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**
BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD
Rev. Herman Hoeksema

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

7 **EDITORIAL**
THE END OF ALL THINGS (3): OBSERVING SIGNS AMONG NATIONS AND IN NATURE
Rev. Nathan Langerak

12 **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**
GOD'S WORK OF REFORMATION (2)
Rev. Tyler Ophoff

17 **RUNNING FOOTMEN**
PROFESSOR DYKSTRA AND GOD'S "UNREAL" PROMISES
Eddie Ophoff

21 **INSIGHTS**
DEAR BROTHER
Michael Vermeer

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

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BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD

The angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD *unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the* LORD *of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.*—Zechariah 4:1–7

And the angel…wakes me.

It is not as though the prophet is asleep. How could a prophet of the Lord fall asleep on such a revelatory and wonderful night as on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month of the reign of Darius?

Rather, the prophet is "as" a man who is asleep.

The man of God is profoundly lost in thoughts so deep that he is cut off from his surroundings and is no longer conscious of the things of the world around him. His spirit is occupied with the works of God as they had been shown to him in vision after vision. The prophet has seen and heard many things that the Lord had revealed to him. And the prophet is greatly interested in those things because they all touch on the promise of God, the things of God's kingdom, the Lord's house, the position of God's people in the world, and their rich and glorious future. And in thinking over these things, how could the prophet not have the greatest interest? It is understandable, then, that when the angel—not the angel of the Lord but the angel who explains things to the prophet—left the prophet for a moment and he lay alone with his thoughts, that he so deeply sinks into meditating on those things that he is *as* a man who is asleep.

The angel has returned and wakes the prophet. There are other things that still must be shown to the prophet. His thoughts must be turned away from the things that have been revealed to him so that he can concentrate on new things.

Again the word of the Lord comes to the prophet in the form of a vision along with an explanation by the angel. This time the vision touches on Zerubbabel. The previous vision was intended for Joshua the high priest. But concerning this vision the text says that it "is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel." In Zerubbabel we have to do with the kingly office in Israel. Joshua was a priest, but Zerubbabel was a royal offspring of the house of David. The kingly line ran through Zerubbabel, who was a kinsman of the "Root of David" (Rev. 5:5; Isa. 11:10). As the head of the exiles, Zerubbabel returned from Babylon to the land of his fathers. Under his leadership the rebuilding of the temple began.

As much as to Joshua, to Zerubbabel also the word of the Lord must come.

After this series of prophetic visions, the priestly and kingly offices will be inseparably joined together, and "the counsel of peace shall be between them both."[1]

At the time of this vision, the offices are still separate.

So to Zerubbabel also comes a separate word of the Lord.

That word comes in a vision.

Because the prophet does not understand the meaning of the things that are shown to him and because the angel asks about their significance, the word of God is attached to the vision:

Not by might, nor by power!

By my Spirit!

It is God's work alone!

So it surely shall come to pass!

1 The reference is to Zechariah 6:13. Hoeksema here is correcting the Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition for many years interpreted the "counsel of peace" to be a reference to a supposed agreement between the Father and the Son to send the Son as the mediator of the covenant. This is the so-called *pactum salutis*. The idea is a corruption of the truth of the covenant. Here Hoeksema correctly sees the "counsel of peace" to be the union of the priestly and kingly offices in Christ, who is a royal priest after the order of Melchizedek.

By my Spirit!

Although towering Bashan with all its hills taunts Zion, it surely shall come to pass.

If you ask, what must and surely shall come to pass? then you find the answer at the beginning of the vision. That vision, then, is a word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: By my Spirit it surely shall come to pass.

The vision that the prophet is shown is wholly dominated by the meaning of the candlestick. The prophet sees a golden candlestick, and with this figure the prophet is familiar. He knows about a candle with seven arms and seven lamps, although he has never seen the candle as it is shown to him in the vision. The lamps of the candle in the temple had to be filled constantly with oil by the attending priest. But this candle has a steady supply of oil. Above the lamps is an elongated bowl that extends over all seven lamps of the candlestick. From the bowl to the lamps are "seven pipes to the seven lamps," a Hebrew way of saying that each lamp has seven pipes going to it. And on each side of the bowl stands an olive tree.

For care by the hands of a man, this candlestick has no need!

Out of the olive trees flows oil to the bowl. Through the seven-times-seven system of pipes, the oil flows steadily to the lamps, whereby the candlestick can give its light.

In that vision lies the answer to the question, *what* shall surely come to pass?

In short that answer is, God's house shall surely be built! The vast building marked by the favor of God, according to his own design, shall rise in eternity.

This candlestick is a symbol of God's house, his living church. Thus truly the candle in the temple in the former days signified Israel, the people of the Lord, from the viewpoint of their being light. God's people are the light of the world as a reflection of the true light of God because God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. And light is life. Light does not mean mere knowledge, but light contrasts with darkness, and as such light is symbolic of the true light of God: of God's truth, faithfulness, love, knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and of the life of the overflowing fountain of all good. That life of God lives also in his church. She reveals the life of God to his glory. And this candlestick is a symbol of the church as she lives and reflects the life of God by his grace. The church is that in the new dispensation as well, as is made clear from Revelation 1:12–13, 20.

> 12. I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;
> 13. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.
> 20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

Here, however, the seven candles do not stand in a straight line as the seven arms of one candlestick; but according to the nature of the new dispensation, the candles are arranged in a circle: The church as expanded in every direction!

Therefore, also *seven* candles.

Surely the fullness of the divine life of God's covenant must radiate in the church and be reflected by her to the outside.

And to the church belong the two olive trees. These are not symbolic of the Holy Spirit, as some suppose. Rather, the olive trees symbolize Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the prince from the house of David. Is it not true that in Revelation 11:4 these two olive trees are identified? There they are "the two witnesses" and "the two candlesticks" that stand before the God of the whole earth. But the candlesticks in the vision belong to the church and are symbolic of Joshua and of Zerubbabel, not in their personal capacity but in their official positions as priest and king. Soon these two offices will be united in Christ, and out of him God's people will be partakers of Christ's anointing and become a royal priesthood in order to stand before the God of the whole earth. They will be his witnesses over against the ungodly power of the antichristian world to declare the praises of God who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light.

That surely shall come to pass!

That house of God shall be built!

Then the royal priesthood of God's people shall radiate with the light of God. They shall live and glorify God's marvelous life. They shall be formed and fashioned in perfection.

Of that the rebuilding of the temple was a shadow. And the second temple will be finished by Zerubbabel, so that he will bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings of the people, crying, "Grace, grace unto it."

That royal priesthood will be realized in the new dispensation. The offices of priest and king will be united in the exalted Christ and advanced to their highest perfection. Out of Christ the whole church will become a royal priesthood.

That house of God will be finished in the new creation when the new Jerusalem will descend out of heaven, and the tabernacle of God eternally will be with men!

God's eternal house!

By my Spirit!

By that Spirit alone it surely shall come to pass!

Surely it is by that Spirit that the house of God is built, that it continues to stand, that it is a house of God, and that it is completed.

This word of the Lord too is proclaimed in the vision.

The oil is one of the chief elements of the vision. Out of the olive trees, the oil flows to the bowl above the lamps, and from the bowl the oil flows through the seven-times-seven system of pipes to the lamps. It is by the oil that the lamps are able to give their light.

The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. That is very plain from the holy anointing oil that was poured over the head of the one who had been called to serve in office in God's kingdom in the old dispensation. And it is clear from the angel's explanation that the oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The vision is the word of the Lord that surely shall come to pass, not by might, nor by power, but through the Spirit of the Lord. Just as the light of the candlestick is in the oil, so the life of God's church is in the Spirit.

The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, for Christ is the Stone, the Lamb with seven eyes. Christ received the Spirit in his exaltation, and in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Christ has become that life-giving Spirit whom he pours out in his church. Thus there are seven pipes that carry the oil to each of the lamps, which represents the Spirit of Christ as he dwells in the church and is the "seven Spirits which are before his throne" (Rev. 1:4). Seven represents here the fullness of the life of the Spirit, the life of God's covenant in Christ, and out of Christ the fullness of that life in the church. Through the working of the sevenfold, covenant Spirit, the sevenfold, covenant life radiates out of Christ in the church forever.

By that Spirit God's house is built!

By that Spirit Christ becomes flesh, taking our flesh and blood from the womb of Mary. By that Spirit Christ is equipped for office as the priest-king par excellence. By that Spirit Christ offers himself to God as the Lamb without spot and blemish and descends into the depths of death and hell in order to accomplish satisfaction and reconciliation and to establish the foundation of God's house on the basis of God's strictest justice. By that Spirit Christ is raised and exalted to the right hand of the Father. Christ receives that Spirit in order to dwell by that Spirit in his people. By that Spirit Christ gathers his church out of every tribe, tongue, and nation of the world.

By that Spirit God's house is preserved!

Only by the indwelling of that Spirit do God's people have his life, the life of God. They never possess any of that life without the Spirit. Constantly that Spirit works this life of God in them and causes the house of God to radiate with that life. By that Spirit God's people are preserved in the midst of the world and kept unto the very end!

By that Spirit the house of God also will be finished soon!

Because the one who raised Jesus from the dead did so by the same Spirit who will also raise our mortal bodies.

And soon Christ will make all things new and cause the whole new creation to radiate the glory of God in Christ!

Then Christ will bring forth the headstone!

Then will be heard shouts of joy: "Grace, grace unto it!"

By my Spirit!

It surely shall come to pass!

Exactly because it is by God's Spirit, it surely shall come to pass!

Might and power mean nothing!

Human power and wisdom and human efforts and labor in themselves mean nothing for the building of God's house. We do well to keep this in mind especially as we are privileged to be laborers together of God. We never build God's house.

But the cause of God's covenant so frequently appears thoroughly hopeless!

Oh, at the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua, that cause seems so dark. Jerusalem lies in ruins. The temple still is not built. Nothing but a wretched remnant has returned out of Babylon. Far and away the majority have it too good according to the flesh to return to the wasted land of their fathers. Besides, there is that great mountain: the world power! And that ungodly world power is always full of wrath toward God's people and always opposes the cause of the Son of God!

What will become of God's cause?

And so it is still! Is it not true that the faithful in the land always become smaller in number? Is it not true that what is called church is mostly like the salt that has lost its savor and is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden underfoot of men? Is it not true that it appears as though the powers of unbelief and lawlessness will obtain the victory? Who does not tremble a little?

But! Not by might, nor by power! If it were otherwise, the cause of God would be hopeless!

Now it surely shall come to pass!

Fear not, Zerubbabel! Do not hang your harp on the willows. Though it appears so dark, it surely will come to pass! God's house certainly will be built and shall rise in eternity!

Do you say, "It can never be"? Oh, it can never be by might, nor by power!

But by my Spirit the great mountain shall become a flat plain, and the ungodly world power will disappear!

And God's house will be finished!

Fear not!

—Herman Hoeksema

You have in your hands another gospel-packed issue of *Sword and Shield*. Maybe, just maybe, you will get some days in April that will be warm enough for you to do some reading outside or at least in the sunroom or the three-season porch.

Easter is early this year: April 5. Ordinarily the magazine would run a meditation reflecting on the glorious resurrection of our Lord, when he was declared to be the Son of God with power and when he brought to light life and immortality. Christ's resurrection is our justification, for he was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification. In his resurrection he gave to the church the glorious hope that in the last day we shall be raised by the same power and working whereby Christ was raised, and our mortal and vile bodies will be made like unto his most glorious body. The resurrection stands along with the cross as the heart of the church's proclamation of the gospel. That gospel-event is worth remembering every year.

This year the meditation in the magazine is a little different. The editor is continuing to translate the Dutch meditations written by Herman Hoeksema on the book of Zechariah. The meditation this month is on the prophet's vision concerning the Spirit and the work of the Spirit. Christ arose and ascended to God and received from him the promise of the Spirit. In that Spirit the vision that Zechariah saw was fulfilled. And in that we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. By his Spirit God's church will be built!

We also remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ by declaring, writing, and contending for the gospel of his cross and resurrection as the fullness of our salvation. In this issue you will find that aplenty.

In the *Running Footmen* rubric—ably filled this month by Mr. Eddie Ophoff—we have his analysis of a wretched preparatory sermon preached by Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches. He was professor of New Testament exegesis in the denomination's theological school, where he was responsible for teaching men to find the gospel in the New Testament. He cannot find the gospel in the New Testament. And it is apparent from the preparatory sermon that he cannot find the gospel in the Old Testament either. The gospel is the promise. Dykstra has nothing for his congregation but unreal and unfulfilled promises apart from man's activities. By that measure Dykstra also has no gospel; worse, he has a gospel that is no gospel, and the apostle Paul damns him along with other preachers of a gospel that is no gospel.

Reverend Ophoff publishes the second installment of his speech on God's work of reformation in beginning the Reformed Protestant Churches. Reading back over some of the past issues of *Sword and Shield* and reading the quotations that Reverend Ophoff includes in his speech, it is clear to anyone with ears to hear and eyes to see that God worked a wonderwork in delivering us in the Reformed Protestant Churches from the incredibly deceitful men and their theology in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Truly the Lord cut a hole in her net, and so escaped are we. And while our hope for others to come out may flicker at times, yet the witness of *Sword and Shield* must still come, if for no other reason than as a testimony against the Protestant Reformed Churches and her rampant departures from the truth. That testimony has already served to drive that denomination in her departure. Christ at his resurrection made his disciples, then and now, to be his witnesses, and their witness has both a saving and a hardening effect.

Mr. Michael Vermeer sent in a contribution for *Insights* that consists of a letter to a brother. The message of the letter is sad: "Brother, you are dying!" That is the word to anyone still laboring under the illusion that he or she can without harm remain in the grip of the ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches and their soul-destroying preaching of works.

May the Lord bless you in your reading!

—NJL

THE END OF ALL THINGS (3): OBSERVING SIGNS AMONG NATIONS AND IN NATURE

Introduction

I have begun a series on the subject of the end of all things. The study of the end of all things is eschatology. When we speak of the *end* of all things, it is important to remember that the end is not like the end of a game or the end of a school day. The word *end* as it is used in eschatology means *goal*. The study of the end of all things is the study of the events that belong to the final revelation of God's eternally appointed goal of all things. This goal ultimately is the glory of God in the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ and his elect church when God shall be all in all. With a view to the coming of this end, all things that belong to the new dispensation have been ordained eternally by God as the way in which the end comes.

The grand event that leads to the final consummation of all things is the second coming of Jesus Christ with power and great glory when he will raise the dead, conduct the final judgment, cast the reprobate out of the creation into hell, and make all things new as the everlasting inheritance and home for his elect church. Although we speak of the final appearance of Christ—when he shall appear as the sign of the Son of man in the heavens and descend with clouds and with his angels and his saints—it may not be forgotten that Christ's coming is the *cause* of all other events. His coming is the ongoing event of the new dispensation. Christ's coming is the event that stands behind all other events that take place.

I have written that the calling of the Christian in light of the coming of the end of all things is to know the time. He is to know in particular that the coming of the end is nearer than when he first believed. In light of the nearness of the end, the Christian is to live soberly in the world. That he is to live soberly does not mean simply that he refrains from living in drunkenness, but more especially he orders his life with a view to that end. He is not caught up in the world, does not live for the world, and does not set his affections on temporal and perishing things, but he lifts up his heart and stretches out his neck toward heavenly and eternal things. He lives and walks as a child of the light and of the day in a world that walks in darkness. In distinction from the world, upon which that day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, the Christian has a lively awareness of the coming of Christ and that it approaches quickly.

For the sake of the Christian's knowledge of the end of all things, Christ himself and through his apostles gave to the church signs of his coming. The purpose of these signs is for the church. The purpose is not for the world. The world can observe the signs because they do not occur in a corner or in private; the signs are public events seen by all. Because the world does not have the Spirit, it cannot correctly interpret those signs and always lies about them. Take for instance the increasing intensity and frequency of violent storms. The world attributes that to the effects of man's activity on the climate and not to God and to the coming of Jesus Christ. The world goes about to preserve itself against these judgments of God by passing laws or attempting to change man's effects on the climate. Through the teaching of the Spirit and the word of God, the church is able to understand those events as signs of the approaching coming of Christ.

Foremost in the church's understanding of the signs is the truth that those signs are created by the coming of Christ. The coming of Christ is *the* event of all history. For that purpose God made all things, and that is the event that controls all history. All history and every event in history are simply the effects of the coming of Christ. For the sake of the coming of Christ and the revelation of God's purpose in Christ, Adam fell, the sentence of death was passed over the whole human race, and all men are conceived and born in sin. The announcement of the coming of Christ kicked off the history-long warfare between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent that dominates the pages of Old Testament history.

The same is true of the history of the new dispensation. Christ's word through the angels at his ascension was that he would come again as the disciples had seen him go away. Christ's word to the church through John in the book of Revelation is, "Behold, I come quickly." These words do not mean that Christ eventually will arrive on

the scene of the world at some point in the future, but the words mean that he is coming at all times and in every event of history. The coming of Christ explains the rising and setting of the sun, the changing seasons, the falling of a hair from your head, and the rise and fall of nations. The coming of some violent storm to the eastern or western coast of the United States is simply Jesus Christ, walking on the wings of that storm. It is as the song in the Psalter says: "He rides on the clouds, the wings of the storm, the lightning and wind His mission perform."[1] The church as she lives by faith and waits in hope for the promise of Christ's coming has a lively sense of that reality concerning history. All power and authority were given to Christ when he sat down at the right hand of the Father. To Christ was given the task to execute God's counsel for the end of all things and the fulfillment of the promise of Christ's appearance. All things are the work that his Father gave him to do, and in all those things Christ comes.

To Christ was given the task to execute God's counsel for the end of all things and the fulfillment of the promise of Christ's appearance. All things are the work that his Father gave him to do, and in all those things Christ comes.

In light of the subject of the signs of the times and of Christ's coming and the Christian's knowledge of the time through those signs, the question is, what makes the signs of Christ's coming different from other events of history? The answer is that God ordained the signs; Christ carries them out; and accompanied with the teaching of the Spirit, the signs catch the attention of the church and draw out her hope for the coming of Christ. The church does not always live on the heights of faith. The church in the world is still encumbered by the flesh, and often her attention is captivated by the glittering vanities of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. Oftentimes she forgets the promise of Christ's coming and is enamored with her pleasant life in the world. In order to shake the church awake from her spiritually sleepy state, God sends startling and attention-grabbing events. These events are what we call the signs of Christ's coming.

Observing Christ's Near and Sudden Coming

The church must observe these events, and through them she can take note that the coming of Christ draws near and approaches quickly. It is true that no man knows the day or the hour of Christ's appearance. Jesus said in Matthew 24:36 concerning his coming, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." It has been the folly of heretics throughout history to attempt to establish precisely the day and the hour of Christ's coming. If the false teachers are not attempting to establish the day or the hour, then they attempt to fool the church by teaching that Christ can come at any moment or that indeed Christ has already come.

Jesus himself warned in Matthew 24:23–28 about this work of false teachers:

> 23. If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.
> 24. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.
> 25. Behold, I have told you before.
> 26. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.
> 27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.
> 28. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

Jesus spoke these words in connection with his prophecy of the days of tribulation that will befall the church at the time of the final antichrist. These words refer ultimately to his bodily, visible appearance. However, there is a general application of these words to the truth of the signs of Christ's coming. There are false teachers who arise and say that Christ has come already. They say that he is in the desert or in some secret place. They teach that they have the key of knowledge to bring the church to Christ. They play upon the desire of the church to be with Christ. But the words of Jesus over against the false teachers who attempt to bring the church into their power is that Christ's coming will be like a flash of lightning that spreads from east to west in the heavens. His coming will

1 No. 285:2, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1927; rev. ed. 1995).

be visible and plain to all. It will be no secret, but it will be open for all to behold. The church will need no teacher to instruct her when or where Christ is coming.

Over against the anxiety of the church that she might miss that day, Jesus gives a quaint analogy about the eagles. Many have puzzled over his words and allegorized the meanings of carcass and eagles. Carcass they say refers to Christ or to Christ as he died for his church. Or the carcass is supposedly the destroyed kingdom of antichrist. The eagles are the church. But all such allegorizing misses the meaning of the analogy.

Jesus also used this analogy in Luke 17:34–37:

> 34. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.
> 35. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
> 36. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
> 37. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

In verses 34–36 Jesus describes the suddenness of his coming and how that coming will separate the elect and the reprobate. In response to that description, the disciples ask, "Where, Lord?" Where will this mysterious separation take place? Will the church miss that day? Will the church have to travel to a certain location to participate in that day? In response and in answer to their question, Jesus gives again his analogy about the carcass and the eagles.

So what does the analogy mean? The analogy is common sense. Everyone who lives in the Midwest notices from time to time the circling of turkey vultures. The reasons the vultures are gathered together and circling are that they have scented and spotted a dead body. Mysteriously the vultures gather together and circle in the skies. The issue in the analogy is the mysterious gathering together of those birds of prey. That analogy then also answers the question of the disciples, "Where, Lord?" The Son of man will mysteriously gather together his church to himself on the day of his coming. The church will not miss that day or miss the coming of the Son of man in his glory. As surely and as mysteriously as the vultures gather together over some carcass will the elect be gathered together in Christ's day.

And this is also Christ's explanation in the parallel passage in Mark 13:26–27, where he does not use the analogy of a carcass and eagles, but he explains that analogy concerning his coming:

> 26. Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.
> 27. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

There will be a gathering of the elect in the day of Christ as surely as there is a gathering of vultures around a carcass.

Observing Signs Among the Nations

The elect do not need anyone to tell them "here is Christ and there is Christ," for in the last day Christ himself will show the elect his coming and will gather them to himself. Therefore, scripture indicates not only that there are signs but also that those signs give clues to the church of where she is in the calendar of history. This is the meaning of the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:6–8:

> 6. Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.
> 7. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.
> 8. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Jesus says something similar in Luke 21:9–11:

> 9. When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by.
> 10. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom:
> 11. And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.

In Matthew 24 Jesus names some of the signs of his coming, such as "wars and rumours of wars," and in Luke 21 Jesus adds "commotions," which point to a general state of instability from disturbances in the relationships between nations or among groups within nations. Certainly to commotions belong social, political, and racial conflicts. In Luke 21 Jesus also adds, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Wars and commotions are part of the ordinary history of the world. When man attempts to bring a kingdom in the earth, he does so by force or threat of war or by social upheaval and civil rebellion. The announcement of a potential war or the coming of a war is disruptive to the relationships between the nations. Such an announcement disturbs economies, societies, and the calm peace of the world. Riots in the

streets over political or social differences create an atmosphere of instability in a nation. Wars and commotions are stirred up by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in the interest of his church. When all the world is at peace, then the world turns its attention from itself and remembers again its hatred of the church. To protect his church, God often moves one world power to attack another.

An example of that is Saul's persecution of David as recorded in 1 Samuel 23:26–28:

> 26. Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them.
> 27. But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land.
> 28. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth.

Saul was hunting David like an animal and was intent on annihilating David. David was in such a situation that he had no way to escape. And God provided a way of escape by causing the Philistines to invade Israel, so that Saul was forced to give up his pursuit.

This work of God to raise up warfare, strife, and social upheaval in the nations is described to the prophet Zechariah in the vision of the carpenters:

> 18. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns.
> 19. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.
> 20. And the Lord shewed me four carpenters.
> 21. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it. (Zech. 1:18–21)

The horns are the world powers that would attack and destroy Judah and Zion as types of God's church. But God raises up carpenters who demolish the horns and their power. The carpenters are other world powers—in themselves they are equally hostile to Zion—that God uses to take peace from the earth and to turn the world against itself.

This same work of God is pictured in Revelation 6:3–4 as the running of the red horse:

> 3. When he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.
> 4. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

The context of these verses is the opening of the book with seven seals by Jesus Christ. The book is the counsel of God for the end of all things. Christ in the opening of those seals reveals what God has ordained and controls the carrying out of what God has ordained. Out of the first four seals run white, red, black, and pale horses. These various horses are powers that God uses to bring all things to their appointed end. The red horse is the power of anger, hatred, strife, revenge, and war among and within the nations.

Wars and commotions are stirred up by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in the interest of his church. When all the world is at peace, then the world turns its attention from itself and remembers again its hatred of the church.

We see and hear of these things, and Christ says to his church in Matthew 24:6, "See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." The church is to know from these things that they must come to pass as means and instruments to bring about the end of all things. They are not things that happen because the world is out of control, but they must happen as sovereignly ordained by God. But wars, strife, upheaval, and instability in the nations indicate to the church that the end is not yet. The wars and strife among nations mean that they have not been united yet into one kingdom under one head, which means that the persecution that the church endures presently is not the final, great tribulation by the antichristian world kingdom and that there are great, world-changing events that must take place before the end comes.

Observing Signs in Nature

In a similar way the church is to understand that "there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles" (Mark 13:8). Jesus mentions

earthquakes not because they alone are intended as signs of Christ's coming but because earthquakes in particular are associated with the coming of the end of the world. There was an earthquake at Christ's cross: "When the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). There was an earthquake at the cross because then the world essentially came to an end; the end of all things had come in principle.

Haggai describes the coming of the end in terms of an earthquake:

> 6. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;
> 7. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. (Hag. 2:6–7)

The writer to the Hebrews describes in Old Testament language an earthquake at the coming of the end:

> 26. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.
> 27. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. (Heb. 12:26–27)

The book of Revelation repeatedly describes the coming of the end in terms of an earthquake, for example, in Revelation 16:18: "There were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great." To the earthquakes we can add storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, and typhoons that cause disasters for the nations of the earth. Some of these disasters are mentioned by Christ as "famines and troubles" (Mark 13:8). "Troubles" mean *disturbances* and *riots*.

Observing That Christ Cannot Come at Any Moment

How is the church to understand the occurrence of these things? Jesus says, "These are the beginnings of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8). The word "sorrows" that Jesus uses is a metaphor that refers to the labor of childbirth. When Christ returns, the child will be born. Storms, earthquakes, and the famines and riots and disturbances that accompany them are the first signs that labor has begun. It has begun and cannot be stopped, but it is only just begun.

The apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4 warns against a specific error regarding the coming of Christ, that is, that the coming of Christ can be at any moment:

> 1. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,
> 2. That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.
> 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;
> 4. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

The Thessalonian church was troubled by false teachers almost immediately after Paul left. Part of their false doctrine was to teach that "the day of Christ is at hand." The Greek word translated as "at hand" means *at any moment*. The false teachers taught that the day of Christ could come at any moment. The practical result of that teaching was in part that many Christians in Thessalonica were lazing around waiting for that moment.

Over against that false teaching, the apostle Paul instructed the church that Christ's coming cannot be at any moment. Christ's coming cannot be at any moment for three reasons. First, when the apostle says that there must come first a falling away, the implication is that the day of Christ awaits the worldwide preaching of the gospel. If there must be a falling away, there first must be the preaching and gathering of the elect church. Second, the day of the Lord cannot come at any moment because there first must be that falling away, that is, apostasy from the truth of Christ. Third, the day of the Lord cannot come except the man of sin be revealed. The man of sin is the personal antichrist whose way is prepared by apostasy from the truth. In the day of antichrist's revelation, there also will be the gathering of the nations into his kingdom.

The teaching of the apostle still has bearing today on the church's understanding of the end. We can say too that the day of Christ cannot be at any moment; indeed, that day appears yet to be a little way off. For we have not seen the man of sin, and we are not witnesses yet to the gathering of the nations into his kingdom.

To the signs of apostasy and the man of sin, I will turn next time.

—NJL

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

GOD'S WORK OF REFORMATION (2)

Introduction

I stated in the last article that God's work of the reformation of his church in 2021 was necessary and demonstrated the necessity of it.[1] The reformation of 2021 was God's work alone in the salvation of his church. A generation had arisen that knew not the mighty works of Jehovah and that forgot the gospel of grace. Instead of worshiping the one true God as the God of their salvation, the people of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) corrupted themselves in the vanity of the idol. God came and broke the snare so that we might escape the bondage of salvation by the working and willing of man. The intent of this second article is to expound on the idea of reformation and the truth that was restored to the church.

Its Idea

God worked a reformation and formed his church anew. Reformation is God's work of returning his church to the truth of the word of God. A generation arises that knows not the works of the Lord. The truth gets watered down. The message gets softened. Perhaps the pulpit plays a major part in that, or the pew clamors for nicer preaching and pressures the pulpit to back off. Men want to hear less about God and Jesus Christ and more about what man has to do. So Christ is moved from his prominent place in the church, and man is given a small part alongside Christ.

In reformation there is first a return to the truth of the scriptures. The anthem of the Reformation church of Luther's day was the phrase *sola scriptura,* or scripture alone. Not the will of man, the writings of men, the wisdom of man, or the traditions of the church but the scriptures alone.

At the famous Diet of Worms in 1521, before the imperial court, Martin Luther said, "My conscience is captive to the word of God." Though men demanded that he recant, he said he could not because no one had ever proved from scripture that he was wrong. The scriptures are the objective standard of truth. Everything is subject to the word of God. All things must be tested according to that word. And the believer is bound to that objective standard of the truth. The believer can take the scriptures and judge all things. That belongs to your office of believer. That is the honoring of the office of believer in the church. Every church says, "Here is Christ." The believer takes the word and holds it up to the lens of scripture and judges churches: "No, Christ is not there or there. Christ is here." Luther broke with a thousand years of Roman Catholic tradition that said the church councils were inerrant. In 2021 we broke with the PRC, who also had set up her councils above God's word. God's word must reign in the church. God's word is the sole standard of what is right and wrong, of truth and lie, of light and darkness.

In 2021 the return was to the truth of the unconditional covenant. The covenant is God's relationship of fellowship and friendship with his elect in Jesus Christ. God established, maintains, and perfects that covenant in Jesus Christ. The covenant is not God and man working together. The covenant is not two rails running side by side. But the covenant is governed by election. God takes his people to himself as his friends and servants. He draws his people into his covenant and gives them life. Upon the elect, God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit bestows all the blessings of the covenant as an unending fountain. There was a return to that truth.

In reformation there is also an advance in the truth. This means that the truth is brought to a deeper understanding than in years past. In 1924 the covenant was developed and explained as fellowship and friendship with God in Christ and not as a pact or bargain, as had been the Reformed consensus. Our forefathers in 1924

1 This article is the second half of a lecture that was given on behalf of the evangelism committee of First Reformed Protestant Church on January 30, 2026. The original lecture can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPQ9ndtlo6s&t=3s.

taught that God established, maintains, and will perfect his covenant and that the covenant is unconditional and unilateral. But gradually over time, it was being taught that the way to experience that fellowship is "in the way of" obedience, repentance, or prayer. Since 2021 the advance has been that the covenant *in its experience* is also unilateral and unconditional. An elect child of God experiences and enjoys the friendship and fellowship of God by faith alone in Jesus Christ crucified, which is to say, by doing nothing. There are no works of man necessary to experience the covenant.

Out of the recovery of the doctrine of the covenant has been the recovery and advance regarding the demand of the covenant in the Christian day school and the doctrine of the antithesis. The school is the banding together of members of the covenant to educate their children in the fear of the Lord. The antithesis is the enmity that exists between God and the world. The reality of the child of God in his heart, life, and experience is that he stands at enmity with the unfruitful works of darkness. The school has its foundation in the separation between God and his people and the false church and the world. The covenant, the antithesis, and the Christian school stand and fall together. If one rejects the antithesis, the school and the covenant will fall too. If one rejects the school, the antithesis and the covenant also will fall with it.

Another return in God's work of reformation was to the truth of justification by faith alone. The controversy with the PRC touched on the heart of the gospel. The Reformed Protestant doctrine of justification, which is the doctrine of the scriptures and the Reformed confessions, is the reason for the existence of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Justification is the legal act of God, declaring the ungodly sinner righteous for Christ's sake. God forgives the sinner's sins and imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ by the instrument of faith alone. Justification and the forgiveness of sins are the same thing (Belgic Confession 23). The PRC makes a distinction between them, but scripture and the creeds consider forgiveness and justification to be one and the same. The RPC returned to the gospel-truth of justification by faith alone without the activities of man. The RPC returned to the full-throated declaration that God forgives the sinner of his sins for Christ's sake by faith alone without any "but" coming after that declaration. There is no "but…man must just do this one thing." The child of God is justified by doing nothing at all, not by a single work or even a breath. He is justified by doing nothing. He is justified in eternity. He is justified at the cross. He is justified in time when God sends the gospel and tells him what is real in eternity.

Because the RPC's controversy with the PRC is in the realm of man's subjective experience, the assurance of the believer is the object of relentless attack. Assurance is man's subjective experience of justification in his heart and life. Assurance is justification. According to Professor Cammenga, assurance does not just fall out of the sky; you have to obey to have assurance. Well, actually assurance does drop "out of the sky." John 3:8: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The Spirit, whose work is mysterious and wonderful, is compared with the wind. You never see the wind, but you see its effects. The wind comes out of the sky and blows over the creation. Belonging to the work of the Spirit is faith and the assurance of faith. He is the author of faith in its entirety (Lord's Day 27). The believer has assurance because the Spirit blew in the preaching of the holy gospel and worked in him the assurance of forgiveness and justification.

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Further, if you ask someone in the PRC today, "Whom does God justify?" the overwhelming answer will be that God justifies the repentant, penitent believer. God justifies good people in the church. He justifies people who love God and love their neighbors. He justifies people who are obedient and faithful. The PRC covers that teaching by using the phrase "in the way of," which has become equivalent to "by means of." That is the message that pours forth from Protestant Reformed pulpits.

The message of the Reformed Protestant Churches and the right of her existence as church is that God justifies ungodly sinners. The Reformed Protestant Churches are the only churches I know of that preach this doctrine. Where do you hear this doctrine in the world today? Where do you hear that sound Sunday after Sunday as the heart and soul of the message of the church? The

preaching of this doctrine is as rare as a precious gem. In nominally Reformed churches across the board, you hear this: God justifies you if and when you believe, make a decision for Christ, accept Christ, or by your active faith. The RPC teaches this: God justified the ungodly sinner in eternity, at the cross, and he brings the reality of justification into that ungodly sinner's heart and life in the preaching of the gospel.

The advance that has come from the return to the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the relationship between justification and repentance. The advance is not in the necessity of repentance. Man must repent. He must turn from his sin in hatred and toward God in love. He will repent too. God redeems and renews sinners (Lord's Day 32). God converts sinners. But repentance does not belong in justification. Repentance is not a legal act of God upon the sinner but a renewing act of God. In conversion or repentance, God goes to work on a sinner. The relationship between justification and repentance is that God bestows repentance because he justifies ungodly sinners. Forgiveness (justification) is not in the way of man's repenting. Justification is by faith alone in the perfect work of Christ. As the twin benefit of justification, God also converts sinners.

Another advance regarding the doctrine of justification is the free forgiveness of the neighbor. This truth flows directly out of the truth of God's free forgiveness of his people. The believer forgives his neighbor who will sin against him and has sinned against him, and because he forgives and loves his neighbor, the believer actually will seek out his neighbor's salvation by rebuking him in his sin and calling him to repentance.

Lastly, something that is often overlooked is the reformation in the preaching. In the PRC the preaching is shackled. The minister has to be careful not to offend his congregation. He has to tiptoe around issues. He cannot name the lie. He has to administer a healthy dose of man's responsibility. The preacher has to worry about people and how they receive the preaching. He has to make everyone happy. The pulpits are shackled. But in the RPC the pulpits are free to preach God's word, not fearing the faces of men. The Holy Spirit has free course in his church. He blows like a fire in the pulpits. Is that how the pulpit is characterized in the PRC? Not at all, but Protestant Reformed pulpits are filled with pandering hirelings who seek the praise of men. Protestant Reformed ministers curate their messages as not to offend the sensibilities of their congregants. Instead of preaching the law strictly and properly, condemning man in his sin, Protestant Reformed ministers use the law to tell the people what a great job they are doing in their lives of sanctification.

Further, when I was Protestant Reformed, I knew that in the pulpit Christ was the one speaking. I knew that when I came to church, I came to hear God speak. I do not know if anyone in the PRC believes that truth about the preaching. The people in the PRC dismiss the preaching as a light thing. They say that it is just a man speaking. The preaching is a take-it-or-leave-it Chinese buffet line. I imagine they reduce the preaching to just a man speaking because then they can remain in a church that gives a dose of false doctrine in every sermon. If the sermon is only man's ideas and words, then the members can console themselves while remaining in a church that corrupts the truth that they do not have to listen to certain parts of the preaching.

Its Purpose

God's purpose with the reformation of 2021 is twofold. First, God had in mind his elect whom he loved in Christ from all eternity. He had in mind the salvation of the elect body of Christ. Willing to save the elect and draw them into his fellowship that they might know and taste him as the only good and glorious God, he sent Christ, the savior of Israel and of his church, to deliver them. He sent Christ to die for all your sins and to earn righteousness. He sent Christ in your flesh that through his flesh the new and living way unto the Father might be opened. He sent Christ to be your perfect and complete salvation, so that there is nothing more that is needed besides him. And having died, risen, and ascended into heaven, Christ received the Spirit and poured out that Spirit so that the Spirit might communicate to you in your experience all the blessings of salvation that are in Christ. Receiving the Spirit, you have received the promise of God.

God willed that you would not perish in the false church and remain in the snare of idols. He came with his Word in the preaching. God accomplishes mighty things in the preaching. He tears down the kingdom of man and realizes his own kingdom. He works wonders in the preaching. By his voice he delivered his people. His people heard Christ; and hearing Christ, they believed in him for all their salvation and condemned themselves in all their works. God had a people in the PRC whom he loved, and he drew them out by his Spirit and Word. Our hope as a church, and thus the reason for this lecture, is that if there are children of God yet in the PRC, that he will fill them with the Spirit and draw them out of the false church into the true church and the glorious liberty that we have as the sons and daughters of God. Our prayer is that he convicts you in the fear of faith to forsake that apostate institution and follow Christ to the place where he is present by his Spirit and Word.

Second, the purpose of reformation, like the preaching of the gospel, is the damnation of the reprobate. We ought to say a few things about apostasy here. Apostasy is departure from the truth of God. Apostasy is not that someone makes a mistake or blunders. When Christ is kicked out of a church, the reason is that the reprobate element has the majority. There is always the seed of apostasy in the true church. Already from the beginning of a reformation, there is a reprobate element in the church. No one knows where the line is drawn, but we know it is always there. That reprobate element lies in wait until it sees the opportunity to seize the truth in order to kill it. That the PRC kicked out Christ in 2021 is because the majority of the Protestant Reformed denomination is filled with reprobate men and women who had Rev. Hubert De Wolf's theology in their hearts for almost seventy years. They came to power in the church over a lengthy period of time. A whole generation arose that knew not the gospel. God exposed those people. He came to them with this simple question, "What will you do with the truth? What will you do with my Christ?"

They loudly and with one voice said, "Crucify him, crucify him!" God hates them and wills their destruction.

In reformation then, God's purpose is the glory of his name in the salvation of his elect people and the destruction of the reprobate.

And we too killed Christ, each in our own way. Maybe we sat mute while all that was going on. Perhaps we even defended the lie. We stood guilty of the same sins as those in the PRC. It was not until the Spirit came and pricked our hearts that Jesus Christ became to us as the most beautiful person in all the heaven and earth. When the PRC killed Christ, she killed us too then. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:13). And so we followed Christ out of the camp to the place where we could hear him, and in doing so, the sufferings of the cross left behind for us abound in us. That reproach of the apostate church and the world against the true church fills up God's cup of wrath and prepares the world for the destruction that is coming. In reformation then, God's purpose is the glory of his name in the salvation of his elect people and the destruction of the reprobate.

Its Continuation

God continues his work of reformation in his church. There is a definite time that we can point to, and we can say, "God determined to form his church anew on January 21, 2021." Yet we must say that God also continues his work of reformation. A church is either reforming, or a church is apostatizing. She is either growing in the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ her Lord, or she is falling away. Through that all God is refining the work of his hands.

Knowing that, remember that the true church will not always be First Reformed Protestant Church or the Reformed Protestant Churches. The truth will not always be found there. You always must have that in your mind. You never are settled here. I say that especially for my children and for your children. The Israelites loved the truth as long as Joshua and the elders lived, but after they died, a generation arose that knew not the works of the Lord. The believer always is watching, listening, and testing everything against the word of God. The believer is a pilgrim and a stranger, and he is ready to depart outside the camp to go where Christ is if the lie corrupts the beautiful doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through Christ alone, by faith alone, to the glory of God alone. Do you hear that warning in the PRC? Could you imagine if a Protestant Reformed minister said that? I will say to you, if the RPC ever corrupts the truths that God justifies ungodly sinners and that the covenant is completely unconditional in every respect, God must form his church anew and you must leave here. Do not hesitate for one moment. You will know then that a generation has risen up that knows not the Lord nor his mighty works. That will happen again and again until Christ returns. That is the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the book of Judges.

To end on a positive note, if I consider the place in time and history that God has given to First Reformed Protestant Church and to the Reformed Protestant denomination, all I can do is praise and thank our God for this tremendous privilege. Those outside this church look at us and think with all the trouble and distress that seems to befall us that we must be the most miserable people in the world. I can tell you that we are not. We are beset on every side, that is true. But we have this: Peace with God. Peace in my heart and life that I am right with God. He is not at war with me. He does not strive against me. But in all my life he is for me. He is blessing me and blessing this congregation. The proof of that is that he has given to us the gospel. This is our joy and happiness as believers and as a church: We are righteous before God in Christ without our works. That is our confession. That is our joy and peace.

The church suffers in the world. That is her lot in this miserable, cursed, sin-filled world. The church is hated and despised. Besides, her members still have all the motions of sin in them. But faith is bright, all that considered. God's people love and confess the truth. They know the works of the Lord. They are filled with joy, hope, and peace. There is nowhere you or I would rather be than this privileged place in the year of our Lord 2026.

Questions and Answers

Q. Did election become just a "who" and not "unto something" in the Protestant Reformed Churches?

A. In Canons 1.7 the confession explains the "who" of election in the first part of the article. In the last half of the article, the confession explains the "what" of election. The confession first defines election and then explains what benefits of salvation come to us from election. The confession then goes on to quote Ephesians 1:4 at the end of the article. Every saving benefit, and I note that nothing is missing in the article, comes to us from the root, fountain, and source of salvation. That you believe the gospel? The source is election. That you repent of your sins? The source is election.

As far as your question is concerned, in the Protestant Reformed Churches the ministers gut election. It is simply window dressing so that they can say, "See, we preach election." They might use the word *election*, but their theology is not election theology. They come to a text and do not find the sovereign, gracious God of election but find man and his responsibility.

Protestant Reformed ministers do not preach election. If they preached election, every gift—the reception of the Spirit, membership in the covenant, experience and fellowship with the living God, repentance and good works—would all flow out of the truth of election, and there would be none of these silly word games that they play around with in their preaching.

Q. In connection with justification by faith alone, could you expound on the importance of the recovery of faith as a bond with Christ—it is no activity of man, but all of God, so that we are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh?

A. Faith is actively being rejected as union with Christ. Union with Christ is the essence of faith, and union with Christ is really the essence of salvation too. Salvation is wrapped up in our union with Christ as our head. God said about Christ "righteous" when he was raised up; and because God says that about your head, he says that about you who are in him.

The work that is being done in the PRC, especially by Reverend McGeown, is the denial of the truth that faith is a bond and thereby also a denial of the truth of Lord's Day 7. McGeown makes the activity of faith the important thing with faith. He makes our activity of believing, resting, and trusting the deciding thing. Our union with Christ is our bond with Jesus Christ. John 15 is explicit that Christ is the true vine and that we are in him. The only way you can understand John 15 and the *inness* of Christ with the child of God is faith as a bond. Anytime that you are reading the scriptures and you come to "in Christ," there you have the scriptures' teaching of faith as a bond or union with Jesus Christ. That is no small matter in scripture. That is the essence of faith. It is only because we are united with Jesus Christ that we receive all the blessings of salvation and all the righteousness that is ours in Christ. That by faith alone, by doing nothing, we are justified before the sight of God.

—TDO

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

PROFESSOR DYKSTRA AND GOD'S "UNREAL" PROMISES

There is a maxim in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC): "If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do."[1] Some in these churches have disillusioned themselves into believing that they have condemned this maxim. Others demand that it be preached, and it is. Made infamous by the writings of Rev. Kenneth Koole, this maxim perfectly encapsulates the escalating drumbeat of dogma that is sounding off the pulpits in the Protestant Reformed Churches and that defines the PRC. Protestant Reformed preachers often are careful not to raise any Reformed antennas by the direct use of the phrase, lest they excite any righteous indignation. But the theology is the same: Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation. Prof. Russell Dykstra's theology is the maxim.

On April 28, 2024, Professor Dykstra preached a weighty sermon.[2] It was not weighty in the sense that he brought the unburdening gospel to the broken sinner and told him that everything needed for his salvation was accomplished in Jesus Christ at the cross, but the sermon was weighty with the crushing force of the maxim. The experience of your salvation is unfinished. The suffering of Christ at the cross was a mere potentiality or "basis." Left for the hearer is that which man *must* do. The professor's theology is easily grasped: Christ's work as the "basis" plus your confession and forsaking of sin, which is repentance, is the way to salvation.

The occasion of the sermon was preparatory for the Lord's supper, and the text that the professor chose was Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." It is a beautiful text, and I will give the reader an orthodox interpretation. Proverbs 28 juxtaposes the believer and the unbeliever. Verse 13 says that those who cover their sins shall not prosper because they are not believers who know that the only covering for their sins is the blood of Jesus Christ. Confession and the forsaking of sins (repentance) are identifying marks or fruits of a believer who has God's mercy, and a life characterized by true repentance will inevitably flow out of the believer.

The professor does much evil with Proverbs 28:13. I will demonstrate the professor's theology with the words he preached. In the introduction to the sermon, the professor makes a subtle change to the wording of the text:

> You have on the one hand a man who covers his sin, and he does not prosper; and a man who confesses on the other hand and forsakes his sin. He shall *obtain* mercy. (emphasis added)

The professor interprets the text as causal, and his change to the word "obtain" is purposeful. He has a man who confesses and forsakes sin in order to "obtain" something he does not possess, God's mercy. The professor does not preach the sure promise of God that he is merciful to his people and that his people really have that mercy. The professor teaches conditional theology in the vein of his spiritual father, Rev. Hubert De Wolf. First this, then that. Man is first, then God may give. First confession and forsaking of sin, then God's mercy and not before; or as Hubert put it, "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom."

The professor goes further yet in the introduction:

> This is spiritual wisdom. It's the wisdom of God. And the wisdom of God is confess your sins and turn from them. Confess your sins and forsake them. This is the way of wisdom. This is the way of Christ. This is the way of salvation. How a saved person lives.

To the professor the way of Christ, the way of salvation, is to confess and forsake your sins. John 14:6 gives the true way: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but

1 Kenneth Koole, "What Must I Do…?," *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 7.

2 Russell Dykstra, "The Antithetical Way of Repentance," sermon preached in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on April 28, 2024, https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/429240636571. All quotations from Dykstra in the article are from this sermon.

by me." But Christ alone is not the way for the professor. His way is Christ's work as a "basis" plus your work to "confess your sins and turn from them." The professor teaches his congregants to enter the kingdom another way than by Christ.

Throughout the body of the sermon, the professor does not mention Christ. Although the professor mentions Christ a few times in the introduction and the conclusion, the sermon is entirely Christless.

Throughout the body of the sermon, the professor does not mention Christ. Although the professor mentions Christ a few times in the introduction and the conclusion, the sermon is entirely Christless. Even in the few mentions of Christ in the introduction and conclusion, the professor disparages Christ and displaces his perfect work, or, in the words of Belgic Confession article 22, the professor asserts that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides him, which is "too gross a blasphemy" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50). The main of the sermon is the "how-to" of repentance. The professor gives scriptural examples of sins that are covered up and many different ways of how man covers his sins and what that looks like and emphasizes what are the necessary parts of genuine repentance. He also demonstrates that confession and the forsaking of sins are repentance.

In the center of the message, he comes with this:

> When a man by the grace of God repents and confesses his sins, the next step is asking God for grace to forsake it. And God gives that grace, but if a man is not sorry for his sin and then piously goes before God and says, "O God, forgive me and deliver me from my sin," but he really isn't repentant…God is not mocked. God does not give the grace to forsake sin. If there is not genuine repentance, there will not be that grace given.

With this quotation the professor continues adding to what the believer does not have until he repents. You want grace? God only gives grace after you repent and confess. Reverend Koole preached a sermon in various Protestant Reformed churches in which he admonished the congregations to "seek the grace that is available."[3] What happened to irresistible grace? Professor Dykstra's theology is the same as his counterpart's. No grace without genuine repentance. When you confess, then God will give you more grace to forsake sin, but not before. Koole and Dykstra are two peas in a pod. God's grace is not irresistible for Reverend Koole or for the professor. Grace is obtained. Their theology is man-first, conditional theology.

Let us continue with the professor's teachings.

> People of God, there is some of this in us too. When we do not confess and forsake sin, if we cover sins and continue in them, the heavy hand of God's wrath comes upon us. Psalm 32:3–4: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." It wasn't until he [David] acknowledged his sin, confessed his guilt, that he received mercy. Failure to confess, failure to forsake, not only brings God's heavy hand upon us, but it says to you and me as we read in the form tonight, "Do not come to the table of the Lord." You will not receive in the Lord's supper God's assurance of love and mercy toward you. You will not experience that if you do not confess, if you do not forsake your sins. You will experience God's judgment. His judgment.

When we do not confess and forsake our sins, if we cover our sins and continue in them, the heavy hand of God's wrath comes upon us. Is that right, Professor? This was a preparatory sermon. Does not the Reformed Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper state that Christ "bore for us the wrath of God (under which we should have perished everlastingly) from the beginning of His incarnation to the end of His life upon earth"? (*Confessions and Church Order*, 270). To the professor, Jesus Christ's bearing of God's wrath does not quite cover that wrath, for there is wrath that man also must bear. Does not the professor know that no mere man can bear the wrath of God even for a moment? What terror the professor brings to his hearers.

We cannot pass over the end of the quotation: "You will experience God's judgment. His judgment." Notice the repetition. The professor teaches that if you do not confess and forsake your sins, you will experience God's judgment. *Judgment* has to do with the doctrine of justification. So

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

the professor brings his hearers into the very tribunal of God in the judgment seat. This means that they stand as unrighteous before God and as the proper objects of God's wrath. The professor teaches his hearers to stand before God, the righteous judge, holding their confessions and their forsaking of sins. What utter wickedness!

Who would dare to come to the Lord's table?

Where is Christ in the professor's theology?

The Lord's supper form states

> that every one examine his own heart, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own, yea, so perfectly as if he had satisfied in his own person for all his sins and fulfilled all righteousness. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 268)

According to the professor, the amount of blessings of salvation that can be obtained by one's repentance continues to grow:

> You will not receive in the Lord's supper God's assurance of love and mercy towards you. You will not experience that if you do not confess, if you do not forsake your sins.

Earlier in the sermon, the professor used Proverbs 28:13, which text he sought out for his theology, to teach that God's mercy is something one can "obtain," and then he added, as something that is unlocked with one's genuine repentance, that God gives grace to forsake sins. Now the professor adds that by one's confessing and forsaking of sins, one receives the assurance of God's love and mercy. This is some sort of repentance. Do we not receive these blessings by faith alone without works? "If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6).

But what of David?

With the PRC's standard interpretation of Psalm 32, the professor alludes to David's experience and says that David was missing the experience of his salvation—that is, David was missing God's love and mercy, the assurance of salvation, and the forgiveness of sins. Then David repented. After he repented he received God's mercy and the comforting assurance of the forgiveness of his sins. Never of merit. By grace, of course.

Is that an accurate representation of the common teaching in the PRC? It is.

Concerning Abraham's justification by faith alone and David as he describes his blessedness in Psalm 32, the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote in Romans 4:1–8:

1. What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
2. For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.
3. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.
4. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
7. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
8. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

The blessedness of David was that he was justified. David's righteousness was imputed to him without works.

The professor is yet culminating in the sermon, and there is more to come. The following portion of quotations are connected to each other in every breath and compose the conclusion of the sermon.

> The text says that those who confess and forsake shall have mercy. Shall have mercy. What does it mean that we shall have mercy? Surely it does not mean that we merit it by confessing our sins, and that's very obvious from two things immediately that shows that. We don't merit it because even when we come confessing our sins, we're still rebels. We still deserve to be cast out of his presence. There isn't anything in us that ever merits any mercy from God. And the second thing that makes it obvious that we didn't merit is God has eternally been merciful to us within his own mind and his own counsel. God says, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy." And who is that? Romans 9, it's his elect people. Jacob, who has never done good or evil—yet God said, "Jacob have I loved. I will have mercy on him." It's his elect people. He reveals that mercy by sending his Son. And the death of Jesus on the cross becomes the very *basis* for why he *may* show mercy to us. Because we are forgiven in Jesus Christ. We never earn that mercy. (emphasis added)

The professor tries to sound Reformed here by checking some Reformed boxes. He mentions God's eternality and counsel, check. Election, check. Never earn or merit, check. Eternal mercy, check. The professor says all these things, but

they mean nothing to him. Christ is only the "basis" to the professor. Christ "may" show mercy. God's promises are not realities to the professor. He gives Christ for a moment—kind of—and he can hardly wait to rip Christ away. There is always a "but" in Protestant Reformed dogma. In this case there are an "and yet…" and a "but." For the professor believes in the maxim: If a man is to be saved, there is that which he *must* do. The professor continues:

> *And yet* the text is saying that the one who confesses and forsaketh them shall have mercy, and the sense almost is if, well, he didn't really have it in a certain sense before, but after confessing and forsaking now he has it. (emphasis added)

The professor is really trying to stand up in his canoe at this point, and it is difficult to listen to him fumbling around in this section of the sermon. He is trying to fit the doctrines of election and God's eternal counsel with his doctrine of prerequisite repentance and justification by works. The doctrines do not fit together, and he knows it. His theology necessarily denies a God who is eternally merciful to the elect. The professor pays lip service to election and the sovereignty of God in salvation and then denies them to be realities. I will have him show the reader with his own words.

> Now again, eternally God has been merciful. I know that; you know that. *But this is the reality*, that God shows mercy in the way of God leading us to confession and forgiveness and then showing us his mercy. In the way of. In the Old Testament, the man putting his hand upon the animal, confessing his sins—those sins went away; they were taken away from him. *So do we know that all our sins are imputed to Jesus Christ. Every time we confess them, they're taken off from our account; they're put on Jesus. And God says once again, I forgive you. I forgive you. He shows us mercy*. I forgive you for Jesus' sake. (emphasis added)

And finally the professor is fully ensconced in the seat of Rome. He sounds more like a Catholic priest trying to explain the decisions of the Council of Trent to his parishioners than a man who takes to himself the name Reformed. Rome's Council of Trent denied the Protestant Reformation's core doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the professor also denies that truth. The professor's teaching about repentance—or penance, if I may—and all that it "obtains" would make the Pope blush. Your confession takes sin off your account and places it on Christ's account? That is what the professor teaches. He really preached that. Go listen for yourself. Sin is taken off one's account and imputed to Christ's account by one's confession. The professor teaches simply justification by works, not even justification by faith and works. This is evidenced by the fact that he never says the word *faith* in the entire sermon! He overthrows the Reformation of 1517 and the core doctrine of *sola fide*. He teaches another gospel, which is no gospel.

Let us see the truth in Lord's Day 23:

> Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?
>
> A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 106–107)

The professor ends the sermon with the following remarks:

> That's the only way we should ever dare to come to the table of the Lord. Do that this week. Do that every day of your life. Confess with grief, forsake the sins by the power of God's grace, and you shall have mercy. This is God's beautiful promise to sinners. Amen.

"Beautiful"? This so-called promise that depends upon the filth of man's doing is no promise at all and is devoid of any comfort. All the professor can see is what man must do to "obtain" from God, and the professor searches the scriptures to press his theology into them.

The only way that believers "dare" to come to the Lord's table is by believing in the finished work of Jesus Christ as their complete savior, of which the sacrament testifies. The beautiful promise of the gospel is what Christ has done for his people through his work. Lord's Day 25 states that the sacraments seal to us "the promise of the gospel, namely, that [Christ] grants us freely the remission of sin and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 108).

Now that is beautiful!

That is comforting!

God's promises are yea and amen in Christ, and we have a perfect savior who told his Father at the cross, "It is finished." Hearing that news, we have everlasting comfort and assurance that our God will only ever show mercy to us poor sinners.

—Eddie Ophoff

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

DEAR BROTHER

Dear Brother,

I can tell that you are dying.

That may have caught you off guard. After all, your letter to me indicated that you have quite a vibrant life. You have a lively family, and you are busy with a great deal of activity. Your children are playing, learning, dating, musicking, traveling, graduating, and working. Your family is exchanging gifts, sending cards to one another, feasting, marrying, and giving in marriage. Your wife is planning, working, organizing, and mothering. You are living life to the fullest. As in the days of Noah.

Yet with all this, there is evidence that what is actually working is death.

The preaching of the gospel is life and is necessary for the soul. The gospel brings Christ as the bread and water of life. However, in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), the preaching brings death. The preaching of the PRC substitutes man for Christ at every turn. As I have warned you before,

> the PRC denies the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Specifically, the PRC denies justification by faith alone by redefining faith, so that the essence of faith becomes the activity of believing. The PRC denies justification by teaching that the way of obedience, repentance, believing, or any combination of these are necessary to experience fellowship with God. The PRC denies justification by faith alone by requiring the activity of repentance prior to being forgiven by God.[1]

The preaching of the gospel works life. The preaching in the PRC is working death.

You may try to treat this as an intellectual exercise. Perhaps you will think, "I will compare my sermons with your sermons and judge who teaches the truth." Well and good. We have shown you the evil in your sermons and speeches. We have written the truth of the gospel. When will you start judging? Are you *able* to judge *spiritually*? Are you *willing* to judge regardless of the outcome to your life on this earth? Or have you delayed, fearing the outcome? I know God's judgment; I await yours.

While you are delaying, another week brings more evidence that death is working in Protestant Reformed pews. The legalism taught from Protestant Reformed pulpits must work sin in Protestant Reformed members. The preaching of legalism does this by bringing soul-crushing misery to the members who then try and fail to find solace by going deeper in sin. You know that. You see its effect. And the legalism taught from Protestant Reformed pulpits affects an even more wicked, God-hating pride that does not understand the corruption of one's own nature but says "I will do better than that; I will try harder."

We have warned you about this before. We have warned you that the only stance possible for a Christian in your current place is one of all-out warfare—warfare against your denomination, against your consistory and minister, against your church, even against your family and your own flesh, all of whom are actively embracing and running in the lie that is against Christ. If you would battle just for a moment against any aspect of the lie, as that lie has overtaken your church, you will see who now rules there. It is not Christ. Behold! Christ stands outside the door and knocks.

We have also shown you the joy and rest that can be found only under the pure preaching of the gospel. Under the preaching of the gospel, we and our children are well. We have found rest, true rest that can come only from renouncing our wills and seeking after God's will. We have come to enjoy and appreciate the picture of covenant life that God gives us in our family. We have learned also that when this picture crowds out the reality of God's covenant with us, even that covenant life in the family becomes an idol. There is no rest in idolatry. We have learned that while the gospel comes with great loss—sometimes a loss like Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac but sometimes like David's loss of Absalom—in those losses God always restores many times over, as with Job.

God restores us by giving us himself and his truth. He

1 Michael Vermeer, "Rev. Joshua Engelsma's Overthrow," *Sword and Shield* 6, no. 7 (December 2025): 28–31.

makes that truth so important to us that we can suffer the loss of all things for that truth. He shows to us that what is done with his truth is done to God himself, because God himself is identified as truth.

What happens when God restores his truth? That truth surpasses everything else in value. As with the parable of the pearl of great price, a man will sell all his possessions so that he may have the truth. He hates everything that loves and makes a lie, counting such as "dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters" (Rev. 22:15). He understands also that falling from God's truth is not a mere indiscretion, but straying one iota from that truth carries with it damning consequences. Notwithstanding the false ecumenism within the PRC that seeks to unite with every brand of false doctrine, Christ says such is wickedness and "if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life" (v. 19).

This emphasis on the truth probably sounds very strange to you, since postmodernism has taken fast hold on the Protestant Reformed Churches. In the PRC your *Double-Standard Bearer* attempts to hold together teachings from yesteryear against common grace[2] alongside promotion of and participation with the churches of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), who love that devilish doctrine. In the PRC professors and ministers imagine and teach that truth is relative by allowing contradictory doctrines to be taught from their pulpits. Even within the same sermon, sovereign grace is served as a cliché garnish that lends some contrast to the main dish, the "way of your obedience." In the PRC you may not dare to judge the very words spoken by the ministers! Rather, you must assume that they are "solid Reformed men,"[3] and what they *mean* therefore must be sound. Postmodernism!

Over against this wicked, postmodernist thought, God makes his truth so important to us that we may not—indeed, cannot—dwell with those who corrupt his truth. This does not apply merely to members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, but this is a universal truth. Our God hates the lie. When he regenerates a man, he makes that man the dwelling of the Spirit of Christ, and that man will also hate the lie. Wherever that man sees corruption and denial of God and his truth, he cannot help but speak out. And when his friends stubbornly live in the lie and refuse to turn from it, it becomes impossible to dwell in friendship with them anymore. Trying to do so is yoking oneself unequally with an unbeliever and is attempting the impossible: to be friends with God and with mammon. Ye cannot!

If the truth of God is the name of God, then a refusal to love and follow after the truth but instead to dwell with the lie is blasphemy against God's name.

Perhaps you are thinking, why cannot we pick the lowest common denominator of the truth that pitches a tent over both of us and use that to determine with whom we dwell? Must we be so particular about doctrine? Yes. Because God is God. As Reverend Ophoff recently preached,

> The name of God is the revelation of who he is in all of his perfections, in all of his words and all of his works, in all of his glorious perfections. The name of God is this: It's the whole truth of God. You can just say this, too: The name of God is the truth.[4]

This is not any new doctrine. The truth of God's simplicity demands that all God's attributes are one in him, as we learned in our *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine* catechism class. If the truth of God is the name of God, then a refusal to love and follow after the truth but instead to dwell with the lie is blasphemy against God's name. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" (Ex. 20:7).

Dear brother, in the face of all this witness, you show evidence that this death is also having its effect on you.

You respond. In response to our warning and rebuke… you ignore everything we said? Instead, you ask about our life and if we can send pictures?

How carnal! We pointed you to the impending judgment that is coming toward you like a dark storm cloud and called you to seek after heavenly things, and instead you root around in the dirt like a pig. Are you so much now a naturalized citizen of John Bunyan's Vanity Fair? In both ignoring

2 James Laning, "Common Grace Promised to the Natural Seed," *Standard Bearer* 102, no. 6 (February 2026): 175–78.

3 Hilgard Goosen, "Why Did the Goosen Family Leave?," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 9 (November 2021): 29. This quote is attributed to Professor Dykstra.

4 Tyler Ophoff, "Of Thankfulness: The Third Commandment," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on January 25, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/live/xf5eQG2pEmA?si=JnAwF-AkUFa5fiH6.

the important questions and asking the carnal ones, you show that you do not have interest in life. You show that you despise life and love death. As in the days of Noah.

It is not that your letter did not have an effect. The devil is working hard through your carnal letter. The devil works in your dying flesh to find every opportunity to remind us of the pleasures of our formerly carnal life. He sticks it in our noses, tempts us with it, and reminds us how good it was. "It could be that way again," he hisses!

And there is more in your letter that shows that you are dying. The devil, it seems, has taken your spiritually lifeless corpse and is using it for his nefarious purposes. You ask why we cannot have an earthly relationship. After all, God made us an earthly family. And others of my ilk are living in unbelief, secreting away to spend time with their Protestant Reformed families; why can't we spend time together?

It appears that you are still getting advice from Uncle Screwtape. He recommended that the Christian should be

> taught to enjoy kneeling besides the grocer on Sunday just because he remembers that the grocer could not possibly understand the urbane and mocking world which he [the Christian] inhabited on Saturday evening; and contrariwise, to enjoy the bawdy and blasphemy over the coffee with these admirable friends all the more because he is aware of a "deeper", "spiritual" world within him which they cannot understand...Thus, while being permanently treacherous to at least two sets of people, he will feel, instead of shame, a continual undercurrent of self-satisfaction.[5]

I do not know what you think the antithesis means. Reverend McGeown recently attempted to explain the antithesis, but he contradicted himself and also mutilated Christ's speech in Luke 14:25–26 by claiming that Christ does not bring any practical division in the family. Do you also make to be nothing the division that Christ brings in the family? I leave you to Reverend Ophoff's demonstration of the wickedness of McGeown's teaching.[6]

Christ came to set us—you and I, brother—at variance. The variance has been well documented. Now, what should we do with this variance that Christ has set in our relationship? Let us search the scriptures and judge! The plain reading of the following passages insists that I may no longer dwell in fellowship with you while you are living in the unbelief and false gospel of the Protestant Reformed Churches; my calling, rather, is to speak the truth against your lie.

> Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. (Eph. 5:11)
>
> I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. (1 Cor. 10:20)
>
> Now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. (1 Cor. 5:11)
>
> If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. (1 Cor. 16:22)
>
> If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. (1 John 1:6)
>
> Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Cor. 6:14)

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep!

What have I said that is hateful? What have I said that is untrue? Will you shake your head sadly and say that I have been deceived and am under the grips of the devil or wicked men (meanwhile giving the lie to that idea by not trying to save me from it)? Will you call me a devil? I suppose it should be expected. The Jews railed against my Lord when he spoke against them, and he taught me that "if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matt. 10:25).

Call me what you will. Brother, I love you. And loving you, I consider this a warning or an attempted roadblock on your full-tilt run toward the cliff. And when I remember how "we took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company" (Ps. 55:14), I pray that God in his mercy will preserve you, pulling you out of the fire and corruption of death where I see you running.

We all must die. We all will die. Death in this life, however, has two forms. You appear to have chosen this form: to be dead to the truth in order to save your carnal life.

I submit to you a different form of death. Particularly, crucifixion.

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

Sincerely,
Michael Vermeer

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5 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 52.

6 Tyler Ophoff, "McGeown's Fables (2)," *Sword and Shield* 6, no. 9 (February 2026): 15–21.

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. —Jude 14–15

It must have been a thrilling sermon for God's people in Enoch's age to hear. It is still thrilling for God's people to read the small portion of that sermon as it is recorded for us by Jude.

There is more written about Enoch in the New Testament than what Moses wrote about Enoch in the Old Testament. Moses tells us that Enoch was the son of Jared and the father of Methuselah. Adam died only a few years before Enoch was taken to heaven. Moses tells us that "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). The New Testament tells us much more. In Hebrews 11:5–6 is the Spirit's explanation of Moses' briefer testimony:

5. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.
6. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Enoch's faith is the explanation of his sermon. The Spirit revealed that sermon to Jude. Jude did not copy it from any book or receive it by tradition. That sermon Jude applies to the false teachers of his day. Jude says that Enoch prophesied concerning false teachers. When Jude says that Enoch prophesied, Jude means that Enoch spoke his speech against the false teachers of his own day. There were men who had crept in unawares into Adam's church, where Enoch was the preacher, and they brought in their damnable heresies. Specifically, Jude says earlier in his book that the false teachers turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. You must not understand that to mean that Jude is preaching against a certain class or form of heresy, but he is teaching what all false doctrine does. No matter the form of false doctrine, its purpose is to take the grace of God and to turn it in the service of man's lusts and desires. Jude also says that the false teachers denied the only God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is also what all false doctrine does, no matter its form. False teachers are not mistaken and benighted souls, but they are personally wicked men who were foreordained to that condemnation.

Against such false teachers Enoch was moved with indignation, and he comforted the church over against them and all their ungodly deeds and their hard speeches that they ungodly spoke against Christ. When the false teachers speak the lie, they speak against Christ. And Enoch said, "The Lord is coming!" Enoch meant Jesus Christ. Enoch in his day saw the day of Christ, and he comforted the church in the Lord's certain judgments on false teachers and their false doctrine and wicked lives. Enoch's words Jude applied to his day. And we apply them to our day. Here is the comfort of the church: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints!" Then the Lord will contend for his own truth against the pious-sounding frauds, who with their lies deny Christ and in their attack on the truth speak against him.

—NJL