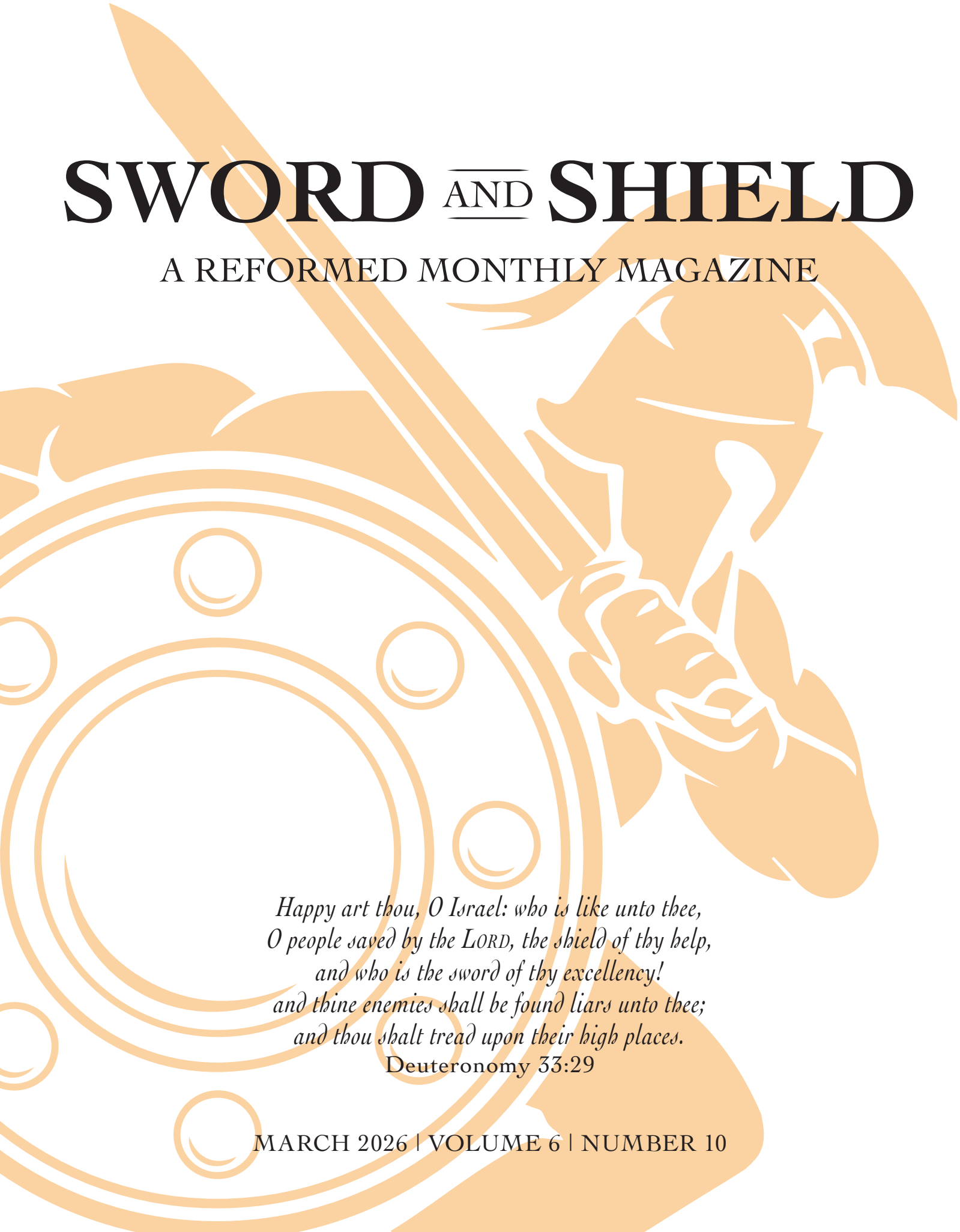
SWORD AND SHIELD

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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CONTENTS

3 **MEDITATION**
THE STONE WITH SEVEN EYES
Rev. Herman Hoeksema

6 **FROM THE EDITOR**
Rev. Nathan Langerak

7 **EDITORIAL**
THE END OF ALL THINGS (2): THE IDEA OF THE SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING
Rev. Nathan Langerak

11 **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**
GOD'S WORK OF REFORMATION (1)
Rev. Tyler Ophoff

20 **DRY MORSEL**
OUR COVENANT CONCEPTION WITH FATHER HOEKSEMA (1): HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
Rev. Jeremiah Pascual

26 **RUNNING FOOTMEN**
THE PROTRACTOR OF DEATH
James Jansma

32 **FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL**
Rev. Nathan Langerak

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THE STONE WITH SEVEN EYES

The angel of the Lord *protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the* Lord *of hosts;*
If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house,
and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.
Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at:
for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch. *For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua;*
upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord *of hosts,*
and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord *of hosts,*
shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree. —Zechariah 3:6–10

How can this stand?

That question must have arisen in the mind of the prophet and certainly also within Joshua the high priest after their further reflections on the vision just shown to the seer.

In the judgment of God, the accuser of the brethren opposed Joshua, the high priest of Israel. Satan demanded Joshua's condemnation and deposition from the high priesthood. Satan pointed out Joshua's filthy garments and appealed to the righteousness of God.

Note well that Satan was rebuked. And the Lord ordered that Joshua's filthy garments be removed from him, that clean and elegant garments be put on him, and that a fair miter be set on his head. The angel of the Lord said to Joshua, "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee!" Instead of condemnation, there was justification! Instead of deposition, there was exaltation. Israel's high priest won the lawsuit against Satan!...

And yet, how is that judgment possible?

How can all this stand in the judgment of God?

The high priest's filthy garments were a reality. The high priesthood of Israel truly was polluted by many and terrible sins. How can a righteous God maintain the high priest in his office and even exalt him?

How can that be?

The answer comes in the words of the above text. The word of God in this text accompanies and explains the previous vision shown to Zechariah.

Only as types could Joshua and his priests be maintained in office. By the wonderful grace of God, they were signs of that Branch whom the Lord will beget and of all that the Lord will bring to pass through the Branch.

The Branch is Jehovah's servant!

The Branch is Jehovah's friend-servant par excellence; he stands in and for God's covenant; he is placed over the whole house of God; he stands at the head of God's people.

In and through the Branch, the Lord will set up a miraculous Stone with seven eyes and elegantly engraved by the hand of God.

God's house shall be built.

The iniquity of the land shall be removed in one day.

And everlasting peace shall reign among God's people.

In the Branch this all shall stand!

Wonderful Stone!

Astonishment strikes the onlookers as God sets the Stone as the headstone of the corner.

The meaning of the Stone is certainly first historical, referring to the cornerstone of the second temple. Commentators answer in all kinds of ways the question about the meaning of this wonderful Stone. Some see in the Stone simply a reference to the cornerstone of the second temple and nothing more. Others explain the Stone as a representation of the kingdom of God; others see the Stone as a picture of the stone that took the place of the ark of the covenant after the exile; while still others suppose that the Stone refers to a precious stone in the breastplate of the high priest. But according to scripture there can be no doubt that the Stone refers first to the cornerstone of the second temple, although not without more meaning. In addition to being the temple cornerstone, this Stone will be fashioned and made lovely and glorious, living and beautiful, by God's wonder of grace in order eternally to be the chief Cornerstone on which God's eternal house shall be built.

Surely scripture speaks of this Stone as being *laid*, and men only *lay* foundation stones. So this stone is a *foundation* stone. Still more, scripture says that the Lord already had laid this Stone in the presence of Joshua the high priest. And that language points to a past historical fact. By this time, according to Ezra 3, the foundation of the second temple already had been laid, truly by means of the builders but indeed as a work of the Lord.

Yet this Cornerstone will be glorious!

It will be a marvelous Stone—engraved with God's own

hand and having seven eyes. Therefore, in the prophetic sense this Stone is Christ, the chief Cornerstone of God's eternal house, which is his church. The Stone is God's tabernacle with men, his eternal covenant of friendship. Before this vision scripture already spoke about this Stone: It is "the stone which the builders refused," but which is "become the head stone of the corner" (Ps. 118:22); at the same time, it is "a stone of stumbling" and "a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel" (Isa. 8:14); it is the stone God lays "in Zion for a foundation…a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" (Isa. 28:16).

The New Testament indicates that the stone certainly is Christ.

Christ asks the Pharisees in Matthew 21:42, "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?"

In Romans 9:32–33 Paul says about the unbelieving Israelites, "They stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

And Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:6–8,

> 6. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.
> 7. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,
> 8. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

The stone laid by the Lord before the face of Joshua the high priest as the foundation stone of the second temple will have its eternal realization in *the* chief Cornerstone of God's eternal tabernacle.

Then that Stone will have seven eyes!

The eye is a symbol of light, of true knowledge, and thus of life. The eye is a symbol of physical light: The eye is the candle of the body by which the whole body is enlightened. By means of the eye, we take in the world around us. The eye is a symbol also of natural light, the light of reason and understanding by which we perceive and understand natural things. And the eye is a symbol of spiritual light—the true, spiritual knowledge of the love of God, the eternal life of God's covenant of friendship by which we enter into the mysteries of God's salvation. This full, rich, eternal life of God's covenant is meant here.

In the Stone are seven eyes. Seven is the symbol of the perfection of God's work, of his eternal kingdom, of the eternal Sabbath, the rest that is the reward after six days of struggle, the rest that remains for the people of God. It is this as six plus one. But it is also the sum of three and four, God and the creation, and as such the number seven is the symbol of the fellowship of God's eternal covenant—the true, eternal, perfect, heavenly life!

That life is in this Stone!

For as it stands here—with seven eyes *on* this Stone—the meaning is that the eyes belong to and are in the Stone. They are the eyes of the Stone. Some commentators insist that the expression "upon one stone" must mean that seven eyes are focused *on* the Stone, staring at it. But, first, the Hebrew preposition used here must mean that these eyes belong to the Stone. Second, it must be remembered that in Revelation 5:6, the Lamb who stands as having been slain has seven eyes.

The Stone is thus the living Christ, the Word become flesh, who was dead and is raised in glory, who is exalted and enthroned at the right hand of the Father, who has received the Spirit, and who is become the quickening Spirit…

He is the living cornerstone of God's living temple!

He is become the head of the corner!

Radiating throughout the whole temple, the perfect life of God!

Wonderful Stone!

God lays this Stone!

He lays it before the face of Joshua.

And God will continue to lay it, making it perfect, engraving it with his own hand until it is wholly perfect.

And God does this by the Branch, his servant, whom he will bring forth.

The prophet knew of this Branch, and so did Joshua the high priest. All the faithful in Israel hoped for the coming of the Branch. Already prior to the exile, the prophets spoke concerning him.

We read in Jeremiah 23:5–6:

> 5. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.
> 6. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

And again: "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land" (Jer. 33:15).

In Isaiah 11:1–2 we read,

> 1. There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:
> 2. And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

And Isaiah says, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (53:2).

It is precisely this fact that he was prophesied to be a Branch—a sprout—that would spring up out of the dry ground that was for the people of that day a rich comfort when there was almost nothing left of the glory of David.

It appeared appallingly dark!

The fulfillment of the promise seemed nearly impossible!

But the prophecy so clearly sounded: A branch, a root out of dry ground, a sprout out of the hewn-down trunk, the Branch of David, the Lord our righteousness, certainly will come!

Through him will this beautiful Stone be laid at the head of the corner of God's living temple. And he himself is also the Stone. Surely he is the servant of the Lord, the friend of God par excellence, God's coworker in the building of God's house; and God's house is built in him and on him!

God lays this Stone and makes it beautiful; and in the laying and glorifying of this Stone, the Stone himself labors!

Such is it in God's eternal counsel! The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—ordained the Son as head, surety, and mediator, as friend-servant of Jehovah in order to build God's house and that he be the chief cornerstone on whom the whole building will be constructed, and who himself will build it in the name of the Lord!

So it is in time!

Jehovah makes the Stone beautiful and glorious, and that through the work of his Servant. Jehovah does this by the wonder of wonders, the in-fleshing of the Word of God, because the Father sends the Son, and the Son takes on human flesh and blood by the Spirit! The Son does this at the cross because God lays on him all our iniquities and pours out the vials of his righteous anger upon him at the terrible cross; and the Servant of the Lord in obedient love toward God willingly enters into death; according to God's will he seeks hell, descends to its very depths, and there in hell still he says, "It is my meat to do the will of my Father!"

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself!

And the works go forward!

The good pleasure of the Lord prospers in the hands of the Servant of the Lord!

God engraves this Stone until it is wholly beautiful!

For he is raised in glory! The weakness of the flesh makes way for the power of the Spirit. The likeness of sinful flesh is exchanged for the glorious image of the heavenly. The mortal must put on immortality! The corruptible must put on incorruption!

And God continues to engrave upon the Stone!

For he is taken up to the highest heaven; he is exalted above all power and might and glory and every name that is named in this world and in that which is to come…

And the Stone becomes the quickening Spirit!

And the Stone will return in the Spirit and be laid at the head of the corner!

The Stone with seven eyes!

It has happened! And we look forward to his final revelation in glory!

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

Be at peace, Joshua and you, his fellow priests!

Do not waver in doubt about the royal and elegant clothes with which God clothed you in the vision. Wear them!

The judgment can very well stand!

For you are signs and wonders of God, signs of the Branch, of the Servant of the Lord, whom the Lord will bring forth. For by him the Lord will work a wonder: He will make perfect the Stone with seven eyes.

Wear with confidence your royal garments, O high priest!

Do not take off the fair miter!

Believe and be assured that the Lord has rebuked Satan in the judgment and that you are justified. Oh, this beauty and glory, this perfection and righteousness, are not of you but of the Stone with seven eyes, and you possess them only as signs and wonders of God.

Serve confidently in your office, you, Joshua, and your fellow priests!

You may keep the charge of the Lord to judge his house, to keep his courts, for you are in fact pious priests who walk in the ways of the Lord and faithfully keep watch over his house. For the ungodly have no part in this, have no peace, God says, either in this beautiful vision or in the rich promises. But remember, you serve only as signs of the wonder of the Branch, signs before all the people of the wonder of grace, the Stone with seven eyes.

Until he comes!

Then you may stop being signs!

For the reality has come, both of God's house and of the Stone, and of the high priesthood and of God's eternal covenant of friendship! Then you will partake of the glory of this Stone, not as mere signs but as reflections and examples of his grace. His beauty eternally will be your beauty, his righteousness your righteousness, and his life your life. For he will give you places to walk "among those who stand here"—that is, among the angels who have taken off your filthy garments—a place in the sanctuary of God's eternal house, the heavenly fellowship and friendship of God's covenant.

In one day, indeed, all unrighteousness is removed!

And eternal peace descends on the land, so that everyone invites his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree.

The life of the seven-eyed Stone radiates throughout the whole new creation!

The tabernacle of God is with men!

Oh, eternal peace!

—Herman Hoeksema

By the time this issue is in your hands, there should be signs that spring is pushing away winter. The hyacinths and crocuses should begin to poke out of the ground as the sun returns to its strength and melts away the snow.

The coming of spring is a reminder of the resurrection, when life sprang out of death through our Lord, who brought to light life and immortality! And spring reminds us of that lovely call of our Beloved to us in the spring of life:

> My beloved spake, and said unto me,
> Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
> For, lo, the winter is past,
> The rain is over and gone;
> The flowers appear on the earth;
> The time of the singing of birds is come,
> And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
> The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,
> And the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.
> Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.
> (Song of Sol. 2:10–13)

Yes, Christ brought spring for us through his resurrection, and he will come shortly to take us away out of this sin-cursed and wicked world.

In this issue is another translated meditation from Rev. Herman Hoeksema's series of meditations on the prophecy of Zechariah. Hoeksema penned the meditations in the late 1930s and early 1940s in *The Standard Bearer*, and we are privileged to translate and print them in our magazine. We hope that the reader profits from them as much as the translator has. The meditations represent Hoeksema at his exegetical best. Zechariah is a difficult book to understand. Hoeksema is our guide, and we gladly follow him.

Reverend Pascual begins a series on Reverend Hoeksema's covenant conception. Hoeksema more than anything else was a theologian of God's covenant. He took the Reformed tradition on the covenant, critiqued it, corrected it, and brought the truth of the covenant to a higher state of development. We are the heirs of this invaluable work by our spiritual father. We love him for this and are thankful for the insights that the Spirit of Christ gave to Hoeksema as he led the church into all the truth regarding the covenant.

The covenant of God lies at the heart of the reformation that led to the publication of *Sword and Shield* and eventually to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. It was the corruption of the truth of the unconditionality of the covenant, especially in the experience of the covenant in the daily life of the believer, that was the issue that led to our reformation. Without using the word *condition*, and indeed, denying that they teach such a thing, the Protestant Reformed ministers, elders, and theologians teach conditionality and contingency in the covenant especially in the form that the believer's forgiveness is contingent upon his act of faith and his act of repentance. So we are interested in what Hoeksema said about the covenant. If he erred in some respect, we will critique and correct it. He would not mind. Where he speaks the truth, we follow him and hopefully—the Spirit guiding and God being gracious—the truth of the covenant will be brought to a higher state of development. I believe that one area that already has been developed is the realization of the inseparable connection between the truth of justification by faith alone and the unconditionality of the covenant. Justification by faith alone is the hinge on which the truth of the unconditional covenant turns. If one corrupts in any respect the truth of justification by faith alone—as the Protestant Reformed denomination does with her doctrine of conditional forgiveness and active faith—then one no longer can claim to teach an unconditional covenant. By this test, then, that denomination does not teach an unconditional covenant, which also explains all her cozy relationships with Reformed churches that have long ago corrupted the unconditionality of the covenant.

In *Understanding the Times* Reverend Ophoff publishes the first half of a lecture given on behalf of the evangelism committee of First Reformed Protestant Church. The lecture proves once again that the Protestant Reformed Churches are a false church and that it was necessary for God to reform his church.

James Jansma in the *Running Footmen* rubric demonstrates how Prof. Brian Huizinga teaches the readership of *The Standard Bearer* to measure by degrees their spiritual walks in this life. Don't slip, or down, down, down you will fall!

The editor continues his series on the end of all things. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand! The Christian must know the time, for the clock of history is in its last hour, and Christ comes quickly.

May the Lord bless the issue in the reading of it.

—NJL

THE END OF ALL THINGS (2): THE IDEA OF THE SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING

Knowing the Time

I took a brief break from the series that I intend to write on the end of all things. To that series I now return. The end of all things is the subject of the section in theology known as eschatology. *Eschatology* means the study of the last things. Those last things are all the events that must happen in the new dispensation after the ascension of Christ as they are ordained by God to culminate in the appearance of Christ, the final judgment, and the coming of the everlasting age in the new heaven and new earth.

I began this series on eschatology by examining the calling of the whole church and the individual Christian to know the time. This is the concern of the apostle Paul in Romans 13:11–12:

> 11. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.
> 12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

The Christian must know the time in the sense that from his own time and place in the history of the unfolding of God's counsel he understands what time it is on the clock of history. Time rushes forward to the coming of the end. Nothing stands still. All creation and every creature—whether willing or not—are working according to the power of God's counsel for the coming of that end.

Our salvation is nearer than when we believed!

The night is far spent!

The day is at hand!

Some say that when the apostle Paul wrote those words, he labored under the misunderstanding that Christ would come in Paul's own day. But that is impossible. For the apostle writes later of the expectation of his own death and that he would through death be with Christ (Phil. 1:20–25). Paul writes to the Thessalonians, who thought that Christ could come at any moment, that the day of the Lord cannot come at any moment, but first there must "come a falling away," and there must be the revelation of the "man of sin," "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3).

Rather, the apostle is speaking of the advance of Christ and his kingdom in the new dispensation as Christ comes at every moment and in every event. It is not true that Christ will *merely* come at some future point in time. The whole new dispensation and all its events are but the footsteps of the coming Christ. For the creation as a whole, Christ is always coming, and always he comes nearer. When he comes for our salvation, then he comes nearer. There is also a personal application for the child of God of the truth that his salvation is nearer than when he believed, for the day of the Lord for the believer will be at the moment of his death, and surely every Christian can say, "I fly away quickly!" His day, the day of his death, and so the day of the perfection of his salvation, comes quickly and is nearer now than yesterday.

Yet it is especially with a view to the completion of the whole purpose of God in Christ with his church, kingdom, and covenant that the apostle says that our salvation is nearer than when we first believed and that the night is far spent and the day is at hand.

The day is at hand! The entire new dispensation is the last hour of night before the rising of "the Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

As far as scripture is concerned, then, the rest of the new dispensation has been night with the Dawn at hand. The night is far spent. The day is at hand. With the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Christ, we have come to the very threshold of Day.

This means, then, that for the Christian the main

character of this present time is yet night. It is night because the present state of the world is still sinful, groaning and travailing under the curse, and characterized by death. This night the Christian also carries around with him in his nature, so that he must say about himself, "I am carnal and sold under sin." He is not carnal in the sense of the man of the world. The things of God are no longer foolishness to him. He delights in the law of God after the inward man. But his condition yet is that he has his old flesh and in his members the law of sin still operates and takes him captive, so that the good that he would, he does not do, and the evil that he would not, that he does. He too groans within himself, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of his body. The Spirit who is in the Christian also groans, with groanings that cannot be uttered, in that perfect intercession for the Christian's perfection in heaven.

Yet it is not all night. The day is at hand. In the dimness of the early light of the dawn, the Christian lives by faith and not by sight. He sees through a glass darkly the coming glory of the kingdom of Christ. The Christian does not yet know as he is known. He sees only in the light of scripture, which indeed means that he has "a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." In hope he looks forward to that time when "the day dawn[s], and the day star arise[s] in your hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19). He does not yet see face to face and with his eyes behold the majesty of Christ and the glory of his kingdom, but by faith the Christian lives in hope of that coming glory.

The day is at hand! The entire new dispensation is the last hour of night before the rising of "the Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

The Christian, then, must know the time. He must know that now the clock of history is in its last hour. The coming of Christ is quick. Oh yes, it seems that Christ delays, but he does not. He is working speedily all things that must happen according to God's counsel in order to appear in his time on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Christ comes with irresistible power. Like the labor of a pregnant woman that has begun and cannot be stopped, so the coming of Christ is begun and cannot be stopped. The church in the new dispensation lives in the hope of the consummation of all things. The church in the old dispensation saw the coming of Christ as a single event, a mingling in her vision of the first and second comings of Christ, seeing at once both his humiliation and his future glory. Now we understand that Christ's coming has two great parts to it: his coming in his humiliation and his coming in his exaltation; his coming to confirm God's covenant and his coming to perfect God's covenant. In the first coming Christ entered into our night to bring the clock of history forward to its last hour. In the second coming he will arise in all his glory as the day to chase away forever the night that came on the world in Adam, and the time will come for the creation when "there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). In John's vision of the holy city, the perfected church

> 21. had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.
> 22. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.
> 23. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. (Rev. 21:23–25)

And now it is the last hour!

This the Christian must know!

The Signs and Their Relationship to Christ's Coming

It is with a view to the Christian's knowledge of the time, then, that in eschatology we speak colloquially of *the signs of times*. If the Christian must know where on the clock of God the hands are pointing so that he can as it were read that clock, then there must be indicators of what time it is. It is these indicators that are the focus in this article.

In theology we call those indicators of the nearness of the end the precursory signs. The word *precursory* is akin to the word *forerunner*. A *forerunner* is one who precedes the coming of another and announces that the other will arrive shortly. This is also the idea of the word *precursory*. The *precursory signs* are, then, those events in the realm of creation, society, and the church that indicate that the coming of Christ is near and approaches quickly.

After Christ had prophesied to the disciples of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, they asked him about these signs. So we read in Matthew 24:1–3:

> 1. Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.
> 2. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.
> 3. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

The disciples correctly connected Christ's teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem to the end of the world and the coming of Christ. In the destruction of Jerusalem, there is a kind of type of the end of the world, especially in the aspect that the world power puts out of existence the false church and makes the true church the target of its persecution. The end of Jerusalem was also the definitive end of the economy of the old dispensation. That there would no longer be a temple meant that the keeping of the Old Testament laws was impossible even for the false church of Jesus' day and that the observation of those laws denied that Jesus is the Christ. The disciples correctly saw that with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the economy of the old dispensation that the last hour had come on the world and with it the revelation of Christ in his glory. So the disciples asked concerning the signs. Christ responded by teaching the disciples about the signs of his coming and of the end of the world under the type of the destruction of Jerusalem. These verses in Matthew 24 are then basic to understanding those signs, what they are and what their purpose is.

A proper understanding of the *relationship* between the precursory signs and the coming of Christ is basic to a proper understanding of the signs. The relationship between the signs of Christ's coming and the coming of Christ itself is not merely that there are events that happen to occur in creation, society, and the church that incidentally remind the church that Christ is coming. So the relationship between the signs and Christ's coming is not like the relationship between the timer that you set and the cake that you put into the oven. When the timer goes off, it reminds you to take the cake out of the oven. But there is no essential connection between the timer and the baking cake.

Rather, the relationship between the precursory signs and the coming of Christ is more akin to signs of a thunderstorm and the arrival of that storm. The coming storm has its signs: the lowered barometric pressure, the rising humidity, the ominous cloud formations, the lightning show in the cloud bank, the rumble of thunder, the sudden calm, the blast of wind as the storm's front moves toward you, and then the storm itself breaks over you. The relationship between that storm and its signs is that the storm itself creates its own signs. In a sense the storm is its signs, and the storm itself comes in those signs. In this way also the coming of Christ creates the precursory signs. The coming of Christ happens in those signs and is really indistinguishable from those signs. For instance when there is a massive disaster, then it is not merely the case that the disaster reminds us that Christ will come, but in that disaster Christ has come. Or, to use another analogy, the huge iron ore freighter moving through the water creates a massive bow wave in front of it, and so the massive event of the coming of Christ pushes before itself and creates the bow wave of the precursory signs.

The lordly and controlling figure in all eschatology is Jesus Christ. His coming is the central event of all history, and this is true also of the history of the new dispensation. The central reality of all that history is simply the coming of Jesus Christ. This is what Christ meant when he said, "Behold, I come quickly." The meaning is not that he will quickly come in the sense that in the future he will soon appear on the clouds of heaven to judge the quick and the dead. The meaning, rather, is that Christ is coming throughout all the history of the new dispensation, and his coming creates all that history. Christ as it were strides through history like a gigantic storm sweeps across the Great Plains of the American Midwest, or as a great ship the coming of Christ pushes before him the bow wave of the history of the new dispensation.

The purpose of these signs then is for the church. They are not for the world.

Christ dominates and controls all history according to God's counsel. Christ is first in that counsel, and all things were created in that counsel by him and for him, and all those things serve him and the salvation of his church and the manifestation of that counsel in the eternal kingdom of God. This controlling power that Christ has in all history is in part what the apostle has in view in Romans 8:28, where he says that "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The "good" is God's glory in the finishing of his purpose in Christ. To this end all things work. It is not that all things consciously and willingly work for this good purpose. The brute creation does not know that it is working for this purpose, but it is. The devil, the ungodly world, and the false church in their persecution and affliction of God's people are consciously seeking to destroy this good purpose of God, but by the power of God's sovereign counsel, they are in fact working for good to those who love God and are the called according to his purpose. So the meaning is that the entire universe and all that is in it and all that occurs in the universe are according to God's counsel—by the active and sovereign governance of God—working together for good, which is nothing less than the coming of Christ and the perfect revelation and manifestation of God's eternal kingdom and covenant.

The Purpose of the Signs

What distinguishes these signs then from the rest of the events of the new dispensation? According to the description of the history of the new dispensation, all history is in reality an effect of the coming of Christ. So what makes these signs stand out? It is the character of these signs themselves as they interrupt what becomes for man an ordinary course of events. There is seedtime and harvest, the daily rising and setting of the sun, and the Christian goes about his day and begins to lose sight of his hope in the coming of Christ. And then an event startles him back to that central reality of his own life and of the whole universe that Christ is coming. The Christian hears the gospel preached for twenty years, and suddenly he hears the lie preached! He sees that generations hear and receive the same truth, and then he sees a generation that departs from the truth. He follows the weather and observes its rather ordinary patterns, and then a massive hurricane comes and devastation follows. It is not that these signs are any less or more connected to the coming of Christ than any other event in history, but only that they are designed by God to catch the attention of the church.

The purpose of these signs then is for the church. They are not for the world. The world, of course, can observe the signs, for they do not happen in a corner but before the whole world. But the reaction of the world is unbelief and to blaspheme the God of heaven. What John saw in his vision in Revelation of the pouring out of the vials of God's wrath upon the antichristian world power is true of the signs generally. John writes in Revelation 16:10–11,

> 10. The fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,
> 11. And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

From this viewpoint the coming of the Lord is as a thief in the night for the ungodly world. So the apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–4,

> 1. Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.
> 2. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.
> 3. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.
> 4. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Over against all God's judgments on the world and the false church, they assure themselves of peace and safety. They redouble their efforts to overcome the purpose of God and build for themselves a kingdom of man and of man's peace on the earth, and they set themselves more stubbornly to oppose the truth and the church of God. And sudden destruction comes on them.

But for the church it is not so. She observes the signs and knows the times and the seasons of the history of the world. Christ speaks of the purpose of these signs for the church in Luke 21:28–31:

> 28. When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.
> 29. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;
> 30. When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.
> 31. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

The reference of "these things" is to all the precursory signs of which Christ had just spoken. The purpose of these signs for the church is to take the church's focus from the earth and from her very limited and shortsighted goals and even her frequently carnal living and to lift her head up in expectation again of the grand and all-encompassing purpose of God in the coming of Christ. A wife whose husband must travel for work for a time can bury herself in the work of the home, and she almost forgets that he is gone. Then he calls her, and she is reminded of her desire that he return as soon as he can. So is the function of these signs. They are words to the church from her Lord; they call to the church to lay aside the sin that so easily besets her, to be sober, to shake off the sleepiness of the world, to turn from the deceitfulness of the things of this world, and to turn again to her hope and ardent expectation in the coming of Christ.

When we begin to examine the question of which are these signs, then we must immediately recognize that there is one central and controlling sign that takes place throughout the history of the new dispensation. That sign is the worldwide preaching of the gospel. That the preaching of the gospel is the central and controlling sign is the meaning of the appearance of the white horse, running first out of the book with seven seals that Christ opens:

> 1. I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

2. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. (Rev. 6:1–2)

The white horse appears first not in the sense of a temporal order, but in the sense of the primacy of that horse and his rider in all history. That horse represents the running of the gospel throughout history. The central and controlling place of the preaching of the gospel among the signs of the end is also the meaning of Christ when in his discourse on the precursory signs he says, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). The meaning is that until the gospel is preached in the whole world, the end and all that comes with that end cannot come. The dominant position that the preaching of the gospel has among the precursory signs is also the implication of the apostle's teaching about apostasy in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." The Thessalonian Christians had mistaken or misused the apostle's teaching about the quickness of Christ's coming in 1 Thessalonians to mean that Christ could come at any moment. The apostle wrote 2 Thessalonians to put that false idea to rest. In chapter 2 he says that the day of Christ cannot come except there come a falling away first. This falling away is the massive apostasy that fuels the rise of antichrist, who is the man of sin, the son of perdition. Christ cannot come until apostasy comes. But apostasy cannot come unless the gospel has first come. Apostasy is always a parasite of the gospel. The implication is that the day of Christ does not happen until the gospel has gone everywhere that God determined that it would go. In this light then the greatest event that happens throughout the history of the new dispensation is the pure preaching of the gospel, and that preaching has a universal and controlling power. In every sermon Christ draws near to his church, and with every sermon he hastens the day of his coming.

Other precursory signs are mentioned by Christ and by the apostles. Christ in Matthew 24 and in Luke 21 gives a rather extensive exemplary list of the precursory signs. Second Thessalonians 2 focuses on the two great signs of apostasy and the personal antichrist. The book of Revelation is full of descriptions of the precursory signs. It is to these other signs that I will turn next time and to the question of how these signs indicate where the world is in the calendar of history.

—NJL

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

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

GOD'S WORK OF REFORMATION (1)

Opening Remarks

Good evening. On behalf of the evangelism committee of First Reformed Protestant Church, we thank you for joining us tonight, whether that be those who are in attendance or those who may be listening online.[1] We are thankful to God that we are able to celebrate the five-year anniversary of God's reformation of his church here in this place. Our prayer is that God will use tonight to further the gospel and to draw his people out of the false church and into the true church of God.

All must confess that the reformation of the church is not the work of any man or group of men. It is God's

1 The opening remarks and the following article were given as part of a lecture on behalf of the evangelism committee of First Reformed Protestant Church on January 30, 2026. The article has been edited and split into two parts for publication. The original lecture can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPQ9ndtlo6s&t=3s.

work. Five years ago, God did a wonder. He pulled his people out of the false church to start a new church and also a new denomination. A new church where the pure gospel is preached in all of its glory and power, where the unconditional covenant was reclaimed, and where the full, free, and complete salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ alone is proclaimed each and every Sabbath day.

As we think back on the last five years, we may think of all the losses that we suffered for Christ's sake: the loss of family, the loss of friends and loved ones. But with all those losses, we gained Christ and his truth. We gained the comfort of the gospel that all our sins have been forgiven in eternity and that we stand righteous before God. We are thankful to God for his truth that he has given to us. Our prayer is that God will preserve us in this truth.

Our speaker tonight is Rev. Tyler Ophoff. He was a faithful officebearer at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church when the *Act of Separation* was adopted and signed on January 19, 2021. He studied in the Reformed Protestant seminary, and he is currently serving in his first pastorate at First Reformed Protestant Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Scripture Reading from Judges 2:6–23

Opening Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, we come to thee this evening in praise and thankfulness—praise and thankfulness for who thou art and what thou hast done for us. We praise thee, for thou art our king, and thou hast made us citizens of thy kingdom. Thou art our king who dost lead and protect us. Thou dost lead us in truth and in righteousness. Thou dost protect us from all our enemies. We praise thee and are thankful unto thee for what thou hast done here in this place. Thou in thy infinite wisdom and love for thy people hast reformed thy church. Thou hast pulled us out of the false doctrine where man is king and set us in the truth where thou art king. Thou hast convicted us, and we confess that our salvation has been accomplished by our savior, Jesus Christ, and we have nothing left to accomplish of ourselves, nor could we. We stand righteous before thee and have an inheritance in thy kingdom. What a glorious gift thou hast given to thy church, a gift that is given in thy love and all by thy grace.

We are thankful for the opportunity this evening to reflect on the great wonder that thou hast worked, a wonder that we actually experienced here in this place, a wonder where thou didst form a new church, a new denomination of churches, and new schools. Thou hast given us faithful ministers, and Sabbath after Sabbath they bring us thy truth. We confess, Lord, except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain. We pray, O Lord, that thou will be pleased to preserve us in thy truth and that the good news of Jesus Christ may be proclaimed from our pulpit with all its power and glory week after week.

Be with us now tonight, and we beseech thee that according to thy will thou wilt use this night to draw thy people out of the darkness into thy marvelous light. Thou, O God, hath built the walls of Zion as a sure defense against our enemies. Preserve us by those walls and the watchmen that thou hast set on those walls. Bow down thy ear and hear our prayer in mercy and forgive us of our sins for Jesus' sake. Amen.

— Jim Geerlings

Introduction

Judges 2:6–23 is a kind of summary of the entire three-hundred-fifty-year period of the judges. The people of Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and the elders who had seen all God's mighty works in Israel. Then Joshua and the elders died, and "there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (v. 10). A new generation of Israelites arose who forsook the Lord God of their fathers. The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord and followed after and served the idol. According to Judges 21:25 the history of the nation of Israel before each judge was characterized by this: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." We could say it this way: "Every man believed that which was right in his own eyes and therefore did what his wretched heart desired." Man's actions are the fruit of his wicked and depraved heart. That every man did that which was right in his own eyes was the fruit of hearts that had turned away from the truth. The Israelites had forgotten the mighty works of the Lord that he had demonstrated in leading them out of Egypt and into the land of promise. Central to all those works was the gospel of Israel's salvation. Thus the central significance is that the Israelites had forgotten the gospel and went and served the idol.

The nations that surrounded Israel became a thorn to the nation. The gods of the heathen nations were a snare to Israel. Then the Lord raised up judges to deliver the Israelites out of the hands of those who spoiled them. The right of the deliverance of the Israelites was God's gracious justification of elect Israel. The Israelites' deliverance was not because of, on the ground of, or in the way of their repentance and turning to God. They deserved only to be destroyed and oppressed by their enemies. But God raised up judges to deliver Israel and came upon the judges in the Spirit. We read that the Lord was with the judges (2:18). And he delivered the Israelites out of the hand of their enemies all the days of each judge.

The work of the judges was typical of the work of Christ. Each judge brought out some aspect of Christ's work. The heart of the work of the judges was justice and righteousness. The judges came as deliverers, and their work pointed to Christ, the redeemer and savior of chosen Israel. The Old Testament types were shadowy revelations of Jesus Christ and his salvation.

For a time, while each judge lived, the Israelites served the Lord; but when the judge died, again a generation arose that knew not the Lord, and men did that which was right in their own eyes. And so the cycle continued again and again. There was a period where the Israelites served the Lord, a period of apostasy from the truth, and a period of reformation in Israel.

The gospel is the good news of Christ in his person, natures, words, and works. The gospel is the finished work of Christ. The gospel is that salvation is finished in him!

The cycle of events during the time of the judges brings out this point: The faithfulness of God to his covenant. God is constantly and unchangeably faithful to his covenant. He never goes back on his word but immutably wills to take his people into his own covenant life. That God did not utterly destroy Israel at that point in her history is astounding. God's notice of the sin of Israel was that "this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice" (Judges 2:20). The people possessed the land of promise. Each tribe had gone in to possess the land God had given to them. And they forgot the Lord and the works he had wrought whereby he delivered them with an outstretched arm and a mighty hand. It is nothing less than God's grace, his eternal attitude of favor toward his elect people in Christ, that God will not and did not go back on his promise. Those in his covenant are of themselves treacherous and unfaithful to his covenant, yet God in his eternal favor delivers and saves an ungrateful and rebellious people.

Why bring up the history of the judges in connection with a lecture on God's work of reformation? The reason is that the history of this sad and terrible period of the judges is repeated in the new dispensation. Throughout church history there has been the ever-repeating cycle of serving the Lord in truth, apostasy from the truth, and God's work of reformation. The history of the judges powerfully illustrates for us that truth. Take any period of the church in the new dispensation, and you can fit it perfectly into the book of Judges. During the Reformation of Martin Luther and the great Synod of Dordt, the Roman Catholic Church no longer served the Lord, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes. God raised up men through whom Christ operated by his Spirit to reform his church from the gross apostasy of Rome. During that period of reformation, God not only returned his church to the truth, but he also gave an advance in the understanding of the truth. Then a new generation arose that knew not the Lord; and two hundred years after 1618–19, God reformed his church again in 1834 with the *Afscheiding*. Then God reformed his church in 1857, when the Christian Reformed Church separated from the Reformed Church of America; in 1924 with the Protestant Reformed Churches; and finally in 2021.

God's work of reformation in the year 2021 was no new phenomenon in the church. What happened in 2021 and the years leading up to it was precisely the fulfillment of the teaching of the Holy Spirit in Judges. In the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), a generation arose that knew not the gospel and the mighty works of the Lord. That was me. That was you. We were that generation. We believed and did that which was right in our own eyes. It was not that the generations after us would go lost, but *we* were the generation that had already gone lost. We forgot the gospel of Jesus Christ. We forgot the mighty works of the Lord God. The greatest wonder of the Lord to which all the wonders of God in the Old Testament pointed was Jesus Christ and his person, natures, words, and works. The great wonder of God was the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. And in the PRC we had forgotten that mighty wonder of God in leading us out of bondage and into the land of promise through Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation.

No church or denomination is immune from apostasy. The PRC is not immune. The Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) are not immune. For forty years or more in the PRC, men believed and did what was right in their own eyes. Men forgot what had made the PRC so beautiful and lovely: God was in the midst of her by his Spirit and Word. God gave to the PRC the gospel! The gospel is not what man must do, following Christ or living a good life for Christ. But the gospel is the good news of the promise. The gospel is the good news of Christ in his person, natures, words, and works. The gospel is the finished work of Christ. The gospel is that salvation is finished in him! The gospel is that Christ fulfilled perfectly all the

obedience to the law and love for God that he requires of you. The gospel is that God justifies ungodly sinners by faith alone and not by their works of obedience. By that gospel God himself delivers his people. He pulls them out of the teeth of their oppressor. God cuts a hole in the net that they might escape from the terrible, soul-crushing doctrine of salvation by the works of man.

Its Necessity

God's work of reformation was necessary. Every necessity finds its answer ultimately in the eternal being and counsel of God. Throughout Judges 2 the name that God reveals to Israel is Jehovah, the I AM THAT I AM. He is the eternal and unchanging God of his covenant. His creatures exist from moment to moment, but God *is*. He never wanes in power. He never changes his mind. He never grows old or tires. He is eternal and infinite activity. He loves and is loved. He glories and is glorified in himself. As the I AM, he is never without his eternal counsel. From the view of God, the events of 2021 were the unfolding of his perfect and all-wise plan for the glory of his name. He determined, purposed, and carried out all the details. Nothing great or small stood apart from his eternal will. Nothing took him by surprise. He prepared all the world for the wonder he was about to perform. He sent a germ that brought the world to its knees to serve his church in 2020. He formed a magazine that would serve as the midwife for the birth of a denomination. All the sin, opposition, and ungodly actions of men, he too determined as that which he hates but which would serve a good purpose, the glory of his name and the salvation of his church.

I do not exaggerate when I say that the reformation of 2021 belongs to that category of wonders and works that God did for Israel in the Old Testament. We do not often think that way. God struck down Pharaoh and Egypt with the ten plagues for you. God parted the Red Sea for you. God fed you in the wilderness. God took you into heaven. What he did in 2021 was no less a wonder because grace always works wonders and does the impossible. The power of God operating in 2021 and beyond was God's grace. That is why I say that 2021 was a wonder. It was a wonder that God saved any of us alive at all. Of that generation that arose that knew not the works of the Lord, he had some whom he was determined to save. These would not perish in their sin and unbelief. God gave to them the gospel.

That the gospel might have free course, on Tuesday, January 19, 2021, God carried out his work of reforming his church anew. Five officebearers from Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church drafted and signed a three-page document that was distributed throughout the Protestant Reformed denomination, calling members of the PRC to flee from the coming destruction by departing from that unfaithful and apostate denomination. On Thursday, January 21, 2021, was the official organization of what became First Reformed Protestant Church. January 21, 2026, marked the five-year anniversary of that mighty work of God's hands. The document that marked the beginning of the reformation of 2021 was called the *Act of Separation.*[1] This document has endured the test of time as only the word of God rightly explained and applied is able. The *Act* stands as a constant rebuke and testimony against the PRC for her departure from the word of God. The document stands as a witness against the PRC's ministers, elders, deacons, and members.

The most important part of the entire document is found in the first paragraph. All the other reasons given in the document for separation fall squarely under this one point—the PRC had become apostate and departed from the truth according to Belgic Confession article 29. That was the damning indictment of the *Act*: The PRC is a false church. The word of God there was no longer central and controlling, but the words and wisdom of men were. Does the word of God rule in the church? Or do the words and wills of men rule? All the marks of the true church stand or fall on that one central idea. Is the word of God preached faithfully, the sacraments administered according to the word, and Christian discipline applied in harmony with that word? Or is the word of man preached, administered, and is that according to which discipline is applied? The *Act* boldly and rightly declared that the PRC had departed from the word of God and is an apostate church, no different in principle than Rome. For any church that departs from the word of God, our evaluation and judgment is no different: That church has become Rome. The true church and the false church are "easily known and distinguished from each other" (Belgic Confession 29, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 64). Here is the beginning of the *Act*:

> "And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore, all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join

1 "Act of Separation," in Andrew Lanning, "Reformed Protestant Churches," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 3 (July 2021): 12–13.

themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God."—Confession of Faith, Article 28

"We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church."—Confession of Faith, Article 29

With astonishment and grief, we have observed the apostatizing of the Protestant Reformed Churches by the denomination's corrupting the marks of the true church and manifesting the marks of the false church, as those marks are set forth in our Confession of Faith, Article 29. The glorious gospel of salvation by God's grace alone has not been preached purely but has been polluted with the filth of conditional theology, while the defense of the pure gospel of sovereign grace has been declared to be schismatic and sinful. False doctrines and errors multiply exceedingly through heretical writings. Church discipline has not been exercised faithfully, especially in the punishment of false doctrine. Teachers and defenders of error are exonerated and protected by the church, while discipline is wrongly applied against faithful watchmen. The denomination zealously guards the empty honor of men but allows the majesty of Jehovah and his truth to be trampled underfoot by the idolatry, false worship, and blasphemy of false doctrine in God's house. The sacraments cannot be administered purely as Christ has appointed in his Word but have been stolen away from Christ's sheep who cannot affirm their unity with an apostatizing congregation and denomination. The Word of God as the rule according to which all things are to be managed in the church has been ignored and disdained, and the will of men prevails. The Church Order and the biblical principles of Reformed church government have not been applied faithfully or righteously but have been ignored, applied only selectively and unevenly, and twisted by the earthly wisdom of men. The church ascribes more power and authority to the ordinances of her ecclesiastical decisions than to the Word of God. She turns to man for wisdom and relies more upon him than upon Christ. She will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ in the reproofs and rebukes of his Word. She slanders and reviles those who love the truth and confess it, hate the lie and repudiate it, rebuke her for her errors, and live holily according to the Word of God. "And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment" (Isa. 59:14–15).

The denomination shrewdly retains the name of the church and a certain form of the church, deceiving the unwary. Nevertheless, she departs from the pure Word of God in her teaching and her government. Though she yet confesses Jesus Christ in name, by her deeds she does not acknowledge him to be the only Head of the church (Isa. 29:13).[2]

God put the entire Protestant Reformed denomination on trial in late 2020. He was not going to allow men to hide behind Synod 2018. The question put to Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and to the entire denomination was, "What are you going to do with the truth?" At Byron Center anytime justification by faith alone was preached off the pulpit, members of the congregation would issue out a collective groan: "We have to hear about justification again?" Mind you, this is the heart of the gospel. This is the doctrine that the Belgic Confession in article 23 calls the "happiness of man" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 51). Men and women did not want that preaching because it was controversial. It went directly against the teaching of ministers in the PRC at that time who were teaching and continued to teach justification by faith and in the way of man's activities. Unity Protestant Reformed Church separated from Byron Center over the preaching of justification by faith alone. That split was the first act of a whole series of rebellions against the word of God.

There were two sounds coming out of the denomination. The controversy was over justification by faith alone and covenant fellowship in the realm of man's experience. Either Christ was decisive in the realm of man's experience of salvation or man was decisive in the realm of man's experience. Either Christ is the way to the Father or Christ plus something is the way to the Father. Both doctrines could not stand together. Both doctrines could not remain in the PRC. The majority of the members of Byron Center wanted justification by faith and in the way of obedience. Most of the members of the denomination wanted the same thing. This came out in sermons and writings during that time. This came out in the clamor

2 "Act of Separation," 12.

for practical preaching at Byron Center. The people wanted to hear what man had to do and of man's responsibility and not of God's sovereignty in the salvation of the sinner. The word of God stood at the center of the controversy. The controversy was not about tone, manner, and personalities but about the truth of God's word. What will men do with the truth? What will you do with Christ? By the end of 2020, Byron Center deceitfully and craftily kicked the truth out and not long after, so did the denomination. They did so by suspending and deposing a minister of the gospel who had preached the truth and applied that truth in the PRC. A few months later, the denomination suspended another minister in another slight against Christ, as if God in heaven does not see or know. The PRC kicked Christ out of his own church and would not bow under the yoke of Jesus Christ.

You do not hear anyone in the PRC saying anymore, "You have not proved anything." It was never about proof. Unbelief does not need more instruction and evidence. Unbelieving man can be shown piles of proof, and he will never believe the truth.

After the *Act* was signed and distributed, an outcry of opposition began to form. One objection was that the *Act* did not prove its contentions. This objection by some in the PRC was incredulous and dubious. Sermons had been preached against the false doctrine of the PRC. Articles and responses were penned in *The Standard Bearer.* The PRC could not buy a big enough rug to bury everything that had been coming to her classical and synodical meetings. Protests had been batted away, many on legality. Many of those protests still sit unanswered today at the feet of Byron Center's consistory. Let the men who sit in that consistory room stand condemned by each unanswered protest. Eleven issues of *Sword and Shield* had been mailed to members of the PRC and others by the time the *Act* was signed, and many consistories told the members of their churches *not* to read the magazine. And members and ministers of the PRC actually had the gall to say, "You did not prove anything in the *Act*."

Now, five years later, after hundreds of sermons and hundreds of articles and numerous speeches, instead of saying "there is no proof," the denomination simply outright has rejected the truth and teaches a lie. You do not hear anyone in the PRC saying anymore, "You have not proved anything." It was never about proof. Unbelief does not need more instruction and evidence. Unbelieving man can be shown piles of proof, and he will never believe the truth. Man loves himself, and he does what is right in his own eyes. His heart is evil. He hates the Lord, and he hates God's word. The PRC has been shown her errors. The *Act* in its declarations has been shown to be true. The PRC has departed from the word of God and the faith of the church.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are apostate, and God's work of reformation was necessary. Shortly after the reformation in 2021, work was begun on a document called the *Annotations to the Act of Separation*, which was never completed. The value of the document is the pages of quotations that were gathered from sermons and writings throughout the denomination. Without having those quotations documented, they would fade away into obscurity. Every one of the quotations corrupts God's work alone in the salvation of sinners. I am going to quote some of the statements from Protestant Reformed ministers in their sermons and articles—some of the statements are well known and some lesser known—thereby demonstrating that the lie of salvation by man has cemented itself in the PRC.

Reverend Koole:

> In order to live in accordance with God's word, beloved, we must seek the grace that is available to us. I don't know how that strikes your ears. Grace available to us? Aren't we saved by grace? Yeah, you're saved by grace. But you and I better be seeking the grace that is available to us.[3]

This sermon, which was preached on nearly every—if not every—pulpit in the denomination, is a complete rejection of the doctrine of grace. I do not know of a grace that is available by my seeking it. That is an Arminian idea of grace. The grace of God is irresistible, efficacious, and particular. It is the grace that justifies ungodly sinners.

Professor Dykstra:

> He [God] takes them to the cross of Jesus Christ and causes them to behold what Christ has done

3 Kenneth Koole, "Manna Sent from Heaven," sermon preached in Pittsburgh Protestant Reformed Church on November 15, 2020, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/1115201615197252.

> and causes them to see the absolute need for confession of sin. In this way, this is the way the child will experience the favor of the Father, and this is the way he will experience the favor of his heavenly Father, the way of repentance, turning from sin, confessing sin.[4]

For Professor Dykstra the "way" of experiencing the Father's favor is not Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, but the "way" of repentance. God takes his people to the cross of Christ and causes them to see the need for…confession of sin? This is strange. God takes his people to the cross and shows them their beautiful savior and his perfect and complete work of salvation for them.

The now-defrocked Ronald Van Overloop:

> God's sovereignty. Man's responsibility. God's gifts and Christ's merits does not exclude God's use of means. Does not exclude God's gift of the use of the means of our obedience...And yet, God commanded. I performed a duty. Two rails. They go side by side. In the wisdom of God: His sovereignty, our responsibility. And it's all grace. And nothing but grace.[5]

Van Overloop preached this sermon at Grace Protestant Reformed Church. God and man enabled by grace, working together side by side in the covenant. God in his sovereignty plus man enabled to obey. Christ's merits and works plus man's obedience. God engraved this false doctrine in the PRC through the events that transpired surrounding the then-Reverend Van Overloop.

Reverend Slopsema:

> In fact, the more faithful the saints are to God's law in the grace of Jesus Christ, the more they prosper in the great blessings of the covenant. They prosper in their marriages, in their family life, and in their church life. Above all, they prosper in the enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship.[6]

Reverend Slopsema makes obedience to the law the way in which you have a good marriage, family, and church life. He never uses the word *condition*, but the message is clear. He gives the law a place and function that it does not have in the life of the child of God. The law only kills man. The law killed Israel in the Old Testament. The law pursued the Israelites all throughout Old Testament history until God simply wiped them out. The law completely destroyed national Israel. The law will do that for the PRC too. All her ministers' admonitions, exhortations, and law-preaching as the gospel will only ever destroy the people in the PRC. That is all the law can ever do! It condemns, curses, and pursues man down into hell. The law when it is strictly preached is not grace to the hearer, but it enrages the old man of sin. Still more, what a hopeless and comfortless doctrine to a struggling covenant family and a struggling church! The word of Reverend Slopsema is, "You had better get busy working if you want a better life." I cannot imagine coming to the home of a father and mother who has a wayward son or daughter and saying to them, "Well it wouldn't have happened if you had obeyed the law more."

Professor Cammenga:

> Although God works the assurance of faith under the preaching of his word, we are active in this whole matter of the assurance of faith. God does not drop assurance out of the sky on us and now we have it forever and it can never be taken away from us and we have nothing to worry about as regards this matter of the assurance of our faith... That's how we make our calling and election sure...What he [the apostle] is describing is a life lived in obedience to God's ten commandments. God uses that in order to confirm in us the assurance of our election and salvation.[7]

This is a complete rejection of faith as assurance. That faith is assurance is the teaching of Lord's Day 7. For Professor Cammenga, if you obey the law, you will gain the assurance of salvation. God uses a life of obedience to the ten commandments to confirm in the child of God his election and salvation. But in 2 Peter 1:10 "calling" is the calling of God in the gospel. That calling of God proceeds from election. In the pure preaching of the gospel, God speaks to his elect child and confirms in him his eternal election and the certainty of his salvation. God works faith in the elect child's heart, which is assurance. The child of God knows himself as elect and saved. God does not leave that up to you in any sense. If that were true, your calling, election, and salvation could never be sure. But assurance comes when God comes and speaks.

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4 Russell J. Dykstra, "A Father's Pity for His Children," sermon preached in Hope Protestant Reformed Church on June 24, 2018, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/715182134425.

5 Ronald Van Overloop, "Calling Toward the Canaanites," sermon preached in Grace Protestant Reformed Church on November 29, 2020. The sermon has been removed from SermonAudio.

6 James Slopsema, "Treasure in the House of the Righteous," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 2 (October 15, 2020): 28.

7 Ronald Cammenga, "Saving Faith as Assurance," sermon preached in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on March 14, 2021, https://www. sermonaudio.com/sermons/31421175035658.

Professor Cammenga again:

> This [that the Catechism calls Jesus the only savior] is what makes Jesus a controversial savior. The Catechism is not teaching here that Jesus accomplishes, himself personally, every aspect of the work of our salvation. He does not. There are other works alongside the work of Jesus. And those other works, on behalf of our salvation, are the works of the Holy Spirit. The work of sanctification.[8]

Professor Cammenga divides Christ and his Spirit. Christ did most of the work, but there are other works alongside the work of Jesus, and those belong to the Spirit. What Professor Cammenga misses entirely is that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, became the Spirit of the man, Jesus Christ, at his ascension. At that point Christ and his Spirit simply became synonymous. This is the importance of Acts 2:38–39: "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, for the promise is unto you…" How could the apostle say that the reception of the Holy Ghost is the reception of the promise? All throughout scripture the promise and promises are Jesus Christ. The apostle could say that because the Spirit brings only the perfect work of Christ. The PRC looks at the Holy Spirit as the enabler of man to gain something. But the apostle says that when you receive the Spirit, you have received the promise and all of salvation in your heart and life. The work of the Spirit of Christ is the application of the salvation of Christ in the heart and life of the elect child of God. The Spirit is the agent or worker of salvation. The Spirit brings Jesus Christ and all his riches and gifts to the elect child of God.

Professor Kuiper:

> Seeking the remission of sin and righteousness of Christ implies prayer, and then that becomes more explicit: "that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit." Now, I need more than the righteousness of Christ imputed to me—I need that, but I need more. I need grace, I need power, to begin anew to live according to the law of God. Don't be afraid at this point that if you seek grace to begin to obey God's law you will come to think that your obedience to God's law helped get you saved, helped you enter the kingdom. I say to you today, don't be afraid of that because even before praying for grace to obey the law of God, we saw the depth of the depravity of our nature, and we saw the remission of sins in Christ, and this comes third—not an unimportant third…but it came in the right order. Out of gratitude to God, I want to keep his law, and I pray for grace to do so.[9]

This quote has not received much attention. But Professor Cammenga is not the only one who teaches explicitly that Christ is not enough. Kuiper is an active professor in the Protestant Reformed seminary who is teaching a whole new generation of ministers this rotten filth. You need more than the righteousness of Christ. You need that, but you also need the grace of the Holy Spirit to live a life of obedience. Jesus Christ is not a complete savior. His death was not effectual to save. He might have redeemed you, but your renewal is by your Spirit-enabled works. God gives you grace and power to live according to the law. That is not the work of the Spirit! The Spirit is not the great enabler of man. The Spirit is the power of God to bring Christ to you in all his perfect work.

Reverend Bruinsma:

> Here is the truth: The regenerated believer is no longer totally depraved. Scripture reveals it...It is not Christ who does the good in us. We do good; we live in obedience to God's law because we are no longer totally depraved.[10]

There is the complete rejection of total depravity. Bruinsma tears down the bulwark of total depravity in the Reformed faith. Total depravity is a wall that stops man from trying to claim a part in salvation. If man is totally depraved, salvation stands absolutely outside his willing and running. If a man tears this bulwark down, he is up to no good. Bruinsma tears down the doctrine of total depravity in order to give man a place in salvation. If regenerated man is not totally depraved, he is able to do some good; and if he can do something good, then he can also do something for God. The believer always remains totally depraved even after regeneration. The "except" clause in Lord's Day 3 does not negate what it teaches about total depravity. The nature of the elect believer is not regenerated. His soul and body remain totally depraved. But in regeneration there is more to that child of God. His heart, the spiritual-ethical center of a man as he stands in relationship to God, is regenerated. But his nature always hates God and the neighbor. God in regeneration gives him a new heart, not an improved nature.

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8 Ronald Cammenga, "His Name is Jesus," sermon preached in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on May 2, 2021, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/5221181459852.

9 Douglas Kuiper, "Taught by Christ in the School of the Law: The Righteousness that God Requires," sermon preached in First Protestant Reformed Church on January 8, 2023, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/18231429485760.

10 Wilbur Bruinsma, "Error Exposed (2)," 3.

Reverend Bruinsma again:

> Jesus does teach us that by means of, by our words, by means of our words we will be justified. That is, by means of the words that we speak we will be declared righteous in that day of judgment.[11]

This is justification by works in the final judgment. For Reverend Bruinsma when you come into the judgment, your words will matter in God's declaring you righteous. This is a terrifying doctrine. The final judgment is not about what you say or what you have done, but it is about what God says about you, and that is that you are righteous for Christ's sake alone. It is a judgment *according to works* not *by means of works.* It is a judgment in harmony with works. That means that God is going to bring up your works to demonstrate your faith before the entire rational, moral world. The believer will not bring up his works because he knows they are polluted and rotten. The believer will stand before his judge and savior in his glorified resurrection body and hear the verdict he has known all his life.

Reverend Spronk:

> The more you live a life of conversion, the more that you walk in good works, the more you will experience God's love and fellowship, the more you will experience the blessing of salvation.[12]

Repent more, work more, obey more; and you will experience more love and fellowship.

Reverend Spriensma:

> In the way of their repentance, and faith, and obedience, there will be showers of blessing on his covenant people…You see, essential for this rain to fall was that repentance of Israel and the turning away from her idols and a returning to Jehovah before they received that rain.[13]

Again, repentance is set out to be the way to experience the blessing of Jehovah. There will be showers of blessing on you if and when you repent—not by faith alone in Jesus Christ but by man's working and doing.

I could keep going. I could pick out sermons from every single minister in the denomination, and they all would teach some variant of this. Christ and his work on one side, and man enabled to do something by the Holy Spirit on the other side. The young ministers in the PRC were all taught by some of these men who were or are professors in the seminary. The young ministers will only take all that they have heard and run even further down into idolatry. All these examples and more characterize Protestant Reformed preaching and writing. This is the rotten sound that exudes out of that denomination still today. The emphasis of every sermon is not Christ and what he has done but man and what he must do. Every man does that which is right in his own eyes. That is true in the doctrine and also in the life of the members of the PRC. You see and hear of things from time to time in the denomination. God simply has given them over to the service of sin. They have forgotten the works of the Lord and instead prostrate themselves before the idol. All their false doctrine is idolatry. They do not worship the God who has revealed himself in his word. They worship a god after their own hearts and do what is right in their own eyes. Our calling to the members in the PRC is the same as it has been since the beginning: Flee from the coming destruction!

Having laid out the necessity of the reformation that God worked in 2021, having shown how the ministers and professors of the PRC have completely corrupted the cardinal doctrines of justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant, and having laid before the members of the PRC what their calling is in light of all this, I end the article here for now. Next time, the Lord willing, I will conclude by publishing the second half of the lecture and explain the idea, purpose, and continuation of God's work of reforming his church, especially as that pertains to the Reformed Protestant Churches and God's people therein. I also intend to include the question-and-answer section that took place at the end of the lecture.

—TDO

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11 Wilbur Bruinsma, "Justified or Condemned by Your Words," sermon preached in Pittsburgh Protestant Reformed Church on March 14, 2021. The sermon has been removed from SermonAudio.

12 Clayton Spronk, "Christian Conversion," sermon preached in Faith Protestant Reformed Church on September 13, 2020, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/104201510121151.

13 Audred Spriensma, "Showers of Blessings," sermon preached in Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church on November 28, 2021, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/1128212330204462.

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

OUR COVENANT CONCEPTION WITH FATHER HOEKSEMA (1): HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ulrum and Amsterdam

Our spiritual father in the faith, Herman Hoeksema, was born on March 12, 1886. The next day his unbelieving, drunkard father, Tiele Hoeksema, registered the baby under the name Harm. Tiele neglected his children and left them without a father. So Harm was brought up by his devout, Dutch Reformed mother, Johanna Bakema. Alone in the city of Groningen without a husband to support the family, she sewed clothing to support herself and her four children.

Johanna was a devout, godly woman, imbued with the deep Reformed piety of the *Afscheiding* (Separation or Secession). She belonged to the *Afscheiding* church in Groningen and brought Harm to church and to catechism classes there. Occasionally, Harm went to the *Doleantie* (Grieving or Aggrieved) church with his best friend.

Hoeksema later recounted his membership in an *Afscheiding* church (A-Church) and his affinity with a *Doleantie* church (B-Church) as follows:

> I was at that time member of the A-Church, but attended and was member of what was virtually a B-Young Men's Society. And it is not at all difficult for me to recall the tenseness of the situation on those days.[1]

Hoeksema had more affinity with the *Doleantie* churches. For this reason Dr. Abraham Kuyper influenced Hoeksema's theology, especially regarding the emphasis on sovereign, particular grace and on the inseparable relationship of election to the covenant of grace. However, the theology of the *Afscheiding* movement safeguarded Hoeksema from leaning toward the rationalistic tendencies of the *Doleantie*. Moreover, the *Afscheiding's* emphasis on God's relationship with his elect people seemed to have helped Hoeksema develop his covenant conception that the covenant is a bond of friendship and fellowship between Jehovah and his elect people in Jesus Christ.

Hoeksema immigrated to the United States in 1904. Great poverty was one of the reasons that led him to leave the Netherlands, but the most distressing reason was the many ecclesiastical conflicts between some of the *Afscheiding* churches (specifically the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* [CGK]) and the *Doleantie* churches, which had merged in 1892 as a new denomination, the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [GKN]). As a federation of 700 congregations and composed of 370,000 members, the union was massive, but that new denomination continued to be fraught with doctrinal controversies. For instance, those of the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie* viewed their mother church differently.

Concerning those reformatory perspectives, Prof. Russell Dykstra wrote,

> The Secession [*Afscheiding*] repudiated the state church and labeled it the false church. They viewed the Secession as a work of reformation, where the true church of Christ was re-formed, that is, formed again. On the other hand, the *Doleantie* viewed itself as the continuing *Hervormde Kerk* [state church (NHK)] in the Netherlands. They insisted that all the members of the *NHK* were members legally under the consistories of the *Doleantie*. They hesitated calling the *NHK* a false church. They desired to continue reforming the local churches.[2]

1 Herman Hoeksema, "The Conclusions and The A-Group" *Standard Bearer* 22, no. 9 (February 1, 1946): 196.
2 Russell J. Dykstra, "Abraham Kuyper and the Union of 1892," *Standard Bearer* 75, no. 2 (October 15, 1998): 36.

The union of 1892 had dissenters who were dissatisfied with the union, especially because of their distaste of Abraham Kuyper, who had driven the union into fruition. Rev. Frederik P. L. C. van Lingen, Rev. Philippus J. Wessels, and Rev. Jacobus Wisse led the dissenters. The ministers and their respective churches did not join the GKN and retained the name of the *Afscheiding* churches, CGK.[3]

The *Afscheiding's* emphasis on God's relationship with his elect people seemed to have helped Hoeksema develop his covenant conception that the covenant is a bond of friendship and fellowship between Jehovah and his elect people in Jesus Christ.

The quotation below conveys succinctly not only the key doctrinal differences between the CGK and Abraham Kuyper but also the covenant conceptions of the CGK, around which all doctrinal questions center. Moreover, the quotation has contemporary implications concerning the character of the experience of covenant fellowship with God, that is, whether or not the believer cooperates with God in that aspect. One should also notice the close attention Kuyper gave to the idea that all the children of believers are presupposed to be regenerated, which idea Hoeksema later countered with his organic view of the covenant. The views of Kuyper and the CGK regarding the covenant are as follows:

> In the churches dominated by the thinking of Kuyper, the doctrine of election is central and becomes the basis of a system of thinking which Rev. Henstra characterizes as the "covenant system." The justification of the sinner takes place in eternity, for Kuyper, and it has nothing to do with man or his faith…Kuyper's order was: justification, regeneration, calling, conversion, faith, sanctification. The dissenters of 1892 claim that the order, according to Scripture, is: calling, regeneration, conversion, faith, justification, sanctification…Kuyper subordinates the covenant of grace to the doctrine of election and therefore maintains that the covenant includes only the elect…Rev. Henstra writes that because Kuyper thinks of the covenant of grace as having been established with the elect, virtually all who are born within the covenant circle are elect. "This election takes place in Christ, which means that the elect stood before God eternally as recipients of grace and as justified. Therefore we may assume, when they come into the world, that regeneration has taken place at the time of their birth or before it. This regeneration, according to Kuyper, does not as a rule take place by means of the Word, which is also why he speaks of an 'immediate regeneration'"...According to Rev. Henstra, the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands maintain that the covenant "...is established *in time*, and not in eternity; it is established with Abraham and his seed, and later, in the New Testament terms, with believers and their seed. Thus it does not include the elect alone but believers and their *natural* seed. Ishmael, Esau, and others were also included in the covenant"…Such a covenant demands a human response, in the form of faith and conversion. The response that is needed represents a fulfillment of the covenant. That the covenant has indeed been fulfilled in the life of a particular believer is also a matter of experience (*believing*). Rev. Henstra writes: "The covenant thus asks for *experience*, and this is primarily the characteristic difference between the Reformed and Christian Reformed views of the covenant…we on our side believe that God gives His promise as a *basis for our plea*; it is on this basis that we beseech Him for what He has promised, namely, salvation and blessing…" The difficulty with the Reformed (as opposed to Christian Reformed) view of this matter is that "we *have* and *possess* all of this; we already *are* justified before God, and therefore also regenerated. Faith is only a becoming aware that one is justified"…Rev. Henstra writes that disagreements regarding this area of doctrine were also the cause…of the liberation of 1944… indeed the events of 1944 are to be regarded as "a justification of our ecclesiastical standpoint."

3 In 1947 the CGK changed her name to the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The name should not be confused with the Christian Reformed Church of America. The CGK, or the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, has the Free Reformed Churches of North America as her sister.

(Plantinga 1995:218–219).[4]

However, within the GKN doctrinal issues constantly resurfaced, which frequently resulted in distrust among the churches. Hoeksema described the strange situation within the GKN, which reflected ecclesiastical disunity rather than unity:

> That they were called A and B was not simply reminiscent of the past. It meant that in many places the churches of the two groups did not have fellowship together, stood sharply opposed to each other. In the city of Groningen, where undersigned lived till 1904, the Reformed Churches A and B congregated on the sabbath in four different meeting places. Normally, according to the system in vogue in the Netherlands, the entire group would have been one congregation. The different ministers would, alternately, have preached in all the churches. However, the actual situation was that the one B-minister never preached in the A-churches, and the ministers of the A-churches never appeared in the pulpit of the B-church. Nor was this situation due merely to ministerial antagonism. The people themselves were deeply interested. They listened closely to the preaching to detect any trace of deviation from the truth as they saw it.[5]

Rev. Joshua Engelsma succinctly laid out the doctrinal differences between the *Afscheiding* and *Doleantie* churches in the GKN this way:

> There were especially four areas of doctrinal difference remaining between them. First, regarding justification, the Afscheiding generally maintained justification in time by faith while the Doleantie tended to emphasize eternal justification. Second, regarding regeneration, the Afscheiding taught mediate regeneration while the Doleantie argued for immediate regeneration. Third, regarding the ground of baptism, the Afscheiding said the ground for baptism is the promise of God while the Doleantie followed the thinking of Kuyper and said the ground for baptism is presupposed regeneration. Fourth, regarding the logical order of God's eternal decrees, the Afscheiding tended to be infralapsarian while the Doleantie were more supralapsarian.[6]

After years of conflict a compromise was made at the Synod of Utrecht in 1905. Leaders from the two groups drew up the Conclusions of Utrecht to bring peace to the GKN. Hoeksema did not witness this meeting since a year prior he had left for America. The meeting at Utrecht and the Conclusions "still did not bring about a settled peace in the GKN. Finally, the issues would come to a head in the 1940s with the deposition of Klaas Schilder and the formation of the GKN 'Liberated.'"[7]

Van Raalte and the Dutch Reformed Church in America

The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in America (later the Reformed Church of America [RCA]) was established in 1628 in the United States in New Amsterdam, which is now New York City. The RCA was a daughter of the state church in the Netherlands (NHK).

Emigrants from the Netherlands were attracted to the RCA, which gave the denomination a steady growth. And after the separation of the faithful saints from the NHK and the formation of the *Afscheiding* in 1834 led by Hendrik de Cock, a stream of Dutch immigrants reached American soil. In November 1846 and 1847, respectively, Rev. Albertus Christiaan van Raalte and Rev. Hendrik Pieter Scholte led the immigrants to set foot in America. Scholte led about 850 immigrants to settle west of the Mississippi River in the town of Pella, Iowa. The immigrants had contemplated the name *Pella* while they were still in the Netherlands:

> As early as 1835 Scholte had warned King William I, "My fellow believers might be forced to seek a place in the world to serve God according to the dictates of their consciences." With continued persecution by the national clergy, the resolute Dutch pastor again warned "that God might yet prepare a *Pella* for his oppressed people, when the judgment of God shall come over our Fatherland."[8]

4 P. J. Baskwell, *Herman Hoeksema: A Theological Biography* (Clover, SC: Full Bible Publications, 2007), 38–39.
5 Hoeksema, "The Conclusions and The A-Group," 196.
6 Joshua Engelsma, *Watchman on the Walls of Zion: The Life and Influence of Simon van Velzen* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021), 200–201.
7 Engelsma, *Watchman on the Walls of Zion*, 201.
8 Ronald D. Rietveld, "Hendrik Peter Scholte and the Land of Promise," https://pubs.lib.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/article/id/9661/, 135.

Though Scholte had association with Van Raalte as a fellow *Afscheiding* minister, a brother-in-law, and a former member of the Scholte Club in the University of Leiden, in America Scholte wanted to establish an independent colony and a congregationalist congregation in a little town on the Iowa prairie.[9]

Prof. David Engelsma wrote that by the grace of God such an independent attitude was foreign to Herman Hoeksema:

> He loved the church. He loved her above all in the PRC, but he loved Christ's church. He worked in and for the church. He founded, guided, suffered for, and devoted himself to a denomination of churches. As a churchman—a Reformed churchman—he insisted on, and submitted to, the Church Order of Dordt, not only as regards the government of the local church by elders but also as regards the government of the churches by the major assemblies. No independent, he![10]

Van Raalte and his fellow immigrants established a colony in Holland, Michigan. He led the immigrants to join the churches that in 1867 became the RCA. His settlement in western Michigan became the RCA Classis of Holland. His attraction to joining the RCA is a puzzle. The *Afscheiding* churches were known for their sharp condemnation of their mother, the NHK, because of her fierce state-sponsored laws concerning those who dissented from the state church and most of all because of her departure from the Reformed faith and religion.

Such condemnation of and separation from a false church are demanded by scripture and the Reformed creeds.

Marvin Kamps held the same negative evaluation and condemnation of the NHK, and his evaluation also explains the character of a false church and what gospel she holds that makes her undeniably false:

> The false gospel of the false church is very agreeable to the nonchristian world; it cannot hate that gospel or its promoters, for the false church is one with the world, shares its hopes and dreams, and uses the same methods of learning and education based on human discovery and imagination. Jesus told us in John 15:18–23 and John 16:1–3 that the world will hate and persecute us; but the false church is never persecuted. It need not pray for God's keeping and protection, for it is the hater and the persecutor. The false church is the true church's most bitter and hateful enemy. De Cock and the Secession people experienced this reality prior to 1834 and more specifically and concretely after 1834.[11]

Rev. Andrew Lanning also described the condemnation of the NHK by the *Afscheiding* as something clear and public. Lanning emphasized the antithesis as well, which should be sharply maintained even today:

> The Seceders publicly announced that the state church was apostate; and, while they submitted to the government in all things, they disobeyed the government's antichristian rules. The division between the two peoples in the Netherlands that had been present before the *Afscheiding* was brought into stark relief by the Seceders' separation from the state church.
>
> The *Afscheiding* illustrates the truth that there is a real spiritual division between people. There is an unbridgeable antithesis between the children of light and the children of darkness. Christ has no concord with Belial, and the believer has no concord with an infidel. The antithesis manifests itself in the believer's spiritual separation from the unbeliever.[12]

Such condemnation of and separation from a false church are demanded by scripture and the Reformed creeds. It is not foreign to seceding members to condemn their mother as false as soon as it becomes clear that she has become false. Such condemnation is necessary since no one has the right to live in a separate state from a true church and to remain in fellowship with those who do not belong to a true church of Jesus Christ. Alongside the condemnation of existing errors in a controversy, reforming saints must condemn the false church—an unequivocal calling of the Christian. That is Reformed, and that is one of the elements in church reformation. It would

9 Robert P. Swierenga, "Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry," https://dutch-americans.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1997_03_swierenga.pdf, 30–31.

10 David J. Engelsma, "The Reformer of 1924: 'Doctor of the Covenant,'" *Standard Bearer* 72, no. 2 (October 15, 1995): 30–31.

11 Marvin Kamps, *1834: Hendrik De Cock's Return to the True Church* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 71–72.

12 Andrew Lanning, "The Schools and Emigration," *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 12 (March 2023): 6.

be impossible to pronounce whether a church is true or false if believers were not warranted to make judgments. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1), "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1).

Because Van Raalte knew that the RCA was a daughter of the NHK, he should have avoided contact with the RCA. Considering that the RCA was no better than her sister in the Netherlands, one wonders why he was so attracted to the RCA. His joining the RCA was in principle like returning to the false NHK that persecuted the church of Jesus Christ in the Netherlands. To join the RCA was a repudiation not only of the reason that Van Raalte and his followers emigrated but also of their faith. Maybe it could be argued that Van Raalte became so attached to the RCA because the RCA helped the immigrants with great hospitality in a foreign land. From a carnal point of view, this is understandable since the Dutch authorities in their old homeland were not generous toward them.

Prof. Herman Hanko offered an explanation for why Van Raalte joined the RCA:

> Van Raalte himself was not strong theologically. He was of the weak wing of the Secession, and he not only led the settlers into the RCA without any qualms, but remained in the RCA when many of the settlers left that denomination to form the CRC. He apparently did not share the concern of his followers to remain doctrinally faithful to the Reformed faith.[13]

Moreover, Van Raalte was among the liberals in the Secession. Together with his brother-in-law, Anthony Brummelkamp, he "defended a free church polity and liberal conscience," a conviction that could easily find an abode in the RCA. [14]

"They agreed to join our Synod," reported the Synod of the RCA in June 1849.[15] This had long been planned by Van Raalte. In 1850 Van Raalte and his followers had joined the RCA, but within seven years of union, there was turmoil and unrest throughout the denomination. What a tragic union, another union that was not rooted in the unity of the truth of Jesus Christ. Unrest after unrest characterized the lives of many who had just joined the RCA, and that was primarily due to the gradual departure of the RCA from the Reformed faith and religion. The result of that union was also so tragic.

Hanko described the situation in the RCA this way:

> Some churches there did not administer the sacraments in the divine worship services. Lodge membership was not at all uncommon. Hymns were sung in place of the Psalms. A certain spirit of worldliness and willingness to conform to American ways was common. It all added up to the conclusion on the part of many that they had made a serious mistake in joining the RCA.[16]

The Christian Reformed Church

Significant doctrinal differences in the RCA with Van Raalte and the members of his colony precipitated the 1857 secession that led to the formation of the Christian Reformed Church.

Rev. Henry Beets listed seven things that the seceders of 1857 objected to in the RCA:

1. Departure from the Calvinism of the standards—particularly as to the two points just mentioned, atonement and election.
2. Neglect of Catechism-preaching and teaching.
3. The use of 800 hymns contrary to the Church Order of Dordrecht.
4. The toleration of Free Masons as members in good standing.
5. Private baptisms taking the place of public administration of the sacrament in connection with preaching, according to the Reformed principle.
6. Admission of non-reformed people to the Communion table: open communion.
7. Neglect of family-visiting as required by the Church Order.[17]

The Christian Reformed Church's first classical assembly convened in 1857 and was represented by five congregations: Grand Rapids, Vriesland, Noordelos, Graafschap, and Grand Haven. Originally the churches adopted the

13 Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 28.
14 Swierenga, "Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry," 31.
15 Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eastern Avenue Book Store, 1923), 42.
16 Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, 22.
17 Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America*, 46–47.

name Holland Reformed Church. After many name changes throughout the years, in 1904 the denomination adopted the name Christian Reformed Church.

In 1868 a congregation in Chicago was organized. This is probably the same church that was known as First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago. Herman Hoeksema joined this church, and after four years of membership, in the fall of 1908, he entered college in pursuance of his desire to enter seminary to train for the gospel ministry. The seminary that Hoeksema attended was established in 1876 as Calvin College and Preparatory School. Hoeksema graduated from Calvin in 1915 and became eligible for his first call.

God was not mocked. He had been raising a godly man whose ministry would be centered around the development of the doctrine of the covenant.

During Hoeksema's tenure as a seminary student, William Heyns was a professor of practical theology at Calvin seminary. Heyns was an advocate of the conditional covenant. He taught that the covenant was essentially a promise that was unconditionally given, but the fulfillment of the promise was upon the conditions of faith and obedience. I hope to present more of Heyns' conception of the covenant in the next installment of this series, the Lord willing. For now let it be known to the reader that Heyns promoted an Arminian view of the covenant, which he spoke of in terms of *objective bequest* and *subjective application*. No matter how conscious he was to avoid detection for Arminianism, his remarks betrayed him almost immediately. Succinctly evaluating Heyns' conception of the covenant, Hoeksema wrote that "the presentation of Heyns is nothing else than the old Pelagian error applied to the doctrine of the covenant."[18]

When Hoeksema was pastoring at Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church, he met Professor Heyns, who by that time had written a book titled *Manual of Reformed Doctrine*. Lois Kregel, Hoeksema's daughter, recounted that encounter:

> He [Heyns] asked Dad what he thought about the book. Dad thought briefly, then replied, "With your thought, Professor, you do not save one reprobate, and you don't build up the elect. Under my preaching, the elect are instructed, and the reprobate are not deceived that they have an imaginary heaven." Professor Heyns was angry, but Dad had finally spoken the words that he had been searching for, words that spelled out his feeling on the doctrine of the covenant. It was the beginning of a lifelong study that would be shadowed in controversy.[19]

The God of the covenant, Jehovah, had been preparing Hoeksema for this work, unbeknownst to Professor Heyns. The professor purposed to destroy the doctrine of the covenant, but God was not mocked. He had been raising a godly man whose ministry would be centered around the development of the doctrine of the covenant.

Heyns was angry; so are all the enemies of the gospel of God's fellowship with his people.

We will see next time the covenant conception of Professor Heyns and how father Hoeksema refuted him with irrefutable proofs from Holy Writ and the Reformed confessions.

—JP

18 Herman Hoeksema, *Believers and Their Seed: Children in the Covenant* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997), 14.
19 Lois E. Kregel, *Just Dad: Stories of Herman Hoeksema* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 45.

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

THE PROTRACTOR OF DEATH

Most people think that *Sword and Shield* is an echo chamber of men's own thoughts, a magazine that hardly anyone reads, and a magazine that the whole world passes by and continues on in ignorant bliss. I do not believe that, not only because of the agitation that the pure word of God causes to those around us who do not believe it and the gossip that men bear but also because the truth is a light that cannot be hid in this world of darkness. Christ will not have his truth unknown, for the whole world will one day confess him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

After not reading *The Standard Bearer* for a year or so, I recently scrolled through what has been written. Was I shocked? No, not at all. Were the writings interesting? No, not at all. Most of the articles are self-help instructions regarding how to be a better person and how, in some way, shape, or form, to be more pleasing to God.

In the May 1, 2025, issue of *The Standard Bearer*, Prof. Brian Huizinga has an editorial that explains how a Christian or an unbeliever falls by degrees.[1] The article is another exhortation "to vigilance in laying aside the least beginning of evil in our own lives"—that is, live less wicked and sinful lives in order to be more pleasing to God and therefore to be happier or at least less likely to freefall into sin. Really? Do Protestant Reformed ministers think that they somehow have the monopoly on how to get people to be more holy? Do the ministers not know that there are most likely countless people who "out-holy" the Protestant Reformed people every day by their so-called good works of giving millions of dollars to charities, feeding and clothing the poor and needy, ceaselessly praying, and unendingly reading the Bible and who put the Protestant Reformed people to shame ten times over? Since the beginning of time, men have been trying to earn blessings from God and to be more holy by their works. For example the Pharisees, the Roman Catholics, and the Netherlands Reformed congregations have been perfecting the teaching regarding that which man does to be right with God and to have more blessings! Now the Protestant Reformed Churches are teaching "that which man must do to be saved." The problem with this teaching is that once the sheep stop "doing" what they are told to do (and this usually starts right away), then a murderous stranglehold must be enacted on them because power is the only thing people truly listen to.

It goes something like this:

> Pastor: "To strive for the mark means to live a life that continues to get closer and closer with God, while recognizing at times how sinful you are and repenting of those times."
>
> Sheep: "But Pastor, I just can't do enough. I work six days a week; I give food and clothing to the poor; I serve on all the fundraisers; I read the Bible every morning. I repent as much as possible, but I don't feel like I am getting any holier!"
>
> Pastor: "Well now, you are doing quite a bit. So you should be safe for the time being. But don't get too comfortable, and make sure that you continue to strive for a more pleasing, God-honoring life because that is what God requires."
>
> Sheep: "And if I don't?...What happens if I can't keep up?"
>
> Pastor: "You love your children, right?"
>
> Sheep: "Of course, of course, I love my children. What are you saying?"
>
> Pastor: "You know that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, right? Well, I can't say for certain, but only those who strive for the mark will see God's blessing on their children. You know, God uses your efforts as the means for their salvation."

1 Brian Huizinga, "And by Degrees Is Brought to Ruin," *Standard Bearer* 101, no. 9 (May 1, 2025): 265–68. All quotations from Professor Huizinga in this article are taken from this *Standard Bearer* editorial.

Sheep: "Oh, I will do anything for them! I love them dearly. I will give all that I have, so that God sees it, and the church sees it, and then I can know too that by my striving and by the cross of Christ, I and my children will experience God's covenantal faithfulness and fellowship."

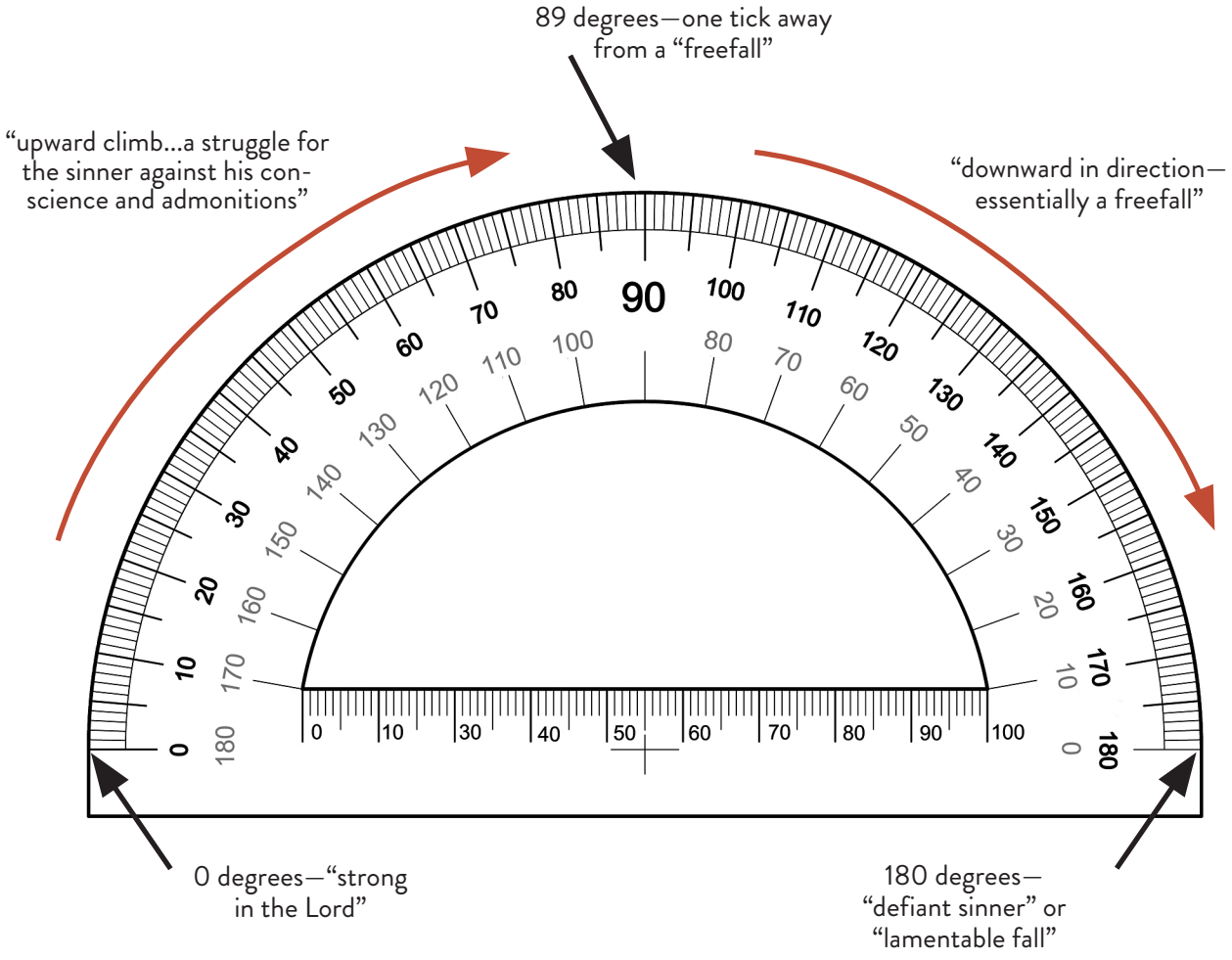
Pastor: "That's good and a right understanding of things too. God truly will help you carry this out."

Since supposedly no one outside the Reformed Protestant denomination reads this magazine, only those inside the denomination will agree that this is the stranglehold of what we have experienced under the preaching in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). And having experienced that stranglehold, many saw what the experiences of their children would be if they and their children did not flee that plague of apostasy. Some picture a finely-dressed pastor in an expensive robe with a bishop's hat who gives this type of cruel advice to a bruised and battered daughter or son of the congregation, but that is not the picture I have in mind. In my mind are ministers and elders in their relaxed khakis and sport jackets who visit in their offices or in the home of a beleaguered congregant—an intimate setting, where the cruelty is perhaps the sharpest. Now in the PRC the cruelty also takes place by pens and from the pulpits.

Brian Huizinga, professor of dogmatics and Old Testament studies in the Protestant Reformed seminary, writes about the importance of understanding the principle of a fallen person, specifically when and how one falls, either lamentably in this life or eternally. The context of the article is the phrase "by degrees is brought to ruin" found in the Reformed Form for Excommunication (*Confessions and Church Order*, 277). Huizinga depicts the idea of "ruin by degrees" by the visual aid of a semi-circular protractor, a tool used to measure and draw angles and marked with degree measurements from 0 degrees to 180 degrees. Professor Huizinga uses this tool to demonstrate how quickly one comes to ruin.

First, he describes a man who is at "0 degrees" on the protractor and who is "strong in the Lord":

> Every day, sins of infirmity spring from his sinful flesh and spots adhere to his best works. However, he lives by the power of faith each day. He humbles himself before God and flees for refuge to Christ crucified. He fights against temptation and mortifies his flesh by the Spirit of prayer and



other holy exercises of piety. He walks in the light of God's countenance, lives in the joy of his salvation, and seeks to remain patient in suffering. He strives to be faithful in all his relationships, loving and doing good to his neighbor for God's sake. He presses toward the perfection that has been proposed to him in the life to come, living by the hope of reigning one day with the Lamb in heaven. Every week he gathers for public worship on the Lord's Day and sits under the chief means of grace. This man is strong in the Lord.

That all sounds nice.

Second, Professor Huizinga depicts the man who is on the opposite side of the protractor at the "180 degree" mark and who is either a "defiant sinner" or a believer "who had a lamentable fall…into an enormous sin":

> At the "180 degree" mark is the defiant sinner who has been excommunicated for impenitently persisting in sin and rejecting the admonition of Christ through the consistory and congregation. Or, being under church discipline, but refusing to submit to Christ, he terminates the formal process of discipline by pulling his membership papers and leaving Christ's church. He is a threat to the congregation as he embodies the pollution of the world. He is presently in ruin, enslaved by Satan in some sin (probably many sins), and apart from the outstretched arm of a merciful God rescuing him, he is heading straight for hell. How did this happen? Only a few years before his excommunication he faithfully walked unto the house of God with the saints and appeared to be an upright believer, devoted to the church and his family.
>
> We could also think of the man at the "180 degree" mark as a believer who had a lamentable fall like David or Peter (see Canons of Dordt V.4–7). He fell into an enormous sin, very highly offended God, incurred a deadly guilt, grieved the Holy Spirit, interrupted the exercise of faith, very grievously wounded his conscience, and lost the sense of God's favor. Until being renewed by God so that he returns into the right way of repentance, he is in the way of ruin. How did this happen? This brother not only *appeared* to be spiritually strong, but like David and Peter *was* strong in the service of the Lord.

Professor Huizinga explains what "the path from 0 to 180" looks like:

> First, as the sinner begins moving away from "0" there is a diminishing of holy activities, which is why Jesus warns, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). Prayer becomes less frequent and fervent, and Bible reading cold and mechanical. Sunday is less God's holy day and more the sinner's personal day. Worship is more and more formalism. But everything looks good externally.

He describes how easy it is for a sinner to fall from grace, to let sin reign in his heart, and therefore to head toward a freefall into destruction. The professor of dogmatics does a fine job of setting the stage for instruction within the instruction. First, he brings valuable proofs from Canons 5.4–7 about how lamentable the saints' great falls into sin are; second, he brings passages of scripture that remind his readers that they all should push toward the mark of excellence in order to avoid the downward path by degrees; third, he adds that they should "fly for refuge to Christ"; and then he has the readers' attention focused on how gracious God's mercy truly is. Yet the instruction within the instruction does not stop there because the PRC does not believe that is where God leaves it. The PRC believes that to teach God's all-encompassing grace as that which completely saves a sinner does not do justice to her view that the Bible teaches that the regenerated sinner can attain greater blessings and a fuller experience of salvation by his works, all by grace, of course.

Huizinga writes this regarding the Christian's upward struggles and his freefall:

> The figure of a protractor is so fitting for our purposes because the path from 0 degrees to 90 requires an *upward* climb along an arc, implying a struggle for the sinner against his conscience and admonitions. However, the movement from 90 degrees to 180 is *downward* in direction—essentially a freefall.

The problem with Protestant Reformed teachers is that, although they point people from time to time to Christ and his cross, they do not believe that the cross itself is enough for salvation. Thus they place a hurdle after the cross. How?

Let us take the example of the protractor to task. Why does Professor Huizinga say that a Christian should measure himself or herself by the degrees on a protractor? Because that is the PRC's focus regarding the Christian life. At what degree are you on the protractor? Are you a strong Christian? Do you believe yourself to be at 0 degrees? Do you not want to be at 0 degrees? Why do you feel that you cannot be at 0 degrees on the scale of strongness in the Lord? Many will refute the claim that 0 degrees represents strongness in the Lord, and they will calmly put themselves at 10 degrees or 20 degrees or, God forbid, 45 degrees or more. The child of God who puts himself

at 89 degrees is only one tick away from the start of an almost-impossible-to-recover downward spiral of sin.

The protractor that Huizinga depicts is exactly what Protestant Reformed people want and deserve who read these things and believe them to be true. Many who read Huizinga's teachings want a number so that they can decide how far they need to go before they arrive at strongness in the Lord or to know how close they are to a freefall into destruction.

This teaching by Professor Huizinga is wicked and so deceptive. And it so easily appeals to the human natures of sinners, who want to be told that they are not the ungodly but that they are able to progress into a position of more godliness and strongness in the Lord, where there are more blessings and fellowship with God!

It is interesting that Professor Huizinga does not tell his readers at what degree on the protractor he puts himself. I wonder why he leaves to the readers' own impressions where he and other ministers and professors land—somewhere between 0 and 90 degrees, no doubt. Professor Huizinga sees himself not as the greatest sinner but as one who is climbing the mountain toward the top of holiness and strongness in the Lord. He is like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, tirelessly working to get to the top. Professor Huizinga prods himself and others to continue moving up the mountain. He tells the sinner that by grace he is able to overcome sin, that slowly his sin-burden will become less and less until he reaches the point where the mountain of sin on his back is not heavy and unbearable but is light because he has worked and persevered ever so strongly. But the difference between Christian in the book *Pilgrim's Progress* and the sinner that Professor Huizinga portrays is that when Christian finally is confronted with the cross of Christ, Christian's burden is completely removed, and he realizes that his salvation is complete in Christ alone. The teaching of the PRC and her ministers is that the cross gets a person halfway up the mountain, and if he wants to arrive before the throne of God without any dirt on his clothes, he had better take the trail that is free of any mudholes or obstacles to spot his clothing.

The teaching and preaching of the PRC resemble that of a popular con artist, namely, Joel Osteen. Many in the PRC can relate to his style of preaching, for it promotes active faith. In a "sermon" titled "Put Action Behind Your Faith," Osteen says,

> It's one thing to pray about a situation. It's one thing to believe that we're going to get better. And that's good. Pray'n, believe'n, hope'n, that's all a part of faith. But there's another step that we so often leave out. I believe it's one of the keys to seeing God do great things. You have to put *action* behind your faith. *You have to do something* to show God that you're serious about what you're believe'n for.
>
> You can pray all day long, "God, get me out of this problem. God, give me this promotion. God, help me to get well." And that's fine. But if you really wanna get God's attention, if you wanna see God move in amazing ways, then take it one step further and do something to demonstrate your faith. In other words, you may have an addiction, but are you going to a recovery program? Are you in a support group? That's a faith that God can see. Maybe you lost your job. Do you have your resume? Are you out knock'n on new doors?… That's what allows God to do the extraordinary.[2]

Is this not exactly the same advice from Professor Huizinga?

> Where is *your* heart today? Are *you* pressing toward the mark or sliding away, almost imperceptibly? How were *your* devotions this morning?

"But that is not fair," you say? "Professor Huizinga is only encouraging those who struggle with daily sins not to give into those sins because that could send them into a freefall into the depths where they could lose their places in the church or possibly even be thrown into everlasting hell, and therefore…"

Therefore...?

Frustrate the grace of God? I do believe that is Huizinga's point. He teaches a fear of the sovereign God of election and that by sinning against God one can frustrate what God in his counsel set out to accomplish.

The entire fifth head of the Canons of Dordt is not about how you can keep yourself out of hell or from losing your faith by how you live! In whatever article the Canons talks of guilt, shame, and falling by degrees, it does not point you to yourself as the one who can correct your course or keep you from falling. Does sin make you fall? Yes. Can you stop sinning? No. Partially? No. What about when you are feeling the closest to God, when, for example, you are sitting under the preaching of the gospel? No! Working out your salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) is knowing who you are by nature—a totally depraved sinner—and living out of the reality that you are saved by grace alone. Working out your salvation is not a do-more-to-get-more-activity. But the PRC teaches that this verse means that you must get working on your salvation with utter fear and trembling that every step that you take could be, and most likely is, a step away

2 Joel Osteen, "Sermons: 'Put Action Behind Your Faith,'" https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x63jhn5.

from God and from his favor. Do you not want better than that?

Let us hear what Canons 5.8 says about this.

> It is not in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which with respect to themselves is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed, nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 174)

The fearful doctrine preached off Protestant Reformed pulpits is that Christ's preserving power is ineffectual and that the work of the Holy Spirit can be frustrated. It is a fear-based theology because it is a man-centered theology based on law, law, and more law—law because the keeping of the law along with the cross is the only way God's grace is not frustrated by man. "Are you still at 0 degrees, brother? Or are you starting to move toward 1 degree? Did the devil get you yesterday, so that now you are at 3 or 5 degrees?"

If it were not so serious, it would almost be funny how little the PRC thinks of God's election, preservation, and unending grace.

In Rev. Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* in the chapter on preservation and perseverance, he speaks to the folly regarding what the Arminians proposed that scripture truly teaches regarding the falling away of saints:

> It seems that Scripture teaches the possibility of a falling away of those who have been purified by the blood of Christ, who have known the way of righteousness and have walked therein, who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gifts, and who have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. According to Scripture, they fall away so definitely and so finally that their end is worse than their beginning, they increase in ungodliness, and they can never be brought again to repentance.
>
> Besides, the Remonstrants argue that the doctrine of the certain perseverance of the saints simply makes careless and profane men. This objection also seems to have considerable weight. The Scriptures admonish that we must watch and pray that we may not fall into temptation (Matt. 26:41). We are called to be faithful even unto death, keeping that which we have, that no one take our crown (Rev. 3:11). We shall not be highminded, but rather fear, seeing that we also may be broken off as branches from the olive tree (Rom. 11:20, 21). The Arminian argues that if it is established *a priori* that the believer can never fall away from grace finally and completely, these admonitions of Scripture lose all their seriousness. If it is established beforehand that saved once is saved forever, why should we still fight the battle in order to be saved? Therefore, it appears indeed as if the doctrine of the preservation and perseverance of the saints must make men careless and profane.
>
> A doctrine that is based on such an ungodly conception certainly cannot have the truth of Scripture for its foundation.[3]

Then Hoeksema destroys the Arminians' argument:

> As to the argument that the Scriptures admonish the believers to stand fast and not to fall away from the faith, but to persevere, we answer that this in no way militates against the truth of the preservation and perseverance of the saints. Even as conscious faith is wrought through the preaching of the word and by the Holy Spirit, so also the perseverance of the saints is a fruit of the operation of the Holy Spirit through the same word. We must remember that grace does not destroy the rational and moral nature of man, but preserves it.[4]

Professor Huizinga throws a small slight at the truth when he writes,

> Neither does the pure worship of a church of true believers become damnable and its holy doctrine heretical in one year. There is only one way from 0 to 180, and it is by degrees.

You are right, Prof., a church that worships purely does not ordinarily become heretical in one year. A church holds onto false doctrine in her belly for years and slowly squeezes out the life of the bride of Christ until God delivers her from absolute destruction and leaves the bride who years before held to the truth to be just a sideshow.

> 35. Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord:

3 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:165–66.
4 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:166–67.

36. Thus saith the Lord God; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them;
37. Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness.
38. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy.
39. And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. (Ezek. 16:35–39)

Through all her unrighteous decisions, from her despising of God's covenant in the opening of the door for homeschoolers, to the approval of false doctrine by her synods and refusal to submit herself to the yoke of Christ by her constant panting for man and denominations who have given themselves over to man years ago, the PRC has not fallen quickly but surely by degrees in her pride, so that now she thinks that her robes will not be washed by the blood of Christ *alone* but by Christ *and* in the way of her repentance and obedience.

Let us remember what Jesus spoke in Luke 18:9–14 in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

9. He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:
10. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.
11. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.
12. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.
13. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.
14. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The teaching from Professor Huizinga will not let you, or the denomination, become the greatest of sinners. The protractor measurement will keep you looking over against your brother and at yourself regarding where you are on the scale of godliness. All the teachings of man and what he must do and how faith is his act and not God's act only lead to a high-mindedness, a prideful life, and ultimately to hell itself.

The publican went home justified not because he humbled himself but because he was given to see that his salvation was only in the cross of Christ. That is the result of hearing the gospel and seeing your salvation by faith. The child of God comes before his king and sees himself as he truly is and goes home completely justified in his subjective consciousness. This happens no other way than by faith in Christ alone—faith, the bond by which we receive all of Christ's righteousness.

John 8:11 tells us that Jesus forgave the woman taken in the very act of adultery when he said to her, "Go and sin no more." Did Jesus tell her that in order to put a millstone around her neck for the rest of her life, so that if she sinned she would once again slide back down to the state of being unjustified or to a special state of being justified but not tasting God's goodness? Did she then live her life desiring to sin so that grace would much more abound? Would she live a careless and profane life? Impossible! Did she leave her Lord and savior justified and knowing and tasting the mercy of Christ, longing to live out of that justification as forgiven, hating her sin yet being still a sinner, not looking over her shoulder and wondering where she was on a scale of godliness but living every day and seeing herself as an unworthy, redeemed child of God's free grace? Certainly!

Child of God, quit measuring yourself with a ruler or protractor. Quit looking at the law as a measuring stick of holiness before God. Look at the law as that which you desire to do, not as that which you can do. Become nothing before God. Become the greatest sinner that ever was. Become the readmitted excommunicated sinner by grace in Jesus Christ. Know this by faith alone, not by your holy living. Stop trying to be so holy! You want to measure yourself with something? Go to the cross and see where your savior hung, bled, and died. See where you died, where your sins were nailed, and where your justification was accomplished. The elect stand in the perfect man, Jesus Christ! He fulfilled the law! Through his weakness, we are made alive! "For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you" (2 Cor. 13:4).

—James Jansma

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.—Hebrews 13:14

What is a city? A *city* is an organized polity to which an individual belongs, in which he has his specific place, and in which he lives in living connection with the other inhabitants.

Man in his rebellion seeks to build a city here on the earth. He makes this earth his dwelling place in connection with other like-minded rebels. His fellowship is with sin and darkness. In response to the Lord's sentence that Cain would be a vagabond in the earth, he immediately went out and built a city to establish himself in the earth in his rebellion against God. In rebellion against God's command to spread out over the earth and in rejection of the leadership of Noah and Seth in the church of that day, Nimrod and his people set themselves to build the city of Babel as the first appearance of opposition to God and his Christ by the antichristian world power, which God wounded with a deadly wound in the confounding of its language. The false church is described as the city of Babylon, a coalition of the rebellious, organized and dwelling together in their hatred of God and his church. And Babel reborn—with its deadly wound healed, as persecutors of the church and haters of God—is that great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.

This world since Adam's rebellion has had its city. The world always boasts against God that its city shall remain forever. And God has continually laid waste to those cities as an abomination to him as he laid waste to Babylon of old, which boasted that it would abide forever.

And in this city we have no part. In the city of this world, our Lord was crucified. And we must go out to him. For here in this city of the world, we have no place. We have here no continuing city. Understand this to mean that we do not belong here. We are pilgrims and strangers here as were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have been translated by the wonder of grace into another kind of city. So soon as we seek to belong here in the world, then we must pack up our tents and become as Lot, who went to dwell in Sodom. Indeed, constantly we must be reminded and as frequently pulled out of that which is spiritually called Sodom as Lot was pulled from that historical city. For the city of this world vexes our righteous souls as that debauched city of the plains vexed Lot's righteous soul.

We seek a city that is to come. Yes, what does the writer of Hebrews say to the church of his day?

> 22. Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,
> 23. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,
> 24. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. (12:22–24)

Yes, our city is the elect church of God, the perfection of God's covenant, the kingdom of God fully come, the habitation of the living God. Our citizenship is in heaven. And the day is coming when that city will descend out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. For that day we look!

—NJL