26 read as follows:

25. There went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,
26. If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

What becomes immediately apparent is that McGeown splits the text in two and completely misses the last half. There is a very clear indication in the chapter that verses 25 and 26 belong with verses 27 through 33 as one thought of the Holy Ghost. In verse 27 Christ says, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." There is the gospel for the disciples of Christ only because there first is the cross of Jesus Christ as salvation for them. Jesus Christ begins verse 28 by saying "for." By that little conjunction Jesus Christ illustrates in the plainest of terms what he is talking about. The builder who intends to build a tower counts the cost to finish it. The king who anticipates going to war counts his soldiers to see whether he has enough men to conquer his enemies. There is a cost to being Christ's disciple, and the believer counts that cost.

28. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?
29. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,
30. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

¹ Martyn McGeown, "Hating Our Family," sermon preached in Providence Protestant Reformed Church on October 26, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/live/085widfU94?si=1usiy9Q1uVAto6hn>. All quotations from McGeown are from this sermon.

31. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?
32. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (Luke 14:28–32)

Then in verse 33 Christ gives the application of what he had just illustrated in the preceding verses: “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

The theme of the text is not simply about hating one’s family, but Christ is teaching there, in the plainest and simplest language, the cost of being his disciple. Jesus Christ takes away the excuse that a man did not know that being Christ’s disciple means that he must hate his ungodly, unbelieving family for Christ’s sake, and out of that hatred he forsakes them and refuses to have fellowship with them.

The Significant Cost of Discipleship

In the context in Luke 14, Jesus concludes his parable of the great wedding feast, which was occasioned by a follower of Jesus who had said, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom” (v. 15). Many of Christ’s followers had in mind a kingdom, but it was not the heavenly kingdom. It was an earthly kingdom of bread that they desired. They desired a kingdom on earth and the restoration of the Jewish nation to power, honor, glory, and peace. They wanted ease, food, luxury, power, and earthly benefits. They hoped to share in such carnal benefits of Jesus’ kingdom.

There went with Jesus great multitudes. Large numbers of would-be disciples were following after him. Throngs and hordes of men and women were coming to him, traveling with him, and associating with him. There were so many followers that at times Jesus had to teach them from a boat while they remained on the shore. At one point he fed five thousand. At another time he fed four thousand. Jesus was immensely popular at the height of his ministry, and his following grew larger and larger. This huge multitude of followers confessed him as the savior of Israel, but they had in mind not the savior they needed but a savior they desired.

And in verse 25 Jesus stops and turns to the great company of followers that was traveling with him. He

addresses them in the plainest language about what it means to be a disciple. There could be no misunderstanding about what he was teaching. There is a significant cost to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Do you think that is what that multitude wanted to hear? Is Christ the savior whom they wanted—the savior who demands that his disciples lose their lives for his sake? Not at all. They were offended at him and his teaching. Later we read that they would walk no more with him. Here he wants the whole multitude of those who followed after him to know that there is a significant cost. The Lord Jesus Christ is talking about the reality of discipleship.

I note that the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) are often labeled and slandered as a cult. And those who put that slanderous charge on their lips shuffle out some Google-search definition of *cult* that they spend all of ten seconds reading and apply that to the RPC. Look at what Christ requires of his disciples: “If you are my disciple,

you must hate your own family, take up your cross, and forsake all.” The difference between a cult and the true worship of God is Jesus Christ. If you have Christ, then you worship and serve God. If you do not have Christ, then all you have is a cult. We worship Jesus Christ, he who is very God and very man. We are his disciples.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who is deeply devoted to Christ. Christ instructs the multitude negatively about discipleship by using the word “hate.” Hatred is rooted in the heart. The heart is the spiritual, ethical center of man as he stands related to God, his creator. Out of the heart flow all the issues of life. As the heart is, so is the man. Discipleship begins in the heart. Positively implied then is that a disciple is one who loves the triune God and Jesus Christ out of the regenerated heart. God takes one who hates him by nature and makes that one a lover of God and of Jesus Christ. That disciple, before he hates anyone, is tenderly affected toward Christ. That disciple loves Christ.

For the source of that love of Christ, you have to go right into the being of God. God is love. He loves himself. He is tenderly affected toward himself in his own triune being. In love as his motivation, God chose a people for himself in election. He made a gracious choice of his people in love in Christ before the foundation of the world. “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:13). God in eternity chose his people in love and forgave all their sins. And God commended his love toward them, in that, while they were yet sinners, Christ

The heart is the spiritual, ethical center of man as he stands related to God, his creator. Out of the heart flow all the issues of life. As the heart is, so is the man.

died for them. And the Spirit of the risen Lord comes and sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts. Christ speaks to his elect people and justifies ungodly sinners. God's love is manifested week by week in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The voice of Christ kindles in his people true faith according to election. His disciples love him because he is the Christ, the Messiah, the revelation of God's righteousness, truth, grace, and mercy. God determined and fashions the true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Why did those fishermen—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—forsake all they had and follow Christ? Why did they associate with Jesus and follow him? Christ laid hold on their hearts and worked faith in them. Out of that faith they loved him and followed him. They believed in him. They believed that he was their complete and perfect savior. They believed that he spoke the words of eternal life. They believed that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God, who took their sins upon his almighty shoulders. He was the Christ who merited righteousness and in whom they had fellowship with the covenant God. In his grace and love for elect sinners, God makes them disciples of Christ, and the fruit is that those disciples love Christ.

The high cost of that discipleship is paid in the relationships of this earthly life. "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple... Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

The cost of discipleship is hatred.

What is the meaning of *hatred*?

Reverend McGeown never really defines *hatred*. He says what hatred is not. He tells his congregation that hatred is not a malicious or sinful hatred whereby we justify murder and violence toward others. It is a holy hatred. That is true. He says that we do good to all men and seek their salvation. That is true too. The closest he comes to defining hatred is this:

The hatred of verse 26 demands two things: first, forsaking our relatives and second, cutting off fellowship with them... To forsake is the decisive, deliberate rejection of someone or something. To separate oneself from them, to take leave of them, to put them away—that is to forsake. And so hatred of father and mother and husband and wife and children and brothers and sisters means that we reject them.

To understand the meaning of *hatred*, we must understand hatred in God. God is his attributes; he is the implication of all his perfections. God is love; God is not

hatred. And so as an aspect of his love, he hates. God hated Esau. God hated Esau because God loves himself in his righteousness, holiness, beauty, and loveliness. He loves himself as the sole and highest good. God hated Esau and damned him to hell before he had done any good or evil.

It is unpopular to say that the believer hates because it is unpopular to say that God hates. The reason it is unpopular is because the church world today is enamored with a God who loves everyone and has a desire to save everyone. The church world is offended at this word of Jesus Christ. If men call themselves Christians, they conveniently disregard Christ's words. But they are so plain and clear that they cannot be gainsaid. If you are Jesus' disciple, you hate.

Hatred is a loathing and a despising of father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, and even one's own life. We hate people, real people, whom we know in this life. That is the hatred about which Christ is talking. And forsaking them is the result that shows itself in the life of the child of God. The believer hates his ungodly family, and the result is that he forsakes them. He will not fellowship with them. He will not be part of their lives. He will not get together with them during the holidays. He will not have fellowship with the works of darkness. He forsakes and rejects his ungodly family.

Reverend McGeown, however, effectively rejects his own definitions of hatred and forsaking by what he says next.

We forsake them in this sense: We reject their ideas, their opinions, and their beliefs when they are incompatible with following after Christ. Thus this rejection, this forsaking, is spiritual. We don't throw them away. We don't remove them permanently from our lives. We don't live in separation from them. We don't refuse to speak with them or to have anything to do with them. But we refuse to permit them such influence in our life that they would turn us away from our devotion to Christ. And insofar as our family is a hindrance to our following Jesus Christ, we forsake them. That is the idea of *hatred* here.

I am not sure, and McGeown does not explain, what "spiritual" forsaking is. It is left so vague that the members of the congregation can just be indifferent toward everything else in the sermon. They might as well have tried to catch up on their sleep during the rest of the sermon. It sounds like McGeown is saying that inwardly we might forsake our unbelieving family members, but outwardly nothing really has to change. The inward reality might be

that we hate them, but in actuality we can do everything we did before with them. I am not sure what kind of disciple that would be. Perhaps Reverend McGeown can explain how the disciples in Jesus' day would have "spiritually" followed Christ but not actually followed him. Or how they "spiritually" forsook their families but did not really forsake them.

God has given to man various relationships and connections to other men in the world. Believers have these intimate connections in Jesus Christ. We love our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, and children in Jesus Christ. We love our spouses. We love our children. We love our parents and siblings. We love them with God's own love. But as Christ says in the parallel passage of Matthew 10:34–39, when the sword of the gospel comes and it exposes family members in their doctrine and walk to be enemies of God, we must loathe and despise them for God's sake. Those family members may not come between us and Christ. We are willing at any time to turn away from them and to reject them.

The Lord also teaches us that all true love is in him. If the child of God hates such enemies of God for Christ's sake, he truly loves them. When I hate my family members who show themselves to be unbelieving and ungodly, that is my love for them. It is my love for them because I do not want them to perish. My life stands as one massive, unending rebuke for their sin and unbelief, through which rebuke the Lord may be pleased to bring one of his sons or daughters into contact with the word. The love the believer has for his family is such that if they turn away from the truth, he will hate them and forsake them and the relationship that they previously enjoyed. That is the love of God and Jesus Christ in the heart of the child of God.

How do you know if someone is a disciple of Christ? He forsakes his ungodly family. Only because hatred begins in the heart does it show itself in one's life. The believer turns away from his ungodly family and separates from them. Exactly what Reverend McGeown derides is what Christ is speaking. We give them up. We do not have anything to do with them. We cast them away from us. We have no fellowship with them. If they want to get together, fine, but we are going to talk with them only about the truth. We rebuke them in their sin. We warn them. That cost of discipleship comes right into the family, into the nearest and dearest of relationships.

And Christ adds something surprising in Luke 14:26–27: "Yea, and his own life also...and whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." It is true that we must be willing to die for Christ if put to the sword. I do not believe that to be the meaning of these verses though. They come right after Christ expresses the

significant cost of being his disciple. You hate your family for his sake, and so heavy is that cost that it kills you. That is why Christ calls it a cross. It is an agonizing and excruciating death for the disciple of Christ. In this life God's child loses his friends and family and even his own spouse who were so near and dear to his heart. He does that for Christ's sake. That is the meaning of the text. That is the cost of discipleship.

There is more to it though. To hate yourself also is the condemnation of yourself in your works. That was the problem with the multitude that followed Jesus. The Jews held to the works of the law for their righteousness. They did not hate their lives. They actually quite liked their lives. Their lives were pleasing to themselves. They thought themselves to be pretty good people. To hate your own life means that as you view that life and take stock of it, you loathe and despise your sins and sinful nature. The believer desires the love of the regenerated heart to be the entirety of his existence.

Christ's instruction is not that you have to do all these things. Reverend McGeown preaches his whole sermon as one lengthy admonition. He must have listened to Rev. Daniel Kleyn's speech at the recent Protestant Reformed officebearers' conference. But the form of the text is not an admonition. If it were, Christ would have used an imperative, which is a direct command or exhortation. The text does not read as an exhortation or an admonition. "Hate," "bear his cross," and "forsaketh" are spoken by Christ in the indicative mood. An indicative is simply a statement of fact. An indicative is not a command or an exhortation. A fact about Christ's disciples is that they hate, bear their crosses, and forsake. There is nothing in the text as a basis for an entire sermon filled with "do this" and "do not do that." Christ's point is that this hatred and forsaking is a fact, reality, and mark of true disciples of Christ.

McGeown then sets himself up to give a myriad of scenarios of when a believer might need to hate his family out of his devotion for Christ. McGeown says that you need to have Christ in common with someone in order to have fellowship, and you need to have faith in common. When it comes to your unbelieving family members, you have nothing in common besides blood, and so

you must reject them, refuse to have fellowship with them. You may have social discourse with them, but you may not have true fellowship with them because you don't have anything spiritual in common with them.

One of the scenarios McGeown gives is of a young man and young woman who are dating, and the woman tells the man that she hates the church and does not

believe in God. McGeown then instructs his congregation that the young man should stop going out with her because she is clearly not the type of woman he should be dating. But I thought it was a “spiritual” forsaking. Why cannot the young man just continue to date and marry the woman and simply reject her opinions and ideas? Did not McGeown say earlier that we should not just throw away those kinds of people, that we do not remove them from our lives, and that we do not separate ourselves from them? Which is it, Reverend McGeown?

What McGeown says next is so queer and incongruous with the text and with what he said before that I simply am going to quote it for the reader to judge if this is in fact what Christ is saying in the text. What McGeown says follows upon his explanation that we do not hate people, but we hate their ideas, opinions, and beliefs if they are incompatible with following after Christ.

This also applies to Christians with a Christian spouse and believing children. There are times when we must hate them too. Never in cruelty, of course. Never in a mean-spirited way, but only in order to put Jesus first. Even family must come second to Jesus Christ. The devil is subtle. He tempts us in different ways. Sometimes with the world, but often by means of our nearest and dearest relatives. Think of examples from scripture. Think of Adam. Think of Abraham. Adam should have said to Eve after Eve fell first and when she offered him the fruit—Adam should have said something like this, “No, I will not eat of the fruit”...Or Abraham...In that sense, Abraham and Sarah should have hated one another, opposed one another, for the sake of their obedience and allegiance to God...

So to put it as strongly as we can, if your family insists on going to hell, you must not follow them. You must part ways. You must repudiate what they are doing. You must rebuke them in their sin. You must serve Christ without them. Adam should have hated Eve. Abraham and Sarah should have hated one another. They both should have parted ways.

But Christ is not commanding us to hate family who attend a different church. That’s not a proper application of the text. I will not forsake

someone who attends a different church just because he may have some differences in doctrine and practice. That’s not me forsaking them or hating them. I might not approve of that church. I might see some serious weaknesses in doctrine and practice in that church, but I must not be blind to the sins of my own church either. But I will not hate a relative who goes to a different church. I’ll not cut him off. I’ll not charge him with apostasy from Jesus Christ. I’ll not judge him as hell-bound. I’ll not deny his Christianity. I’ll not say he’s going to a false church because he’s

not going to my church. If he leaves my church and joins another faithful Reformed church, let’s say, I may be disappointed, I may be sad, I may disapprove, but hatred will not be my response.

This whole section of the sermon is one massive contradiction. On the one hand, we are supposed to hate other members of the church and members of God’s covenant when they sin? On the other hand, we are not supposed to hate those who leave Christ, go to a false church, and worship a false god of their

imagination? Do we hate and forsake family who sit in a false church where the pure doctrine of the gospel is not preached? According to Reverend McGeown this is not what the text is teaching, but husbands should hate their wives and fellow believers who sin and hinder their following Christ. McGeown’s apotheosis is that there are believers in every church and that they must be called our brothers and sisters. In all four of his recent sermons on the antithesis, McGeown glorifies, deifies, and exalts this idea. This is the idea around which all of his fables are crafted.

Understand that in Jesus’ day, the disciples followed Christ to hear his voice by traveling with him wherever he went. They were literal followers of Christ. Today, the child of God follows Christ by joining himself to a church where Christ is present by his Spirit and where Christ’s voice is heard. Christ is not heard where the lie is taught. There are no followers of Christ in a false church where there is false doctrine, no matter if she has ministers, sermons, and liturgy. In the false church there is no voice of Christ and no Spirit working by the word.

The way McGeown tries to apply the text as a command to forsake *members in the church* and then dismisses

McGeown’s apotheosis is that there are believers in every church and that they must be called our brothers and sisters. In all four of his recent sermons on the antithesis, McGeown glorifies, deifies, and exalts this idea. This is the idea around which all of his fables are crafted.

the proper application of the text to *those who will not follow Christ* is asinine. The sermon is his own carnal idea of what he thinks the Spirit is teaching there. McGeown's sermon is not the word of God. I am absolutely sure of that. The application that he makes is a fable. And the application that he upbraids and scolds is the proper application. Those who will not follow the voice of Christ are in fact unbelievers and ungodly. They are those whom we must hate and forsake.

The Reason for Hatred

The reason Reverend McGeown gives for hating your family members who are "incompatible with following after Christ" is that they will lead you away from your devotion to Christ. He says that they oppose your devotion to Christ. The ungodly and unbelieving family members are not opposing the believer's confession as such, but they are opposing Christ. They are not opposing the believer as such but opposing Christ who lives in that believer.

The general thrust throughout McGeown's sermon, and what makes it man-centered, is that you need to hate father, mother, and the rest of your family because by their ideas, opinions, and beliefs they will lead you away from your devotion to Christ. You must hate them and spiritually forsake them (whatever that means), and by doing so you will not be led away from following Christ. But that is not the reason at all. If the believer's not being led astray depended in any sense on hating his family, he would certainly go astray.

Another reason McGeown gives is that "in short, we must seek to please Christ rather than our relatives." That is not true either. Faith is the only thing that pleases God and that only because Jesus Christ crucified is faith's object.

The reason that this high cost is a reality for the believer lies in the cross. Why do I hate my unbelieving and ungodly family? Is it because I desire to be preserved or because I want to please Christ? No, it is because Christ bore his cross for me. Why is there this cost in the believer's life? Jesus Christ crucified is the reason.

That cross was man's total rejection of Christ at the hands of the ungodly church world. The cross was Christ's intense suffering of the wrath of God. The cross was the only way of salvation for you and me. Christ himself looked at the cost of the cross. There in the garden he prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from

me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). And Christ took up that cross. He willingly bore the shame, rejection, and suffering of that cross. And he saved at that cross all whom the Father had given to him. Christ saved his own from misery, death, and the punishment of hell and condemnation. He saved his elect with his justifying blood.

When we are joined to Christ by faith and are made bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, when we have him as our savior and partake of his life by his Spirit, we must and will bear his reproach. We take up our crosses only because there was *the* cross. The cross that satisfied for all our sins. We bear a cross, not as atonement but in the sharing of Christ's own reproach. The world fills up God's cup of iniquity by persecuting the church and God's people until the world is ripe for judgment.

The cost of being Christ's disciple is a light thing really because so great a cost was paid by God himself. God shed his own blood in the flesh of his Son, Jesus Christ. An infinite debt was paid by an infinitely precious sacrifice. God sent his well-beloved Son to the death of the cross in his love for you. God poured out on Christ his wrath for your sins. Christ was accursed and suffered hell for you. Christ himself, who loved God perfectly, willingly gave up his life. Christ hated his own life

and his own earthly relationships in the sense of the text. God and his glory stood first and foremost to Christ. Christ came to do the will of God, and he did God's will perfectly. And Christ gives you his mind, so that you become his disciple. You become nothing in the earth. You lose your life because you have already gained eternal life.

The fruit of Christ's drawing the lame, the maimed, the blind, the halt, and the poor is that you bear your cross. You come after him. You follow him as his disciple. This all flows out of God's love for you. You do not come to him in the Arminian sense of making a choice for Christ and accepting Christ. But you come to Christ as he really calls you unto himself by his voice as the good shepherd, drawing you unto himself by faith.

He sups with you, eats and drinks with you, and you enjoy God's fellowship and favor as his dear child. This is God's sovereign work of grace. God is first. In that he glorifies himself as God. His grace and majesty and power are extolled in that he takes carnal, ungodly men and women, justifies them, makes them holy, gives them

When we are joined to Christ by faith and are made bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, when we have him as our savior and partake of his life by his Spirit, we must and will bear his reproach.

his quickening Spirit, and they willingly come to Christ and follow him and count all things but loss and dung.

Counting the Cost

In Luke 14:28–33 Jesus Christ illustrates his point about the high cost of being his disciple. The point in both illustrations is that the builder and the king counted, made a tabulation, a reckoning. They made a calculation. When they counted, they had the end in view. The builder had in view a completed tower. The king had in view victory over his enemies.

Now, in the life of the believer with regard to his family there is a cost that no disciple of Christ can escape. And Christ often puts right before the believer a situation where he will have to count the cost and make a choice. Me or your family? Me or your mother? Me or your father? Me or your sister? Me or your brother? Me or your wife? The sure choice of faith is always Christ. Moses chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Heb. 11:23–25). Faith counts and reckons that cost with the end in view. The end is eternal life with God. “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

The unbeliever cannot count the cost. He always chooses himself, his pleasure, his family, and his peace and happiness. He says, “Christ is not worth it to me.” The members of the PRC will live nice, happy, carnal lives with their friends, families, vacations, and things. And there will only be shame and everlasting contempt

for the sake of a few short years here on this earth. Reverend McGeown and the PRC, like the multitude that followed Christ, are offended by Christ’s word. They will get to keep their lives, but in keeping them, they shall lose them. He who loses his life for Christ’s sake shall find it.

The believer counts the cost, and the first thing he says is, “Lord, this is too much for me; I cannot bear it.” You have no ability to make yourself like what Christ teaches. You cannot pay that cost. You cannot bear up under that weight. You cannot and will not give a thing of yourself by nature. You would never renounce yourself. It is not something you have any power to do. It is so other-worldly and contrary to all human reason to lose, lose, and lose in this life. The power and strength of the child of God is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of Christ who dwells in the believer, so that the believer counts the high cost, bears the cost, and walks all his life with his end in view. Heaven is where Christ takes his true disciples. The life of heaven is the perfection of the covenant where God shall dwell with his people in perfection. The believer is going to live with God forever and ever. The church in glory shall dwell with God and see him in the revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ, in the perfected kingdom of his dear Son.

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”

He who has an ear, let him hear.

—TDO

Notice of Bound Volumes

Last call to order your bound copy of volume five of *Sword and Shield*! Volume five is complete, and *Sword and Shield* is well on its way through volume six. Though the time to send in your own issues of volume five for binding is past, if you would like to order a bound volume of new issues, please email your order to

office@reformedbelieverspub.org. There are plenty of extra bound copies of volumes two, three, and four available for purchase, which would make a great gift for a son, daughter, or grandchild who is making confession of faith or for a young adult in your life who is trying to expand his or her theological library. The cost for a volume of new issues is \$45.

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

REWARD FOR GOOD WORKS OR REWARD OF GRACE?

Program Introduction

Welcome to the Good-Works-Rewarded Loyalty Program (hereafter referred to as the “Program”). Every member of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (hereafter referred to as “Members”) has been automatically enrolled in the Program. The following terms and conditions govern the Members’ participation in the Program.

Terms and Conditions

Members have been given a measure of grace in a preapproved amount, a beginning balance to get the Members started as they set out on their lifelong paths to obtaining their rewards (hereafter referred to as the “Rewards Pathways”). Be advised that along the Rewards Pathways, Members can properly and simultaneously pursue both eternal rewards (higher degrees of glory and richer and deeper experiences of their places in heaven) and temporal rewards (special privileges, greater responsibilities and opportunities, distinguished honors, godly friendships, and personal character development in the area of witnessing).

Note, as Members proceed along the Rewards Pathways, they can choose their level of participation in the Program and even enlarge their capacity for rewards. If Members choose a lower level of participation, be assured that they will not lose membership in the Program, but their capacity for rewards and their experiences of the rewards will be commensurate with their level of participation. Do not be discouraged—Members can develop in their capacity for rewards and pursuits of these rewards, and perhaps special opportunities for accelerated Rewards Pathways will arise, so be on the lookout for those!

Some things to remember about the Program are the following:

First, Members in need of more grace always can access available grace along the Rewards Pathways.

Second, while we do not advise Members to compare themselves with others within the Program, we do want Members to be motivated to receive more capacity for rewards and greater and richer experiences of their rewards. Members may expect their rewards to be proportionate to their walks of holiness, lives of obedience, and good works, which are always performed by grace, of course.

Third, as previously mentioned, accelerated Rewards Pathways and bonus rewards do exist within the framework of the Program and can be pursued in the way of suffering and spiritual works that publicly serve the church and the gospel.

Fourth, be sure to listen closely for updates each Sunday as the Program leaders provide instructions on the terms and conditions. Terms and conditions are grounded in the law as stated in the ten commandments or as interpreted by the Program leaders.

Fifth, as a warning, there are certain ex-Program leaders who refused to promote the Program and its terms and conditions and who have been excluded from the Program. Any presentation of an entirely free and gracious reward is not to be confused with the Program. Please consult your Program leaders for more details.

The Protestant Reformed Doctrine of the Reward

The occasion for this article is renewed discussion and attention brought to the doctrine of the reward of grace, as Prof. Brian Huizinga presents that reward under the theme “Crowning His Gifts.” Both his book, which originated as a ThM thesis submitted to Calvin Theological Seminary in 2022,¹ and his recent Reformation Day

¹ Brian L. Huizinga, *Crowning His Gifts: Gracious Rewards in the Reformed Tradition* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2024).

lecture² develop the current Protestant Reformed doctrine of the reward. A brief examination of that doctrine of the reward in contrast to the doctrine of the reward as proclaimed by the Reformed Protestant Churches reveals the dramatically antithetical character of these two different theologies and is an occasion once again for the truth of the reward to be established against the lie.

Professor Huizinga's doctrine of the reward of grace is faithful to and consistent with current Protestant Reformed conditional covenant theology and the place and function the denomination assigns to good works. The method of both his book and speech is a presentation of quotations that he contends represent the majority of the body of Reformed work and development on the topic of the reward, along with a brief commentary. The quotations in this article are mainly from the speech, as the speech is a summary of his book.

Professor Huizinga prefaces his speech with an acknowledgment that there is the perception of tension between a gracious reward and the good works of a believer.

The fear is that when we start talking about a reward and we know it's a reward of grace and God's rewarding the believer's good works, we have to try to bring together in one picture now God's grace and our good works, and we start feeling some tension there.

Professor Huizinga assures everyone that there is only a misunderstanding of some unidentified sort. Since he never clearly elaborates on the nature of that misunderstanding, he leaves the listener with the subtle message that to believe that any perceived conflict exists is in fact the misunderstanding. A conflict is simply not there! Voilà, the magician flashes his hand over the coin, and it is gone!

Professor Huizinga generously employs terms like *grace*, *grace-wrought*, and *gifts of grace*. Initially, he appears to give a grand place to grace. With another flash of the hand, the coin reappears in the hand of the magician.

As Professor Huizinga elaborates on his position, he ends up presenting a doctrine of the reward that is dominated by the works of the child of God, which works

influence and precede the reward. And with a final flick of the wrist, the coin disappears forever.

In brief Professor Huizinga teaches that there is a gracious reward and that the reward is eternal life. He grounds the reward of grace in the doctrine of justification, the merits of Christ apart from works. Huizinga goes on to teach that the reward is according to and proportionate to the unique good works of the believer. It is at this point that he begins to take back all that he previously attributed to grace.

Now, in this expression "crowning his gifts," his gifts refer to our good works. Our good works are all of these good things that we do. They come out of a heart of true faith; they are done according to the law of God; and they are aimed at his glory. You know the Heidelberg Catechism. We're talking about all these acts of loving obedience at home, at church, at school, at work, at play, among the ungodly—our good works. From one point of view, we could properly say that our good works are our gifts to God.

Professor Huizinga's false doctrine becomes apparent especially where he teaches the variation and proportion of the reward as more enjoyment, deeper happiness, and larger capacity. In his speech he elaborates on this point by providing the following explanation:

In heaven, though everyone's glass will be full, some glasses are bigger. Some capacities are bigger. And in heaven, though everyone's glass will be full, some glasses are bigger, some are smaller, some will have deeper experiences of blessedness. Some will radiate with a brighter glory. This capacity for enjoying blessedness and glory is organically connected to this life on earth, so that greater faithfulness on earth corresponds to greater blessedness and glory in heaven. Already here on this earth, we all have our own unique capacity for future blessedness and glory. We have a capacity, and that capacity can even expand through the course of our life. And the more one is faithful now, the greater glory in heaven, for God rewards according to our works.

Professor Huizinga's doctrine of the reward of grace is faithful to and consistent with current Protestant Reformed conditional covenant theology and the place and function the denomination assigns to good works.

2 Brian L. Huizinga, "Crowning His Gifts: Rewarding the Good Works of Believers," lecture given in Peace Protestant Reformed Church on October 31, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkQM_e2IVzI&t=1945s. Unless otherwise noted, the quotations from Professor Huizinga are from this speech.

Huizinga writes more about proportion in his book:

There is some proportionality between good works and the eternal reward, because Scripture teaches each will be rewarded according to his works. There are degrees of glory in heaven according to each saint's body of faithful service. However, there is still a great disproportion between our puny good works and the eternal weight of glory. If each believer's complete body of works were piled up as a mound here on earth, we could walk among the mounds and see variation in size.³

Here Huizinga takes back every bit of the graciousness of the reward that he described earlier. He gives to the law and the believer's living in obedience to the law a place and function as the way to influence the reward of grace. Connecting the obedience of the child of God to the reward in this way means that an act of obedience to the law of God by the regenerated child of God, even obedience performed by grace, both influences and precedes the blessing of God.

I note also that Professor Huizinga teaches that there are both intrinsic and extrinsic temporal rewards that are distinct from the eternal reward. He creates distinction upon distinction, and at every distinction he muddles works and grace.

Now, in addition to an eternal reward, there are temporal rewards, and I'd like to address that yet for a few moments this evening. The Bible makes the eternal reward the main thing. Nevertheless, there are temporal rewards, and we confess that in the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 24 when we confess that God rewards "in this and a future life." The rewards of this present life, they don't consist of saving benefits like reconciliation with God, regeneration, the forgiveness of sins, preservation unto final glory. But Reformed theologians explain temporal rewards as special privileges, greater responsibilities and opportunities, or distinguished honors.

Professor Huizinga ends his speech by very briefly presenting the idea that alongside love for and gratitude to God, a desire for the reward is a motivation for a life of holiness and obedience to the law of God. In his book Professor Huizinga had time and space to elaborate on motivation, and there he was at pains to demonstrate

that "the tradition" often used synonymously the terms *motive*, *incentive*, and *stimulus*.

While the tradition in its use of terminology consistently stops short of identifying the hope of a reward as a *motive* for obedience, there is no ground for concluding that the tradition makes a hard and fast distinction between motive and incentive or stimulus so as to teach or imply that anyone who makes the reward a *motive* for obedience is transgressing the boundaries of orthodoxy and in error. It could even be argued that some of the terms employed instead of *motive* are synonyms of motive, or at least very nearly synonyms. Also, although it is not very common, some Reformed theologians have employed the term *motive* to describe the reward, and their use of the term and explanation of it in no way undermines love for and gratitude to God as motives.⁴

Professor Huizinga's theology of the reward loads a terrible burden on the back of the hearer. His theology is devoid of the gospel of the free reward of grace in Christ and is cut loose from election, so that though there might appear to be glimpses of truth sprinkled throughout both his speech and book, in the end the terms and conditions of the Program bind up the Members with steel-like ropes and steal the joy and hope of the reward.

Rev. Nathan Langerak describes a series of articles also written by Professor Huizinga, and the theology of those articles is that repentance in all its distinctions precedes the remission of sins. Reverend Langerak's apt description of those articles fits Professor Huizinga's theology like a glove.

Besides being barren, misleading, and condescending, the articles are oppressive. The author labors mightily to convince us that what he writes is the Reformed faith, the gospel of the scriptures, the old paths, and historical Protestant Reformed truth... In all of that he oppresses the heart of the believer with works.⁵

Although Professor Huizinga claims that the Reformed tradition and the historical Protestant Reformed truth support his theology, he revises history. Concerning the relationship between election, good works, and the reward—which is eternal life—Rev. Herman Hoeksema in a sermon on Romans 11:6 taught that

3 Huizinga, *Crowning His Gifts*, 152.

4 Huizinga, *Crowning His Gifts*, 190–91.

5 Nathan J. Langerak, "Humpty Dumpty (1): Jabberwocky," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 18 (May 2022): 24.

the glory of God must shine forth in Christ; and the glory of Christ must radiate in the Church. That Church as a whole, and that in organic relation in connection with the whole of His work as it will be perfectly manifested in the new heavens and the new earth, God has foreordained. And the election of those that are saved and ordained unto glory is dominated by that one purpose. The whole determines its parts...

For, personal election is also personal predestination, foreordination unto the particular place each one of the elect must occupy in the whole, and the specific purpose each one must serve in showing forth the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ...

And election also implies that the infinitely wise Architect has assigned to each of the elect his own place, and that he has determined to prepare each one for his particular place and purpose in the whole...

Even from the foregoing it already follows that when the apostle writes [in Romans 11:6] "*it* is by grace," this "*it*" of the text also refers to salvation as it is actually accomplished and applied unto us. If you keep the fountain pure, the stream must be pure. If you confess that election, whence flows the entire stream of our salvation, is by grace and not of works, you cannot mix works with grace anywhere along the line of the process of our salvation...

Now, it is evidently also to that accomplished salvation of the remnant that the apostle refers in the words of our text. We may, therefore, read the text as follows: "And if salvation is by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more of grace: otherwise work is no more work"...

You are, perhaps, inclined to ask, whether anyone could be so foolish as to deny this, and to maintain that even this objective redemption through the blood of Christ, this reconciliation of the world, is of works. And to that I would answer that the cross of Christ has, indeed, been changed into a work of man by many. What else do they teach than salvation by works, who picture the cross of Christ as a mere disciplinary measure on the part of God to show us what He might justly do with us all, and thus to bring us to repentance in order that we might be saved? In that case we are saved, not because Christ bore our sins away and atoned, but because we are good enough to repent. And then it is not of grace but of works...

Salvation is not accomplished by its objective realization in and through the blood and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It must be applied to us, given in our possession, carried into our very hearts...

Also this belongs to that glorious work of God whereby we are saved. And also this part of the work is referred to in the words of our text: "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace."

Are there, then, [those] who teach that a man is regenerated, called into the light of God, brought into a saving fellowship with Christ, liberated from the power of sin and sanctified,—all of works? I answer that they do not express it so bluntly, for it would appear too absurd. How could a man regenerate himself, or how could he deliver himself from the shackles of sin, or how could he bring himself into a saving connection with the living Lord? It is self evident that all this must be the work of God. No more than the dead can rise in their own power, no more can a sinner liberate himself from the prison of sin and death. Besides, Scripture teaches all too plainly, that by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. And so, even the Arminian must admit this. He will emphasize that man can do nothing of himself, nothing to accomplish his own liberation and quickening. It is all of grace. By grace we are reborn and by grace we are called; by grace we receive the justifying faith and by grace we are sanctified. But, he insists, whether God will give this grace to anyone and thus save him, that depends upon man's own readiness and willingness to receive it. And by this he overthrows and denies all he ever said before. For in last instance it depends on us, on man, on his goodness, on an act of his will and choice, whether he shall be quickened and called into the eternal kingdom of God's dear Son, or not. And then salvation is not of grace, but of works...

Again you ask: are there, then, those who teach that the preservation of the saints is of works? I answer: there are, and they are the very same that also hold that election is of works, that redemption is of works, that salvation in the subjective application of it is of works, that make the whole of salvation in last instance and final analysis dependent upon an act of man. They adhere to their principle to the very end, and apply it also to the preservation and perseverance of the saints. And again they would fain leave

the impression that they attribute everything to grace. Strongly they emphasize that the Christian is surrounded by mighty powers of temptation and destruction, over against which he would not be able to stand for a moment if it were not for God's preserving grace. Without Christ the child of God can do nothing. Continually he must receive grace from God in order to stand. But whether he will receive this preserving grace continually, that depends once more upon an act of his own will. He must be willing to preserve [*sic*], to stand, to fight the battle of faith. He must earnestly seek that preserving grace of the Lord. Then God will keep him. And then he will persevere. God helps those that help themselves! And thus they overthrow once more all they first confessed concerning the grace of God. It is of works, not of grace!⁶

The Reformed Protestant Doctrine of the Reward of Grace

In distinction to Professor Huizinga's doctrine of the reward stands the doctrine of the reward of grace as it is taught in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Rev. Luke Bomers ably defends the doctrine of the reward as a reward that is free, that gives no place of influence to the works of men, and that does justice to the decree of election. This doctrine is also faithfully preached from the pulpits of the Reformed Protestant Churches as her ministers bring the gospel from week to week, the good news of the free reward of grace.

The definition that Reverend Bomers provides is as follows:

The reward of grace is the wages of Jesus Christ, which is freely bestowed by God in election and which superabundantly replaces all that the children of God lose in this life as they follow after Christ.⁷

This doctrine of the reward is grounded upon the merits of Jesus Christ and flows out of election; election is the sole, determining influence of the reward in every aspect. The reward is eternal life; the reward is to have God himself in Christ. The reward is the eternal kingdom of God and a name and place in that kingdom as it is made up of many members.

In addition to receiving a name and place above all men, Christ received "a portion with the great"—that is, a kingdom—together with power and authority to execute God's counsel. He also received posterity—"his seed"—and eternal life—"prolong his days."⁸

The kingdom and its members, including their special names and places in that kingdom, were decreed in eternity, and the kingdom is a reality in the eternal decree of God and in time. The kingdom is not influenced and affected by man or man's works, and in the kingdom there is no work of man that precedes the blessing of God. In time we see the unfolding of the eternal decree of God, and every elect child of God already possesses the reward in principle. Each elect child possesses the kingdom, has his or her name and place in the kingdom, has eternal life, and has God himself by faith; and the elect will receive the full perfection and culmination of the reward upon God's realization of his kingdom at Christ's return.

Therefore, we expect the coming of the great day of the Lord with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God that are yes and amen in Jesus Christ our Lord, unto the glory of God by us!⁹

There is no essential, principal difference between the reward in time or in eternity. This reward is proportionate to Christ's perfect work, and not at all proportionate to the works of the child of God. The good works and the lives of obedience of the elect are fruits of faith, and they are demonstrations of the efficacy and reality of God's kingdom; they demonstrate the name and place of the child of God in the kingdom. Therefore, any concept of the place of good works in relation to the reward of grace may not give to works a place that God never assigned and must do justice to the decree of election.

Reverend Bomers explains the proper relationship between good works and the reward this way:

I reiterate my main contention: when the reward of grace is taught as the place that each elect child of God possesses in the eternal kingdom and everlasting covenant of God, it must be taught from the viewpoint that this reward has already been determined in eternity. This reward is not determined by good works, but it is determined by election.¹⁰

6 Herman Hoeksema, *God's Eternal Good Pleasure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Doorn Printing Company, 1940), 330–44.

7 Luke Bomers, "A Reevaluation of the Reward of Grace (1)," *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 5 (October 2022): 32.

8 Luke Bomers, "A Reevaluation of the Reward of Grace (2)," *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 6 (November 1, 2022): 34.

9 Bomers, "A Reevaluation of the Reward of Grace (2)," 38.

10 Luke Bomers, "A Reevaluation of the Reward of Grace (3)," *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 8 (December 1, 2022): 28.

Note well that every rational, moral creature will be judged *according to* works, not *by* works. When scripture speaks of *according to works* in connection with the judgment, it highlights the specific function that men's works have in the theodicy of God. God will use the works of men to demonstrate and vindicate his righteous judgment, such that his glory and honor are acknowledged by every rational, moral creature.

The simple teaching of these texts [that the Protestant Reformed assemblies cited in order to attempt to prove that the reward is proportionate to the good works that believers perform in this life] must be mangled in order to draw out that the reward is according to works, such that the believer receives more or less glory based on his deeds. What these texts set forth is the nature of God's judgment, not the nature of heavenly life. And the natural contrast in these texts is between elect and reprobate, not between different kinds of believers.¹¹

Neither the law nor obedience to the law can give one a name and place in the kingdom. Neither the law nor obedience to the law can give more and more of the reward of grace or can influence the reward in any aspect, including the experience of the reward. Neither the law nor obedience to the law precedes the blessing of God.

As to variation in the body of Christ, hear the instruction of Reverend Langerak:

There is great diversity in the church of Jesus Christ. It belongs to the church's perfection of catholicity that membership in the church of Jesus Christ is not limited by any earthly criteria but by the election of God, out of which comes faith in Jesus Christ. God chooses out of every tribe, tongue, and nation under heaven. The church is not boring sameness but a marvelous diversity.¹²

And again:

That diversity of gifts, works, and effects is the proper work of the Spirit means that diversity is

not a threat to the unity of the church. Diversity is the will of the Spirit of Christ, who divides "to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11). This means that the particular gifts a man receives has nothing to do with his will or abilities. For instance, that one receives the word of wisdom is not the result of his natural intelligence. That one receives the office of mercy is not the result of his natural abilities with money. Rather, the gift, work, and effect that a man has in the church are the result of the Spirit's will. Man has nothing the Spirit needs. He sovereignly distributes, just as sovereignly as he distributes salvation. He chooses men, women, and children in eternity; he appoints them not only to salvation and membership in the church, but also to their particular place in the church, gives them their particular work in the church, equips them for that work, and fruitfully blesses that work for the church's sake. All diversity proceeds solely from his will and is the result of his work.¹³

The reward of grace was sovereignly appointed and decreed in eternity; the child of God possesses this reward in time; and he knows it already by faith.

The reward of grace was sovereignly appointed and decreed in eternity; the child of God possesses this reward in time; and he knows it already by faith. In fact the child of God is even known by his reward, so much so that the devil and the world make every effort to identify, ostracize,

and defame him for the sake of it; and if they could take it from him, they would love to do so. The child of God suffers mightily for that reward, and yet that reward is never in danger of being lost, for it depends entirely on the finished work of Christ, who fully merited it. In this life the child of God hopes and looks forward with a sure knowledge and trust that the full perfection of the reward will come upon Christ's return and that the beauty and glory of the reward will be revealed to all men for the glory of the King.

Conclusion

Having studied both the current Protestant Reformed doctrine of the reward and the Reformed Protestant doctrine of the reward, it is clear that the two doctrines stand diametrically opposed to one another. One doctrine, using

11 Bomers, "A Reevaluation of the Reward of Grace (3)," 30.

12 Nathan J. Langerak, *Walking in the Way of Love: A Practical Commentary on 1 Corinthians for the Believer* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019), 2:173.

13 Langerak, *Walking in the Way of Love*, 2:182.

cunning sleight of hand, leaves the people without a prize at all, free or otherwise; and instead, as natural men and natural wisdom are wont to do, that doctrine relies on tricks, false advertising, and time-tested ploys to sell its cheap wares. The other, the true doctrine, is a theology of pure grace, with riches upon riches poured out upon the heads of the elect.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1).

9. As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.
10. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.
11. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even

so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

12. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.
13. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
14. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
15. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.
16. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:9–16)

—Ashley Cleveland

INSIGHTS

Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things — 1 John 2:20

BEHOLD NICODEMUS!

During the Reformation John Calvin was engaged in a controversy with various so-called Protestants who lived in France. The Roman Catholic Church dominated the society in France and was hostile to anyone who was sympathetic to the Reformed faith. Those with whom Calvin had a controversy said that they could worship outwardly in the Roman Catholic Church and not be corrupted by Rome’s doctrine, as long as they inwardly rejected the heretical doctrine of the popish worship. They claimed to hold to the truth of the Reformation but remained members of the Roman Catholic Church. They did so “in order to avoid being ostracized, or to keep from being persecuted for renouncing popish

worship” and “to maintain their social standing.”¹ These people were termed *Nicodemites*. The moniker *Nicodemites* came from the appeal that Nicodemus did not declare openly to be Jesus’ disciple but secretly came to Jesus by night in order to avoid the reproach of the Jews and ruining his reputation.

Recognizing the command of God that every man is bound to join himself to a true church, Calvin admonished those members of the Roman Catholic Church to reform the church anew in their places or to flee to Geneva where they could join a true church. Calvin insisted that the outward practice of a believer must be consistent with the inner commitment to the truth. In one of his letters, he wrote,

¹ John Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them: ‘Anti-Nicodemite’ Writings of John Calvin*, trans. Seth Skolnitsky (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001), 7.

There is no room, therefore, for anyone to indulge in crafty dissimulation, or to flatter himself with a false idea of piety, pretending that he cherishes it [the truth] in his heart, though he completely overturns it by outward behaviour.²

Upon receiving Calvin's letters, excuses abounded. The Nicodemites complained that Calvin was too harsh, too severe, too demanding. "You would have us give up everything—our livelihood, our homes, our names, our reputations, our lives?" One such correspondent accused Calvin of cruelty, claiming that he "sent poor folks to the slaughter for the sake of piddling and childish trifles."³

And the complaints turned to mockery: "One cannot get to paradise except by way of Geneva."⁴ Calvin, you think that you have the only true church. Calvin, you are saying that membership in a true church is the condition for salvation."

But Calvin did not back down from the truth. He wrote,

It is not lawful for a Christian who knows the pure teaching of the gospel, when he lives in the midst of Popery, to pretend in any way to consent or adhere to the abuses, superstitions, and idolatries which reign in it.

The cowardice of those who pollute themselves with the abominations of the Papists (which are entirely contrary to the Christian religion) whom God has given to know the truth of the gospel... disavow, as far as they possibly can, the Son of God who has redeemed them.⁵

Does this not sound familiar? For some time there were members of the Protestant Reformed Churches who claimed to believe the truth of the gospel as it is preached in the Reformed Protestant Churches. They claimed to see the errors in the Protestant Reformed Churches. They claimed that they were "RP at heart." But for whatever reason—and again, excuses abound—they remain

in the Protestant Reformed Churches. False doctrine is preached off their pulpits, and they say, "Surely God does not require us to give up anything for the sake of the gospel. Surely we do not have to lose our names and reputations. We can stay in this church and not be corrupted by the false doctrine. We do not have to leave. We do not have to join a true church. We know what we believe in our hearts; it does not matter what is coming off the pulpits. We are fine."

And when the Reformed Protestant Churches insist that obedience to God's word includes membership in a true church, and that God will *gather* and preserve his elect people until the end of the world, the Protestant Reformed Nicodemites mock, as in Calvin's day: "You think that you are the only ones saved. You think that you are the only true church. You are proud and hateful and unloving."

Calvin, you think that you have the only true church. Calvin, you are saying that membership in a true church is the condition for salvation.

To be clear, the Protestant Reformed Churches *are* Rome. Idolatries reign in the Protestant Reformed Churches, as they did in the Roman Catholic Church during the Reformation, because false doctrine reigns in the Protestant Reformed Churches. False doctrine is idolatry, for it teaches that in some respect salvation (or

the experience of salvation) belongs to the work of man, and therefore man puts his trust in something besides the one true God. The Protestant Reformed Churches teach that there is that which man must do to be saved. The Protestant Reformed Churches teach that man is justified by faith and by repentance. The Protestant Reformed Churches teach that a man cannot be forgiven unless and until he repents. The Protestant Reformed Churches teach that the living and the dead have not the forgiveness of sins unless they first repent.⁶

In the following excerpt from one of his letters written against the Nicodemites, Calvin removes the cloak from those who try to hide under the mantle of Nicodemus. Calvin clearly sets forth the truth about Nicodemus, that

2 "On Shunning the Unlawful Rites of the Ungodly," as quoted in Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them*, 9.

3 "A Response to a Certain Dutchman Who, Under Pretence of Making Christians Really Spiritual, Suffers Them to Defile Their Bodies in All Sorts of Idolatries (1562)," in Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them*, 284. The publisher of the book makes an apt and still-timely observation regarding this accusation: "The lure of this kind of argument is demonstrated in the 20th century, when religious leaders claim that unnecessary divisions are created in the church when Christians raise questions about 'secondary' or 'minor' matters."

4 Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them*, 192.

5 Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them*, 129.

6 That Protestant Reformed doctrine is essentially Roman Catholic doctrine has been well documented and established throughout the history of *Sword and Shield* and from the pulpits of the Reformed Protestant Churches. For the sake of brevity, I point the interested reader to Nathan J. Langerak, "Unforgiven (2): Handling the Word of God Deceitfully," *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 12 (March 2023): 14–19; and to Tyler D. Ophoff, "Reformed Polemic Against the Protestant Reformed Churches," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on November 16, 2025, <https://youtu.be/a8i3YH0IqqQ?si=TFLrWqxTTiD98GQU>.

faith is infallibly kindled when the word of the gospel—Christ—comes to an elect child of God. Nicodemus did not remain in the darkness! When the gospel comes to a child of God and God works faith in that elect child's heart and he believes the gospel, that child walks in the light. The inward confession of a man's heart matches his outward walk, and that inward confession will be manifested in his outward walk and life. In the case of Nicodemus, he, along with Joseph of Arimathea, begged the body of Christ from the Jews in order to give Jesus an honorable burial. Today, when God sheds his light on his elect child's heart through the power of the Spirit, that child does not remain in the darkness of his sin and in the false church, but he comes out and joins the true church, where the gospel shines forth Christ in all his glory.

Calvin also lays out what one really does who, for all his insistence that he believes the truth, remains in a false church: He puts Christ back in the grave and buries him. That is what the false doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches does, and that is what those who remain in the Protestant Reformed Churches do: They bury Christ. To give man and his repentance a place in man's justification is to deny the resurrection, for Christ was raised because we were justified (Rom. 4:25).

There is no excuse for those who have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and who claim to believe that truth to remain in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Behold Nicodemus!

It seems to them that they still live honourably, as long as they can hide behind the robe of Nicodemus, which they make use of like the mantle of our Lady of Carmelites in Paris. For, I recall that there is a host of monks there like chicks under the wings of their mother. In this fashion, these people stretch out the mantle of good Nicodemus so far that they are all covered by it. Or at least, so they suppose. For, in truth, when each sought to pull a section over himself, they pulled it so much this way and that, that they have torn it all up, not merely into pieces, but into threads.

"How, then, can they hide themselves there?" someone will say. It happens with them as with the partridges, which think to be well hidden when they can find a hole to stick their head in. Thus this mantle of Nicodemus, under which

they think to set themselves in safety, is only a false imagination with which they deceive themselves. As if they were to stop their eyes so that no one would see them.

For, what have they in common with Nicodemus? They say it's that he came to see our Lord by night, and did not declare himself to be one of his disciples [John 3]. I grant them that Nicodemus, before his enlightenment, sought out the shadows. But once the Sun of righteousness had shone upon him [Mal. 4:2], did he still remain in his hiding place? No, on the contrary, we see the declaration he made, even when everything was hopeless: specifically, when he came with Joseph of Arimathea to request the body of our Lord from Pilate, in order to bury it [John 19:39].

Let us note the occasion. Behold the priests, Pharisees and all the other enemies of the truth, triumphant as if they had achieved a complete victory! The poor believers, on the other hand, are quite shocked and dismayed, seeing their master and Saviour, in whom they had had all their hope, dead, and his body hung on the gallows between evildoers and brigands. The Pharisees and scribes and priests

are on the alert, to see if anyone dare say a word. For they are not satisfied with having put him to death. Rather they desire that the very memory of him be wiped out. They are still inflamed with the fury they used against his person and ready to deploy it against all his members. The people were also in a tumult, so that Nicodemus was quite certain that in revealing himself as a disciple or one who loved Jesus Christ, he would incite the rage of everyone against himself. He nevertheless makes his profession before all. He does not fear the scorn and shame. He does not fear the hatred. He is not afraid of riot. He is not afraid of persecutions. Behold Nicodemus: if we take Nicodemus the Christian, and not Nicodemus in his ignorance, before he knew what Jesus Christ was all about!

What then? These people wish to imitate the actions of Nicodemus during the time of his

If this is something offensive to their flesh, I am not surprised. However, if they know that what I tell them is good and salutary, let them determine to profit by it, rather than imitating hysterical patients by striking and hurting the doctor, who is taking pains to succour them.

unbelief. However, as for the example he gives them after coming to know Jesus Christ, they do not wish to hear of it.

In short, Nicodemus came to Jesus Christ by night during the time of his ignorance. After being instructed, he confesses him openly, in the daylight; even at the time when it was more perilous than ever. Therefore, they who hide behind his example do him a great wrong, and it does them no more good than it would if a persecutor of Christianity were to excuse himself on the basis of St. Paul.

And, it was not only in this act that Nicodemus showed himself to be a Christian at great personal danger. He had already begun to risk himself for Jesus Christ when, in the assembly of the wicked, he maintained against them all that they should not condemn him without knowledge of the cause [John 7:50–51]. It is true that he was not yet making a complete confession. Yet it was a great step forward for him to stand alone against the raging tide of all the wicked.

Now three or four of these ‘Nicodemites’ will be present in an assembly, and suffer a poor Christian to be cruelly condemned to death without uttering a word. And God grant that none of them consent to it!...

Perhaps there is one point at which one might grant that they resemble Nicodemus: it is that they are now burying Jesus Christ, as Nicodemus once did. But there is a great difference between the two interments. For Nicodemus only interred the body, embalming it so that it might have a sweet and precious odor. These people inter body and soul, humanity and divinity. And all without honour. Nicodemus buried him while he was dead. These people wish to bury him after he has come back to life.

So let them from henceforth desist from making a shield of Nicodemus, saying that it is legitimate for them to hide their Christianity, to the point of defiling themselves by idolatry: seeing how Nicodemus showed a hundred times more

steadfastness in the death of Jesus Christ than they all together do after his resurrection.

It is time to conclude and make an end of the present treatise. I believe that all those who have a drop of sound judgment plainly see that they have no reason to accuse me, as if I were too rough or harsh in requiring of Christians what our Lord expressly commands them in his word, and no more.

As for those whose ears are so delicate that they cannot bear this teaching, I answer that my doctrine is not hard. Rather, it is the hardness of their hearts which makes them find it so. If there is difficulty in doing it, that does not mean that it is not our duty...

If this is something offensive to their flesh, I am not surprised. However, if they know that what I tell them is good and salutary, let them determine to profit by it, rather than imitating hysterical patients by striking and hurting the doctor, who is taking pains to succour them. I take no pleasure in saddening them. Nevertheless, if I can bring them to a sorrow like the one St. Paul mentions—that is, one that will beget repentance in them—I will not repent of it (2 Cor. 7:10). For that will be their gain. If they sorrow in order to harm themselves, then I will be grieved. For I do not desire their ruin, and would not wish to be the cause of it. Yet the guilt of it will be imputed to them, and not to me.⁷

If there are any true Nicodemites remaining in the Protestant Reformed Churches, heed the warning that the Reformed Protestant Churches and her members have ceased not to shout to you for over five years now, which is the same warning that Calvin gave to those who remained in the false Roman Catholic Church of his day, which is the word that God himself rings out from heaven: “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4). Harden not your hearts against this word of God. This word might be hard to the flesh, but the Spirit of Christ rejoices in and heeds this word. He who has an ear, let him hear.

—Ally Ophoff

⁷ Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them*, 117–21.



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.
—2 Timothy 2:9

The glorious gospel of Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead! So Jesus was crucified. The wonder-child, born of Mary, born under the law, was delivered to the cross because of our offenses. And God raised Jesus from the dead because of our justification. Because at the cross he paid the debt of our sins, made satisfaction to God, and obtained all the blessings of salvation for his elect, God raised Jesus, declaring him to be the Son of God with power by the Spirit of holiness.

So the gospel declares Jesus Christ to be the only way of salvation. The command of the gospel is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and to call on him for salvation. The promise of the gospel is that all who do will certainly be received of God in mercy. The threat of the gospel is that all who turn from Christ in unbelief will be damned.

A beautiful word! Declaring that salvation is found in no other name than Jesus Christ.

A powerful word! For by that gospel the Word of God comes. The Word of God by which he commanded the heavens and earth to be. The Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation!

The Word who effectually carries out the will of God. By the gospel the Word of God comes to save his own people; to summon them out of darkness into God's marvelous light; to turn them, so that they are turned; to call them, so that they come; to open their hearts; to renew their wills; to work faith, so that they believe; to justify, sanctify, and glorify all those and those only whom God has ordained to eternal life. The Word that also hardens all those whom God has appointed to destruction.

Awesome Word of God! By the gospel God builds the heavens and tears down the kingdom of Satan! Unbound in everything to which God sends it. Irresistible in accomplishing God's purpose. Never returning to him void.

What a contrast! The apostle suffered great trouble in the gospel. As the servant of the Lord called to preach the gospel, he could never be separated from that gospel. In their treatment of him, men showed what they thought of the gospel he brought, of the Christ he proclaimed, and of the Word of God himself!

"An evil doer," they said! They maligned the apostle as one who stirred up trouble in the world, a destroyer of laws and customs, a worker of division and licentiousness! How did they slander his gospel to turn all men against it? "He teaches that we should sin that grace may abound! Antinomian!"

What did he say about his ministry? Beaten, whipped, and stoned; in peril of his own countrymen, in peril of the heathen, and in peril among false brethren; even now languishing in prison, in peril for his life!

One can bind an apostle—or any minister of the word—but the word of God is not bound! It cannot be. It is the word of God. Its power is of itself. Its purpose is irresistible. It overcomes bonds, imprisonments, even death. For surely that is the gospel. What man wickedly crucified and buried, God raised. The Word of God is not bound!

So it is always. The sovereign God uses even the hatred and opposition of men to accomplish his purpose to gather his church, comfort his people, and destroy the kingdom of darkness.

—NJL