



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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THE PRIEST-KING

The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah; then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest; and speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. And the crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD. And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God. — Zechariah 6:9–15

For he shall reign upon his throne! And he who shall reign will be a priest upon his throne.

So it must be; it cannot be otherwise. God's house certainly shall be built. His house—high in the highest heavens, in all its glory and grandness, and encompassing all things in heaven and on earth—shall be built. When that house is completed, the priest of the Most High shall stand at the pinnacle of all things, and the servant of Jehovah shall sit upon the throne forever!

That is God's answer to the question posed by the children of men and by the nations: Who shall be the greatest?

The lives of the sinful world, of sinful society, and of the sinful nations center upon that question. To that question people constantly seek to provide an answer—an answer in concrete reality, an answer in the tangible form of a king. This king, the man-king, seeks to rule not merely in the name of the people or of a democratic majority but in the name of *man*. Humanity—the world that has fallen away from God and turned apostate—seeks the kingdom of man by man and for man. There is an irresistible urge in human blood for a king, for the king over all. That urge manifests itself time and again and cannot be suppressed—not even by the slogan about making the world safe for democracy or by the revolutionary cry, “*Ni Dieu ni maître* [Neither God nor master]!”

Who will be the greatest?

Who will rule on the throne of the world as king?

To this question the world's answer is, the red rebel against God and against his anointed!

The insurrectionist.

The servant of the devil.

That has been the world's answer ever since the great revolution in paradise, where the first man Adam stood originally as the servant of the Lord and as the ally of the Most High. God had placed his servant in paradise at the pinnacle of creation here below and given to Adam dominion over all things. All things were to serve Adam, so that he might serve his God. Adam was the priest-king, the servant of God, upon the throne of creation. Then the great revolution broke out—the world revolution, incited by the prince of darkness, that would henceforth throughout the ages dominate the life and striving of the world. The servant of the Lord and the ally of God became the devil's slave and Satan's friend. Since that day, the striving for world dominion in opposition to God has continued. Man seeks to realize his own answer to the question, who shall be king in the world? And man's answer is, the red revolutionary man, the rebel against God, the antichrist, Satan's ally!

But God also has an answer to the world's age-old question.

And God's answer is, “My servant shall sit upon the throne!”

That answer is embodied in Zechariah 6:9–15 as the word of the Lord to Zechariah and as the command of the Lord to Zechariah that he must perform the symbolic act of crowning the high priest.

Josiah, the son of Zephaniah, receives three male visitors: Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah. They were among the

exiles who had been carried away captive. Thus they come from Babylon. They had not returned with those who loved Zion and who, at the word of Cyrus, had set out from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. They come to Jerusalem now, but not with the intention of staying there; they are merely visiting. They belong to the exiles who voluntarily still live in Babylon, for from an earthly perspective as businessmen they consider it unadvisable to change their place of residence. They are doing well in Babylon; their business ventures are prospering. And Jerusalem—burnt and lying in ruins—is hardly an inviting place to live. Nevertheless, the men still take an interest in the cause of the Lord, in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple of God. Undoubtedly, to support the good cause materially and to hearten those who have returned from exile, these men bring gold and silver and are visiting for a few days with Josiah.

Let us not judge these men too harshly. After all, they mean well. Deep down they understand that Jerusalem truly represents God's cause, that they belong there, and that Babylon cannot be their true home. So, while keeping the good cause at a distance—and without wanting to share personally in the scorn, shame, and hardship for God's sake—they are willing to support the cause with their gold and silver.

There are many such people, even today, who are friends of Zion at a distance in Babylon.

Perhaps the three men are surprised when Zechariah, the prophet of the Lord, visits them at Josiah's house to demand their gold and silver. From that gold and silver the prophet intends to fashion a crown for Joshua the high priest.

Although the word "crowns" appears in the King James Version and the plural form is also in the original Hebrew text, Zechariah is ordered to make a *single* crown. The plural form must be understood as referring to the *constituent parts of the one crown*. That crown was to be placed only upon Joshua's head.

The well-meaning visitors initially may have raised some objections to such a squandering of their funds. They certainly are committed to the cause. Indeed, they have brought the money specifically to support the rebuilding of the temple. But to part with their gold and silver for the making of a crown—and a crown for the high priest, at that, which crown is destined merely to hang in the temple as a memorial—seems like a waste of their offerings.

Yet the Lord has spoken: "Take silver and gold from these men!" And when the Lord speaks, who can turn his word aside?

The word of the Lord shall stand.

Joshua the high priest must be crowned!

For God indeed will give his answer to the world's

age-old question: Who shall be king? Who is the greatest? And God's answer is, "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion! My servant shall forever be the greatest. He shall be king over all my works."

The Christ.

For such is the word of the Lord to the three men at the house of Josiah: "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne."

The Christ of God.

For his name is The Branch. He shall sprout from his place—from the seed of Abraham, the tribe of Judah, the house of David, and the womb of Mary. He will sprout from his place; he will also sprout, spring up, and rise on high through his death and resurrection into his glorification at the right hand of the Father.

And he builds the temple of the Lord.

God's eternal house, of which the temple in Jerusalem was but a shadow; the house of God's covenant, the eternal dwelling together of God and his people in a heavenly, perfect bond of friendship within the new creation; the house of God founded by The Branch in the eternal righteousness of God through his blood, realized by his Spirit, and to be revealed in all its glory at his return.

In that house The Branch shall be the high priest!

And the high priest shall be king forever!

For the priest is the servant of the Lord! And only the servant of the Lord may reign over all things.

God's answer that he may be all in all!

The priest-king of God!



Peace on earth!

For this priest-king is the Prince of Peace. The revolutionary man-king is a prince of war, and he can never become a prince of peace because as king he refuses to be a priest, a servant of the Lord. He is anti-God and the antichrist. Through his kingship he seeks to destroy the priesthood of God. There is war between his kingship and God's priesthood. What this king of the revolution desires stands in direct opposition to what the priest of the Lord desires—and must desire—and is in conflict with the will of God. Therefore, the king of the revolution is and must remain to the very end a prince of war.

No matter how much he speaks of peace, he does not know the way of peace, nor will he ever be able to find it. In the kingdom of this revolutionary king, everyone wants to be the greatest, and no one wants to be a priest. So hatred and envy and war and destruction will always remain.

But the priest-king is the Prince of Peace!

“For the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”

It is abundantly clear that dogmatics has made improper use of this word of scripture by appealing to it in support of the doctrine of the counsel of peace. In a dogmatic sense “counsel of peace” would refer to an eternal decree of God—an agreement between the Father and the Son for the redemption of the elect. Yet Zechariah 6:13 is not about an eternal decree or the eternal counsel of God, nor does the verse involve a relationship or an agreement between the Father and the Son. Consequently, the doctrine of the counsel of peace cannot appeal to this scriptural text.¹

For “both” in the text refers to the priest and to the king in the one Christ—or, if you will, Christ as priest in the house of the Lord and Christ as king over Zion, the mountain of God’s holiness. And these two take counsel together. Never does the one do anything without consulting the other. The priest takes counsel with the king; the king eternally consults the priest. And the counsel between these two, united in the one Christ, is always a counsel of peace. There is perfect harmony of will, thought, and purpose. The king always rules according to the will of the priest; the priest always ministers to the king. The king sits upon the throne as priest; the priest ministers as king in God’s house. What the king wills, the priest also wills; the king never wills anything that the priest does not will.

The counsel of peace is between them both.

Christ is the perfect servant-king.

Therefore, the king is eternally in perfect harmony with the will of God. He is the Prince of Peace!

Peace is established; the counsel of peace exists between them both in the incarnation of the Word—for there, indeed, both priest and king were united in the person of the Son of God. There is peace—perfect peace—between them both along the deep path of humiliation that led even into hell. The counsel of peace is held between them both in the quiet of the garden of Gethsemane, where both prayed, “Not my will!” Not for a moment was the counsel of peace hindered at the dreadful cross. And the counsel of peace between them both finds its crowning and fulfillment in the resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of the Most High.

Therefore, he is the Prince of Peace!

Therefore, he also makes peace—peace with God and peace on the earth.

For as the Prince of Peace, he stands at the head of his church; he sends forth the Spirit of peace into the hearts of his own; he applies his peace—peace with God, peace grounded in God’s righteousness—to the hearts of his own; and he removes from those hearts the discord between kingship and priesthood, the spirit of revolution!

He makes his own a royal priesthood!

He causes the counsel of peace to reign within them too!

Here, in principle. And later perfectly when he has cast into hell all the godless disturbers of the peace.

Then he shall eternally subject himself and all things to the Father, so as to reign eternally, in that submission, together with his own over all the works of God’s hands.

Eternally, according to the counsel of peace.

Between them both.



Do not remain in Babylon then!

For there is not the crown.

The crown of Babylon is a revolutionary crown—one that can never endure because God’s word endures.

Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah—and all well-meaning visitors in the house of Josiah—depart from his house! Behold, let the crown that was first pressed upon Joshua’s temples be a sign to you: It is kept in the temple, in God’s house, as a memorial for you! A sign that The Branch, God’s servant, shall soon be king forever!

Come, then—not merely as visitors, not merely with your gold and silver, but as builders of the temple of the Lord—to dwell forevermore with the king in that house! For even strangers shall come from the East and the West and the North and the South and shall build in the temple of the Lord. They are drawn by the sign of this eternal crown! They are impelled by the counsel of peace. Therefore, they listen diligently to the voice of the Lord their God, to the word of the Lord, in order to do it. And then they come and build in the temple. Only then. For, after all, they do not build God’s house. They cannot build God’s house. That is the work of the high priest-king alone. Yet he builds through them as well. They may be laborers together; they are deemed worthy to labor with him, to strive with him, to suffer with him, to triumph with him, and to be glorified with him.

Come, then, and build in the temple of the Lord!

Diligently heeding the voice of the Lord your God.

There Christ builds God’s house!

—Herman Hoeksema

¹ What Hoeksema calls the doctrine of the counsel of peace is also known as the *pactum salutis*, or pact of salvation. It is a reference to the false doctrine that the eternal origin of the covenant of grace is an agreement between the Father and the Son. Hoeksema critiqued this doctrine and rejected it. Many old Reformed theologians appealed to Zechariah 6:13 to support that doctrine. Hoeksema correctly taught that the eternal origin of the covenant of grace is the decree of the covenant. The triune God decreed to establish the covenant of grace with Christ and the elect in Christ.

THE END OF ALL THINGS (7): ANTICHRIST AS A RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. — 1 John 2:18

Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. — 1 John 2:22

Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. — 1 John 4:3

Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. — 2 John 1:7

I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six. — Revelation 13:11–18

Introduction

I have been examining the subject of antichrist, which includes three main parts: antichrist as a political movement for a one-world kingdom that is anti-God and anti-Christ; antichrist as the one man who finally will sit at the head of that kingdom and declare that he is God; and antichrist as a religious movement for the unification of all false, apostate Christianity along with the world's religions that stands in the service of antichrist as a political movement and as a man to cause the whole world to serve him. The fullest, scriptural description of this third aspect of antichrist is Revelation 13:11–18. In this editorial I will follow closely that description.

Antichrist as a political movement has had a history-long manifestation, beginning at Babel with Nimrod. Antichrist as a religious movement has had a history-long

manifestation too. Antichrist as a political movement and as the hero who will lead that movement have always had their prophets who sing their praises. This was true of Nimrod's prophets, who caused this slogan to arise around Nimrod and all his efforts: "Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD (Gen. 10:9)! Pharaoh had Jannes and Jambres, as we read in 2 Timothy 3:8: "As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." Nebuchadnezzar had his wise men, soothsayers, and sorcerers. So we see that the beast that rises out of the sea is accompanied by a beast that rises from the earth.

The appearance of the beast that rises out of the sea is at the same time both terrible and wonderful, for he is a composite beast: lion-faced on his seven heads and having the body of a leopard and the paws of a great bear.

He is the symbol of antichrist as the work of Satan to unite the nations and peoples of the world into one kingdom of political and universal dominion at whose head ultimately will stand that wicked one himself. He will control all the nations and peoples, and he will develop wonderfully the powers of creation and control all the institutions of society. He will have absolute dominion over science and technology, art and culture, industry and commerce, religion and philosophy, and the powers of creation. The beast is the symbol of a kingdom heretofore as yet unrealized, but for which there always has been a push in the history of the world. The spiritual character of this beastly kingdom is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-church. However, the beast will not be anti-religion, but the beast himself will be the religion. He will bear a blasphemous name; he will speak great blasphemies; and he will be worshiped and wondered after by the whole world, which will exclaim, "Who is like unto the beast?"

This antichristian kingdom is not realized primarily by force of arms but by the willing union of all the nations and peoples in the world. It is a kingdom that has been and already is in the world regarding its spiritual principle, as a movement, and as a drive in the hearts of men. It also has had certain pointed types that have failed to achieve the full picture symbolized in the beast that rises out of the sea in Revelation 13:1–10, but nevertheless they have given to us a clear glimpse of this terrible, blaspheming creature.

The Identity of the Beast Out of the Earth

Now we see a second beast. An entirely new subject is not introduced in Revelation 13:11–18, but the second beast is another description of the full reality of antichrist. The reality of antichrist is not exhausted in the representation of his political power, but antichrist has another important aspect that is represented by "another beast," one that is "out of the earth" (v. 11).

There is something darker and more sinister about this beast than the first beast. The first beast comes boldly and openly with his seven heads and great composite body. He snarls and blasphemes openly. But the beast out of the earth is beguiling. This deception begins with his appearance. He appears out of the earth; he comes from obscurity, as it were, as a son of the earth. He does not rise to power in the heady rough-and-tumble of politics and political intrigue, but he comes from the earth until he reaches the heights of extraordinary power.

And he apparently looks like a lamb because he has the two horns of a lamb. He does not have the snarling and awful appearance of the first hydra-headed beast with his tawny face, dappled coat, and huge ursine paws.

Although the second beast appears as a lamb, he is still a beast, but a far less formidable beast in appearance.

Yet any good thoughts about the second beast evaporate when he speaks. He looks like a lamb, but his voice is that of a dragon.

He also stands in a very obvious relationship to the first beast because the second beast exercises "all the power of the first beast before him" (Rev. 13:12). In his presence and in his service, the second beast operates before the first beast as his court magician and prophet.

The second beast also does great wonders, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men. And by his wonders men are deceived, so that they listen to his preaching, make an image to the first beast, and worship that image.

The second beast himself gives a spirit to the image, so that the image speaks and causes all who do not worship the beast to be killed. And all—rich and poor, bond and free, small and great—who worship the image of the beast he inscribes with a mark, so that they all are united in the worship of the beast whose deadly wound has been healed and who speaks great blasphemies.

Revelation 19:20 very specifically confirms the identity of the second beast: "The beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." The false prophet of the book of Revelation is this second beast out of the earth that appears as a lamb but speaks like a dragon.

The second beast is a false prophet.

A prophet is a messenger who is commissioned by another to speak on his behalf, to speak his message and for his cause, and to oppose all that oppose that cause for which he speaks. For example, a prophet of God is commissioned by God to speak for God. The prophet speaks God's word and opposes with that word of God all that sets itself in opposition to that word. The prophet is God's yes to man's no and a teacher and a revealer of the will of God. All the prophet's power is in his voice and in his message, which is the voice and the message of God. Such a prophet is a true prophet. What he speaks is the truth, and the principle that animates him and his message is the Spirit of truth as that truth is in Jesus Christ.

The second beast is a prophet who speaks for the first beast, and with that speaking he persuades and deceives men and thus brings them to the side and to the cause of the first beast.

That the second beast is a *false* prophet describes him according to his animating principle. He operates under the power of the lie and is animated by the spirit of the

lie. The power behind this false prophet, and thus the voice of this prophet, is the dragon himself as the father of the lie. The prophet's message is a lie, regardless of how it sounds, how it is taken, or how it is received. His message is a lie as such. That is something to remember regarding statements of doctrine. There are doctrinal statements that are lies. They are false regardless of how one might have intended them. As such they stand as lies.

The Realization of the Beast Out of the Earth

The second beast will be the final realization of the history-long movement to unite religions. He will be the union of all men in the one religion of the beast. Revelation 13:11–18 emphasizes this. All—small and great, rich and poor, and bond and free—who worship the beast will receive the mark of the beast. This will be a universal, catholic religion that embraces the world. It not only will be the union of apostate Christianity but also the union of apostate Christianity with all the world's religions, so that the only religion that will be tolerated will be the religion of the first beast, and the only worship that will be allowed will be the worship of the image of the first beast. This one universal creed will be embraced: "We believe in one beast and in his creator, the devil. We believe in man and his power and glory. We believe in the wonder of his kingdom and the potentials of his conquests." There will be sung only one hymn: "Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?"

At the head of that false religion of the beast will stand a prophet as its chief spokesman. I think that we cannot rule out one single individual in the future who will carry out this work or who will be the leader in this work. When Moses faced the false prophets of Egypt, then the leaders were Jannes and Jambres. When Micaiah stood before the face of Ahab to oppose his unity with Judah, then the leader of Ahab's stable of false prophets was Zedekiah. And we see in the world around us that certain theologians and philosophers can change a whole generation with their writings, so persuasive are their teachings. And it seems that every false doctrine that has arisen in the church to challenge the truth has attached to it the name of its chief false prophet: Platonism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Pelagianism, Arminianism, Kantianism, and Darwinism. The second beast will be the first beast's minister of propaganda, his herald, and his spokesman, without which the first beast cannot come and achieve his power. The second beast will take up the ideology, the theology, and the world vision of the first beast and preach it.

Is the second beast then merely a man and a religion that will come in the future, or is that beast something

more? Revelation 13:11–18 gives us to understand that the second beast, like the first beast, is something more than a final realization at the end of the world, for the second beast presently is arising out of the earth. As the first beast, the second beast has a coming, that is, his coming raises the question of his historical manifestation. Further, he exercises his power before the first beast. To limit the second beast to a single, future, chief false prophet of the cult of antichrist is to do an injustice to the fact that this beast is and comes.

The apostle John wrote of this beast in 1 John 2:18–22:

18. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.
19. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.
20. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.
21. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.
22. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

The multiplication of antichrists already in the day of the apostle John was the indication that his day already was the last time. Antichrist as a false teacher already was a reality in the time of the apostles. Antichrist is a liar who denies that Jesus is the Christ. That Jesus is the Christ is central in the Christian faith. Jesus is the Christ, the anointed of God; thus he is the king, priest, and chief prophet of his people whom his people hear and to whom they submit. Antichrist denies that.

That may seem like a rather broad test of antichrist. But the context of 1 John 2:18–22 is a powerful test of antichrist as a spirit of apostasy from Jesus Christ. The meaning of "denieth" in the text is *abjure* and *renounce*. To leave a true church of Jesus Christ where Jesus Christ is present in the preaching of the truth and the administration of the sacraments is an act of apostatizing from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and thus it is an act of apostatizing from Jesus Christ. It is a denial of the Christ whom one professed to know, promised to cleave to, and promised to submit to, and it is a manifestation of the spirit of antichrist that now works, a spirit that works a great apostasy in the churches of Jesus Christ.

John also writes in 1 John 4:3: “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” The spirit of antichrist denies that Jesus Christ comes in the flesh. We would be tempted to say again that this is a rather broad and general description of antichrist. How many are known who actually deny the incarnation, except an out-and-out theological liberal? But the point of the apostle is that false doctrine—all false doctrines and false religions—ultimately yields this fruit, which is at the heart of the lie. Either Jesus is just a man, or he is the eternal Son of God in the flesh. If he is just a man, then the Christian religion is hero worship, like any other religion of the world. If Jesus is the Son of God, then he is the only way of salvation. And false doctrine and every false religion always assault this principal fact of the Christian faith and say, “Jesus Christ is not come in the flesh.” That is clear with an example: The denial of the truth of creation. This denial necessarily involves the denial of the historical Adam the first; if there were no Adam the first, then there could not have been Adam the last, Jesus Christ. There is no Christ come in the flesh, and that is the eventual result of the denial of creation.

The second beast is a prophet who speaks for the first beast, and with that speaking he persuades and deceives men and thus brings them to the side and to the cause of the first beast.

The second beast, which ultimately will be the false union of all religions, has its historical manifestation in all the attempts at unity apart from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. All those attempts are denials of Jesus Christ and are the work of the spirit of this false prophet. Each attempt at false unity always appears as a lamb: It has the appearance of Christianity, peace, love, and all the other noble Christian virtues, but it speaks like a dragon. The creed of such a movement is always the denial of the truth: This or that truth is an impediment to unity, so do away with the truth.

And it is necessary that all false doctrines deny Jesus Christ, because this will be the central tenet of the religion of antichrist and his apostate kingdom: Antichrist will proclaim boldly that Jesus Christ is not the Christ

and that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh because he, the antichrist, is the king and is God in the flesh. Under that creed as preached by his false prophet, antichrist will unite the world and all its peoples in his kingdom. The end of all apostasy will be the antichristian kingdom and antichrist himself and his false prophet.

Some say that religion divides or that doctrine divides. That is true. Religion divides. That is true of all the present world's religions. They are divided. How often do not the world's conflicts have a religious overtone: Christian versus Muslim, Muslim versus Hindu, Shinto versus Christian? But these divisions are superficial because the central fact of all false religions, as with all apostate Christianity, is the denial of Jesus Christ as the Christ come in the flesh and in whom God established his eternal kingdom. Every attempt at world dominion must reckon with this fact of religion. It was reckoned with by the great powers of the world. The most successful powers were the most successful at incorporating into their national cults the religions of conquered people. And the denial of Jesus Christ will be reckoned with by the first beast who will send forth his prophet to prepare the way before him, and all these divisions will be given up in the end, as they even now are being given up.

But the fact that religion divides is true absolutely of the true religion. It cannot be combined, synthesized, or joined with any other religion. It is impossible to mingle the exclusive worship of God with the worship of any other and especially the worship of man. The faith always divides in homes, in families, among churches, and ultimately in the whole world. Faith always turns the world upside down. The Jesus Christ that brings peace by the blood of his cross at that same time brings a sword of enmity and division between the church and the world, between Christ and Satan, between the church of the living God and the corrupt synagogues of Satan. And inasmuch as the true religion sharply divides between the church and the world, false religion is ultimately the most powerful force of unity that will be pressed into the service of the antichristian world kingdom and king as the culmination of the principle of all false religions, which is the worship and exaltation of man.

There is one religion, the true worship of the one true God revealed in the mediator Jesus Christ that cannot be combined with any other worship. The true worship is exclusive. God is an exclusive God, one Lord, and all others are idols. Jesus Christ is an exclusive savior, the only way of salvation, because there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ; and he alone is the way, the truth, and the life. There is one righteousness whereby a man might be right with God—that is, the righteousness of God worked out in the cross of Jesus

Christ. And there is one law that may govern men—the law of God. In all this and many other aspects, the Christian faith is exclusive. And in that exclusivity the Christian faith clashes with the religion of the worldwide kingdom, which is nothing else than the blasphemous worship of a man as God.

The Power of the Beast Out of the Earth

The beast out of the earth, in the interest of his goal of uniting all men under one creed and apart from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, will have exceptional power. Operating under the power of the lie, he will have the power to deceive all men into worshiping the first beast.

First, the second beast does great signs in the sight of all men: “He doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” And related to this, he “deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast” (Rev. 13:13–14). No doubt this refers ultimately to the final incarnation of the false prophet, who will effect the union of all religions and apostate Christianity into the religion of the beast. But this also refers to those who are false prophets now. They may have great powers of intellect, are erudite, attain to great things, and have an almost miraculous ability to deceive, to influence, and to affect men. But in the final false prophet, this certainly will be realized in its highest sense. He shall do great signs in the sight of men.

Those signs will be real. The signs that are referred to may not be explained away as tricks. The whole world will not be deceived by a few mirror tricks and some parlor games. The text calls them “wonders,” which is the biblical word for *miracles*. And the text calls them “great.” They will make men wonder. They will catch men’s attention. Such will be the beast’s miracles that he will perform the definitive test of the prophet: He even will bring fire down from heaven. That was the test of the prophet in the days of Elijah when the God who answered by fire was the true God. So deceptive will be the false prophet that even this power will be given to him, to seemingly do the impossible; he will do what the prophets of Baal were unable to do. Indeed, the false prophet will do great signs.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:9 we read of this power that will be given to the beast: “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.” The word “lying” does not refer to the nature of those wonders, to their genuineness or falseness, as if they pretend to be wonders but are not. Rather, “lying” describes the operative principle in the wonders and that to which they point. They are done under the power of the lie and in the service of the lie.

Just as the miracles of God are always performed in the service of the truth and in the power of the truth and in their essence all point to Jesus Christ and especially his incarnation as the central wonder of God in which he came down to us in the person of his Son and dwelt among us, so the false prophet will do miracles that will be signs of his gospel of the lie, his ideology of the beast, and his world vision of a kingdom apart from Jesus Christ and his truth.

And yet it is not the ability to do miracles that will be the definitive test of the prophet. It never was the test of a prophet. The fact that Elijah had to do miracles was to the shame of the people to whom God had given the law and the prophets. Jehovah even warned Israel and thus us of this fact in the law in Deuteronomy 13:1–3:

1. If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,
2. And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;
3. Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

This prophet came with another doctrine and said, “Let us go after other gods.” As proof of his doctrine, he performed a sign, and it came to pass. But the fact that he performed a sign was not the definitive test of that prophet. The test was his doctrine. And Jehovah tested his people by the prophet’s miracle, whether they held to Jehovah with all their hearts, whether they had the love of the truth. All those who did not love the truth would be enamored with the miracle.

This is a warning against the spiritualism that affects the church world. The interest in Pentecostalism and Charismaticism and all their signs plays right into the hand of this beast. Miraculous healings, raising the dead, speaking in tongues, and other wonders persisted for a time as signs of the apostolic office and gospel, but these signs have disappeared with that office. The church and people who are ignorant of that will be prey for the draconic lamb. And not only ignorance but also the superficiality of a veneer of Christianity characterizes many, which is declared to be Christian and holy and beyond reproach, and they weigh not and try not the spirits according to the definitive test, which is the doctrine, the truth, of the word of God. It is a superficiality in which all are Christians who take the name of Jesus on their

lips and that lacks a basic discernment of the spirit of the age and of error. The church or people or person who is not grounded thoroughly, instructed, and filled with the love of the truth will be seduced by the beast's wonders as many are today by the spirit of lies.

Second, the beast out of the earth has power to cause men to make an image of the beast, and he has power to give life to the image of the beast, so that it speaks and sentences all who will not worship the image. This refers to the effect of his teaching and especially of his miracles. The effect of his teaching is that men make an image of the beast to worship it. Whether or not the cult of antichrist will include an actual image that is worshiped is to my mind immaterial.

There were images that the great types of antichrist made and which they demanded their subjects to worship. The most prominent example is Nebuchadnezzar, who made his gigantic gold image and demanded its worship on pain of death. Also Antiochus Epiphanes desolated the worship of God in the temple with his image and the requirement that the Jews sacrifice pigs. In the days of Emperor Caligula, failure to worship the image of the emperor was a capital offense.

To make an image of one's god is an act of devotion toward that god. By making the image, men show who their god is. Their god is not the true God who cannot and may not be represented by images, but whose image is Jesus Christ, but their god is the first beast himself. And the making of this worship of the first beast is the effect of the teaching and persuasion and specifically the miracles of the second beast. Men believed his lies and his lying wonders. The point is that his teaching unifies all peoples of the world in the worship of the beast.

And to the image that men make, the false prophet gives a spirit, so that the image speaks. If we refer to an actual image, then the false prophet will make that image speak. It will be an animated image. If we refer to the worship of this beast, then the idea of this beast, his spiritual character, is that he is a false prophet who will give to the worship of the beast his voice, message, and content.

And the image not only speaks, but the image also sentences all who will not worship it. The syntax of Revelation 13:15 points to the fact that the image itself passes judgment on the worshipers and non-worshipers. A refusal to worship the image marks one as an enemy of the state and religion of the beast.

Third, those who worship the image of the beast the false prophet causes to receive the mark of the beast in their right hands or their foreheads (v. 16). What is that mark? This is a question that has exercised many to no avail. We should use caution in identifying that mark. And that we cannot say certain things about that mark

simply means that we have not seen yet its final realization because when it comes there will be no doubt about what that mark is, and God's people will not take it.

The second beast, which ultimately will be the false union of all religions, has its historical manifestation in all the attempts at unity apart from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, there are certain things we can say about the mark that the second beast will give to all men who worship the image. First, it is a mark; it is that which will stamp one as the property of another and will tell its provenance and makeup. Like a fine piece of china has on it the mark of its maker, so this mark will mark the bearer as the property of the beast. The text makes it appear as rather obvious that it is a mark because it will be stamped on the right hand or on the forehead. But this is not strange in the book of Revelation. The elect of God also are sealed in their foreheads, but that seal is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who is, as it were, on their foreheads because he affects their whole lives and is obvious to those around.

Second, that mark is synonymous with the name of the beast and also with the number of his name, as is clear from Revelation 13:17. The name of the beast is his essence and character, and the number of his name summarizes or points to that character. And all this is pointed to by the mark of the beast. I am inclined to say that the mark will be the act of worshiping the beast because that mark is inseparably connected with the worship of the beast. The way that a man gets the mark will be his act of worshiping the beast. To worship the beast will be to be publicly marked as the beast's and belonging to his kingdom and to demonstrate one's own spiritual character as belonging to the beast.

Third, this mark will guarantee participation in the kingdom of the beast. All who do not have the mark will be excluded from the kingdom, from participation in its most basic activities of buying and selling, and by implication also living. To worship the beast will be to receive the mark. To deny the beast his worship will be to have a death sentence passed on one. And this mark is a dark parody of the mark with which Christ himself marks his own with the assurance of participation in his kingdom.

And we may not leave the Lord out of all this. This is all under the control of God himself. He sends to some strong delusions in order that they believe a lie because they received not the love of the truth. All those to whom God gives the love of the truth, the love of himself, his Christ, and the word of God as truth will not be deceived by this beast. Nor will they worship his image. Nor will they take his mark. They have been sealed, and there is no room for two marks on their foreheads, and they will not worship the beast.

Rather, they wisely will count his number. This does not mean that the wise are to engage in some kabbalistic number games to arrive at the time of this beast or his identity, as some false prophets prattle today. To count the number of the beast is the sober, logical knowledge of his identity, not by name specifically but according to his spiritual character. It is a knowledge that is as simple, sober, and logical as counting a number. This beast has a number, which is the number of his name, which

number reveals the essential spiritual character of the beast and thus also of the beast whose prophet he is. The number is 666—the number of man—man separated from God and man fully developed under the rebellious principle of the lie that was his downfall from the beginning: “Ye shall be as God.” Man worships man and blasphemes God.

And thus 666 is an important number.

Count it.

The number is of a man who may reach the pinnacle of earthly power, but who is man for all that, whose days are in the Lord’s control, whose actions are weighed by the Lord, and who ultimately will be judged with fiery and eternal judgments by the Lord whose place he attempted to usurp.

For when man has fully developed, filled the cup of iniquity to the full, the judge shall appear. Behold, he comes quickly! Amen.

—NJL

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

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

THE PRESENT WORKING OF THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY (1)

A Brief Analysis

The undersigned has been entangled in the Michigan court system for some time in a lawsuit that had been lodged by former members of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). As of July 15, 2026, the lawsuit that Brandon and Alana Oostra filed against me, Reverend Langerak, and Mr. Dillon Altena has been dismissed by the courts. I have looked forward for some time now to examine critically the events that took place toward the end of my first year in the ministry up to the present day. I am free to speak liberally on this case now that it is closed, and I have a lot to say. I intend to do so over the next couple months, the Lord willing.

The issues in First Reformed Protestant Church were over many things, including church discipline, church membership, and the preaching. But all the issues ultimately came back to the covenant and the antithesis. I maintain that the struggle at First was over the covenant, specifically, the antithesis. The triune God is the covenant God; therefore, all doctrinal controversy ultimately has to do with the covenant. If the covenant is God’s relationship of friendship and fellowship with his elect people in Christ, then the flipside of that is that God’s people have no friendship or fellowship with the world. Further, God puts his church in a position of spiritual warfare and hostility against the world, which manifests itself in the

life of the child of God who wars against the sinful world, lies, deceit, the false church, friends and family who have forsaken the truth, and the devil. In the end many from First rejected the covenant and the antithesis and went out from us because they were not of us. I have written and preached extensively on the doctrine of the antithesis, and this series is not intended to be an apology for that doctrine. The doctrine of the antithesis is scriptural and creedal, as I have often demonstrated.

My interest is not so much the doctrine of the antithesis now, but I am interested in how the events that took place in First and the subsequent lawsuit relate with the coming of the antichrist and his kingdom. The apostle in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 says, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work.” He means by “work” that the energy or power of the antichristian kingdom already was operating then when the Holy Spirit authored these words. That power was also operating at Babel, in Egypt, in Babylon, at the cross, and in the constant rise of powerful rulers throughout the new dispensation. Throughout history men have arisen from the world of men in order to subject to themselves nations and kingdoms. It was the same power that operated during the COVID-19 shutdown when the government attempted to close churches in the name of the god of man’s health, with, I might add, astounding success.

It is the power that is working now in the fierce and seemingly unstoppable ecumenical movement of Christianity today to join all things together in an unholy alliance under the banner of the antichrist. According to the broader church world, the Protestant Reformed Churches included, everyone is a true believer as long as he says “I believe in Christ,” doctrine and confession be damned.

Hear Rev. Herman Hoeksema on the matter:

Is not obliteration of all distinction and amalgamation of the church and the world characteristic of all that the devil does today? Are we not told it matters not what form of doctrine we embrace, if only we will all be brothers?¹

This movement we decry with all our might. But our voice is falling on deaf ears. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Striking are Christ’s words in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. To raise from the dead is a work ascribed to God. He is the God who calls those things that be not and raises the dead. God could raise one from the dead, and unbelief still would not believe. Instead, the Reformed Protestant

Churches are labeled and slandered as mentally insane, bigots, and extremists.

The same power of the mystery of iniquity that has been working all throughout history has revealed itself in another way—in an attempt to silence the church of Jesus Christ by hauling her before the civil courts and to put her in subjection to the will and wisdom of man, to strangle the freedom of the church to preach the word, and to neuter the minister’s message on behalf of the sensibilities of the hearers. Should this lawsuit have succeeded, there no longer would be the freedom to preach the truth that all flesh is grass and that salvation is of the Lord. No longer would the minister in the pulpit be able to apply the word in general as well as in particular. Should this lawsuit have succeeded, it would have been the end of the church on earth.

The question comes down to this: “May the church judge and preach against sin in her midst?” The church of Jesus Christ must hold in her hand the word of God and judge all things in light of that word. She must judge churches, confessions, doctrine, decisions, words, actions, behavior, and people. To judge all things certainly includes judging sin. “He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (1 Cor. 2:15).

The specific issue was whether the church may say that, by their actions in Iowa, Brandon and Alana Oostra sinned against God and the eighth commandment. During the disbandment of Sovereign Reformed Protestant Church, was it sin to agree to and take money from the church’s general fund to pay Alana’s school teaching contract for the remainder of the year? The committee to oversee the disbandment of Sovereign was made up of three men. Two voted to pay out Alana’s contract for the rest of the year. One registered a negative vote. The two men who voted for it were themselves compromised, one being her father-in-law and the other being her husband.

Brandon and Alana Oostra stole from God’s kingdom under the appearance of right and abused and wasted God’s gifts.

Regarding stealing and the abuse and waste of God’s gifts, Lord’s Day 42 of the Heidelberg Catechism says,

Q. 110. What doth God forbid in the eighth commandment?

A. God forbids not only those thefts and robberies which are punishable by the magistrate; *but He comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor,*

1 Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, ed. and rev., Homer C. Hoeksema, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 90.

whether it be by force, or under the appearance of right, as by unjust weights, ells, measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury, or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, all abuse and waste of His gifts. (Confessions and Church Order, 132, emphasis added)

Sovereign Reformed Protestant Church in Northwest Iowa had disbanded. Thus there was no longer a Reformed Protestant church there. The task of the three-man committee was to disburse the funds and deal with any of the church's assets.

Brandon, Alana, and company would have you believe that before the church may judge sin, the magistrate must first judge it as a crime.

Because there was no church, there was no Reformed Protestant school there either. An objector might say, "But there was a school still." This fact is debatable, but the important point is that the character of the school was not Reformed Protestant. For the sake of fulfilling a contract to teach one student of one former family of the RPC, Alana and her husband remained in Iowa when their calling was to move and to join themselves to a true church. Further, the student whom she taught was the son of an officebearer who had been rightly deposed, in concurrence with Second Reformed Protestant Church. Brandon and Alana took funds that had been given to God's kingdom and used those funds for something other than God's kingdom. They abused and wasted God's gifts, in the wording of the Catechism, for the funding of private tutoring of an unbeliever and his unbelieving family.

That evaluation in light of God's word and the Reformed confessions was under fire for being defamatory. In the Oostras' minds and all their proponents' minds, the church may not judge sin unless or until the civil magistrate first judges the matter. The church may not judge crimes, as that belongs to the civil magistrate, but the Oostras and their proponents know full well that the situation had to do with sin and church membership, not criminal activity. That the matter was about accused criminal activity is in essence the position of Mr. Henry Kamps. However, the church is not interested in trying to

judge criminal matters, and the situation was not about criminal matters. It was about sin.

The study report that Henry submitted to the council of First was the work of the devil. His document proceeded right out of the bowels of hell. He attempted to maneuver and position his same arguments in different ways. He put himself in such a position that the only way out for him was to repudiate his own documents, which in the end he refused to do. He kicked Christ out of the office of elder and went to Egypt for counsel and claimed that the magistrate must first say that an action is a crime before the church may judge sin either by discipline or in the preaching. To judge before that exposes one to the charge of defamation.²

This argument is horribly faulty. An example is the sin of murder, in mind now, aborting an unborn child. In the state of Michigan, abortion with no maximum gestational period is legal. A woman can decide at thirty-nine weeks that she would like to abort, nay rather, murder her unborn child. She sets up her appointment. She heads to the clinic. And the so-called doctors there proceed to tear that baby's limbs off one by one, then crush his or her skull, and finally discard the dismembered child in the hazard-waste bin. That is perfectly legal in Michigan.

Do you know what the church says about that? "That is murder! That is a terrible sin against the sixth commandment." If a member of First church were to obtain a legal abortion in the state of Michigan, she would be under discipline by the consistory in short order for that sin.

But Brandon, Alana, and company would have you believe that before the church may judge sin, the magistrate must first judge it as a crime. And in the example of abortion, the magistrate never would so judge. In fact, he would uphold the rights of that mother to choose for herself. The position of Henry Kamps and Brandon and Alana Oostra leads to the end of all church discipline and puts judgment in the hands of the civil government. Their position ends the pulpit's God-given right to call out sin in the congregation, and in the world too for that matter.

Many attempt to paint the Reformed Protestant Churches as wicked in this matter that took place in our churches. But that is only because they are so blinded by their hatred for Christ that they cannot see or think clearly. They use this issue as an opportunity to take a swipe at the Reformed Protestant Churches for being unloving and cruel. And with one sound these people deride the church of Jesus Christ for judging sin. They also charge that the Reformed Protestant Churches are Anabaptistic, haters of the authority that God has given to civil magistrates.

² First Reformed Protestant Church, "Information Regarding Membership & Deposition Decisions," November 20, 2024.

These charges are not the truth but vicious slanders. We love the magistrates and the civil government. We love the president, governors, representatives, and judges. We honor them, submit to them, and pray for them as God has placed them in authority over us. But the church always must take care that she is not infringed upon by the government. The government cannot and may not direct the church how to rule and to teach. The government may not tell the church what is to be her doctrine and how that doctrine is to be applied among the congregation. The church is obedient to the word of God and not to men.

Judge Karen Miedema of Ottawa County presided over the case. She stands as an ordained power of God and as God's minister for good unto the Reformed Protestant Churches. God used her for the protection of the Reformed Protestant Churches and the preaching of the gospel. We confess that God would have used her for our good even if she had ruled against the church of Jesus Christ. We would still honor, submit, and pray for her.

In response to the undersigned's motion to dismiss the case grounded on the first amendment of the United States Constitution, she judged that

Brandon and Alana cherry-pick short phrases from Rev. Ophoff's service in support of their claim. While the Court must review the evidence in the light most favorable to the non-moving party, it need not view Rev. Ophoff's statements throughout his sermon in a vacuum and must consider their context. Throughout his sermon on November 24, 2024, Rev. Ophoff stated plainly that the controversy in the church was not about a theft in the eyes of the magistrate, but in the eyes of God. According to his interpretation of First Reformed's doctrine, funds that were reserved for the betterment of God's Kingdom were, in essence, misappropriated for the benefit of those not a part of it, something he repeatedly referred to as "spiritual theft." The truth or falsity of whether Brandon and Alana are "spiritual thieves" simply cannot be determined without interpretation of First Reformed's church doctrine. Thus, Rev. Ophoff's statements during his sermon are protected by the First Amendment and Brandon and Alana's claims arising out of statements made during Rev. Ophoff's "Stealing" sermon are barred by the Ecclesiastical Abstinence Doctrine.³

Brandon and Alana Oostra are not only unrepentant thieves by stealing from God's kingdom, but they are also unrepentant liars about what the church preached and taught. The judge herself noted that Brandon and Alana "cherry-pick[ed]" quotes to attempt to build their case against the church of Jesus Christ. It is not just them who bear this guilt, but also all who joined in and prodded on these two with this bastard child of a lawsuit bear that same guilt.

Henry Kamps and Gordon Schipper made part of the reason for their church's existence (I say that deliberately, for it is a church where man rules) their view of the state over against the Reformed view.

The office bearers of the RPC hold to the error of the Anabaptists with respect to the State. They do not regard the authority of the State as the authority of God himself. This contradicts scripture, the Reformed creeds, and Church Order. Rom. 13:1-7, 2 Pet. 2:10, Jude 8, Belgic Confession Article 36, and CO article 30.⁴

This is one of their four reasons for a separate existence. They prop up their church's existence with four toothpicks for grounds. But these grounds cannot hold the weight of charging the RPC as seditious, mutinous, and rebels against the state and therefore against God. None of the passages from scripture and the confessions they cite are applied, explained, or proved. The Reformed Protestant Churches hold to the sacred scriptures and the three forms of unity. The Reformed Protestant Churches hold to the Church Order, believing that all things in the church must be done decently and in good order. Henry and Gordon's grounds are founded on the faulty assumption that for the church to be able to judge sin, the charges first must be validated by a civil officer. For the RPC to judge sin before the magistrate rules allegedly makes the RPC Anabaptistic. However, Henry Kamps, Gordon Schipper, and others with this position, in fact, rob Christ of his power and authority in his church and ascribe it to men. It explains why their church is a rabble of individuals, each doing what is right in his own eyes. Their church will never have sharp, distinctive preaching, and they will never discipline anyone either.

The deepest reason for this lawsuit came down to hatred of the preaching in the Reformed Protestant Churches. We must not forget that in the preaching Christ is carrying out discipline. He is opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven by the preaching of the gospel. I preached for a year the truth that man is nothing and God is everything.

3 Brandon Oostra & Alana Oostra v. Dillon Altena, Nathan J. Langerak, and Tyler Ophoff, at 11 (20th Circ. 2026).

4 Jeff Kotman, Elijah Roberts, Gordon Schipper, Henry Kamps, "Call to Freedom and Unity in Christ," January 13, 2025.

The gospel must necessarily include man's nothingness for salvation. To make man something for salvation is to deny that God is everything in salvation. If man is something in some way, then he does not need the gospel.

It is relatively easy for a man to say with his lips, "Yeah, yeah, I am an ungodly sinner." But when the preaching pierces right to a man's life and says, "This is *how* you are the ungodly sinner," then man says, "I am not that bad." That reaction came in the sermon I preached on 1 Corinthians 3 titled "The Carnal Church."⁵ God came in the preaching and told the church how she was carnal. Henry Kamps' refusal to shake my hand after that sermon represented his open defiance against the word of God. The word revealed and exposed him as nothing else could have done. The word revealed what had been hidden for months. He would not bow to the word that said that he was carnal.

Again the word came sharply in the exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 42 titled "No Stealing," which defended the decision of First's council and condemned the defense of Brandon and Alana that was circulating in the congregation. The word hardened men and women, so that they could not stand one more moment under the preaching.⁶

Men and women charged the preaching at First with having an emphasis on reprobation. They charged that the sermons were gospel-less and comfortless. I find this interesting. In every sermon I preached election in its proper place and the gospel that God justifies ungodly sinners. There is not one sermon I could look back on and say, "That needed more election or more gospel." God was applying his word to their hearts but not for salvation. The gospel was not for them. Neither were they being assured of their calling and election by the preaching. The words that God made to ring in their ears were of reprobation! They were not being comforted because there was no comfort ordained of God for them!

Those who left First do not have Christ. They have themselves. They have their works, and they have their niceness. They have the fact that they are good people who live decent lives. And they have all their families and friends back too. That is the shocking part. They have the things of Egypt for which they desperately pined, coveted, and desired. They have names again in the world. Men speak well of them. But they will perish unless they repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. And belonging

to that turning from their sins, they will return to First Reformed Protestant Church, who as the church of Jesus Christ stands ready to receive with joy lost sinners.

No more clearly than at this point in history has the power of antichrist and his antichristian kingdom been revealed in the world. Those who seek to persecute the church think they do God's service to take and haul you before the worldly courts.

The remainder of this article is a transcription of the sermon that the undersigned preached on January 12, 2025, in First Reformed Protestant Church.⁷ It has been edited lightly for readability, but the content remains the same as when it was preached. It is included in the opening article of this series because the word of the Lord as it came to First almost two years ago stands to this day. The word of the Lord stands and never falls. It rings true now as it did when it was preached. All who stand opposed to it must tremble and fear, for they oppose God himself in their wickedness, lies, and deceit.

The sermon came in the context of a "Pre-suit Retraction Demand" that was served to me—and thus to First church—on January 6, 2025. This was not entirely a surprise. In one of First's prior council meetings, Henry Kamps had indicated that upholding the protests First had received against Brandon and Alana's membership possibly would open First up to a defamation lawsuit. And Gordon Schipper had lodged a protest in August 2024, at the end of which he threatened First that if she did not do what was right in his eyes regarding the membership rescission, there would be a "mighty battle"—implying a lawsuit. On January 7, the day after I received the "Pre-suit Retraction Demand," Schipper wrote to the council, "Brethren, I grieve that filing a lawsuit was found to be necessary by Brandon and Alana. But you were warned. You left them no other choice."

5 Tyler D. Ophoff, "The Carnal Church," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on October 20, 2024, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/1020241519456039>.

6 Tyler D. Ophoff, "No Stealing," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on November 24, 2024, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/112424639445078>. Parts of this sermon Brandon and Alana Oostra claimed were defamatory.

7 Tyler D. Ophoff, "Awake to Help Me," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on January 12, 2025, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/11225131321188>.

If there is going to be a battle, let us do battle.

The church of Jesus Christ stands ready to do battle, but she will battle on a spiritual battleground with spiritual weapons. The church of Jesus Christ girds her loins about with the truth, puts on the breastplate of righteousness, shods her feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, takes the shield of faith, puts on her head the helmet of salvation, and draws the sword of the Spirit. Thus Christ and his church came battling in the sermon titled “Awake to Help Me” on January 12, 2025.

God’s sovereign, eternal plan was carried out in the preaching of this sermon. God always does great things in the preaching. His word never returns to him void. It is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. It came hardening and saving. And men and women who hated it departed from it. The next day, on January 13, 2025, a schismatic group departed from the fellowship of Christ and his church. Ultimately, Jesus Christ booted these carnal men and women right out of his church.

Awake to Help Me

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the context of Psalm 59:1–5, Saul is seeking to kill David. In 1 Samuel 19 Jonathan acts as a sort of mediator between Saul and David. And Saul takes an oath that he will not kill David. He says, “As the Lord liveth, I will not kill him.” And things appear to be fine between David and Saul. Later, David is in the court of Saul playing music for him, and in a fit of rage, Saul takes his javelin and tries to stick David to the wall with it. David flees out of Saul’s presence and into his home, and that is the setting of our psalm this morning. You have this picture in your mind of David as he flees away into his house and is shut in his home: As he is looking outside the window, he can see all Saul’s messengers—all Saul’s dogs, as we read in Psalm 59, all the workers of iniquity, bloody men. He looks out and sees those enemies surrounding him on all sides. He is besieged in his home as all the forces of the enemy come and seek to kill him and to take away his life. There David finds himself with no way out, no hope of himself, and no power in himself to deliver himself. Saul raises up his messengers—profane men—to come to persecute the church.

This petition is not only a petition of David, but this is the petition of the church who finds herself in the same position as David in this psalm. “Awake to help me; awake and visit all the heathen. Be not merciful to any wicked transgressor. Consume them in thy wrath. Arise in thy power. Destroy the wicked.” This is the prayer of the church as her existence is threatened and as the whole host of darkness surrounds the church.

Beloved, that is true for us as a congregation. What you are going to receive this morning when you walk

out of church are documents that this congregation has received threatening to sue you—legal documents for calling sin *sin*. The pulpit may not call sin *sin* unless the world first says so, and men are going to take you and haul you before the courts for calling sin *sin*. You as a congregation might lose everything. That is a real possibility. You might lose money. You might lose your earthly possessions. I might lose my earthly possessions.

No more clearly than at this point in history has the power of antichrist and his antichristian kingdom been revealed in the world. Those who seek to persecute the church think they do God’s service to take and haul you before the worldly courts. They threaten to do that if you do not capitulate to man’s will and man’s wisdom—it is ungodly. The whore and the beast come together, and on that the antichrist will ride. If there is support for that in this congregation, know this: You are bringing about the antichrist. You are serving his kingdom. It is wicked.

Our psalm has much to say: Awake, O Lord, awake to help me. Awake to help us as thy church. And so we consider then this psalm this morning under that theme: “Awake to Help Me.” First, from whom? Who are these enemies that persecute and kill and seek to destroy the church? Second, by whom? Who is your help, who is your deliverer, who is your salvation? The one who has all power, the Lord of hosts. Third, unto what end? To the end of your eternal salvation and the utter destruction of the wicked. Be not merciful to them, to those wicked transgressors; awake to help me.

The psalmist piles on the verbs: deliver me from my enemies; defend me from those who rise up against me; deliver me from the workers of iniquity; save me from bloody men; help me; awake to visit all the heathen. Awake, O God, to help me. There are all these enemies, and notice, first, that David *had* such enemies; he had such foes. The church has foes; you have foes; David had foes. And those foes of David came from all sides. They encircled his house, so that for David there was no way out and no hope of himself. He says, “Lord, defend me. Make me inaccessibly high. Make me high above all who seek to destroy me and to take my life. Set me upon a rock. Let me not be dismayed at them.”

“They are adversaries,” David says. Enemies are adversaries. They are those who have a hatred of Christ and a hatred of the church. They have a hatred of the truth. There is no love of God in their hearts because God has set a distinction. And they have that hatred because God from all eternity said, “These are my people, and these I have determined to cast away out of my sight; on them I will have no mercy.” God sets that distinction between the elect and the reprobate, a distinction for all time and eternity.

And the result is warfare that God prosecutes and carries out. God brings his church into such a position that

the church has no one else to turn unto. We do not have anything else but the word. We do not have anything else but the gospel. Oh, the mighty, they have their lawyers; they have their lawsuits; they have their earthly power; they have their money; they have their possessions; and they force all that into your destruction, the destruction of the church, the destruction of the officebearers, and the destruction of the ministers.

That is what has been going on in this congregation. An antichristian, ungodly attack against the word of God. It is an attack that comes against the preaching on the antithesis. It is an attack that has come against rescinding of membership. It is an attack that has come for calling sin *sin*. It is an attack that has come because of the deposition of officebearers. It is an attack against the word. That is all you have. It is all I have. There is no hope outside that word.

All those adversaries who seek to consume and destroy the church have no love of God in their hearts. Who are those enemies? David describes them and characterizes them in many different ways, and simply for lack of time I cannot go through all the ways this morning. He says that they are rising up against him. What that means is that they are unrelenting in their opposition. They are fierce in their opposition. There are no bounds that they will not cross to destroy the church. And not only that but they also have the eminent superiority of power, so that they stand as if they have all the power in the world. They can do with you as they see fit and how they please. David says, “They rise up against me.”

He calls them workers of wickedness. First, they are not justified. They are not righteous in Christ by faith alone, but they are righteous in their own eyes. And second, their hearts are black. There is no fear of God in their eyes, and they work iniquity. All that protrudes forth from them is a black fountain of wickedness.

“They are bloody men,” says David. Quick to shed blood. Quick to take a life. They are cutthroat. They lie in wait for my soul. That tells you what those enemies are doing. There is a lot of that too in this congregation. There are those lying in wait, setting traps, making calculations, scheming, plotting, and devising. “If you do not rescind the decision to rescind membership”—this was back three months ago—“there is going to be a lawsuit for defamation.” And lo and behold, there is a threatening of a lawsuit for defamation. Scheming, plotting, laying traps for your soul. They are watching, waiting, calculating, manipulating, and maneuvering.

They make noises like a dog. A dog roams around at night. He eats trash in the streets. He snarls and snaps at you when you get too close. A dog is a profane thing in scripture.

These enemies belch out with their mouths. Swords are in their lips. When David says that they belch out with their mouths, he means that they gush forth slaughter. That is all they can ever do. They can only ever kill. They slaughter you with their words; they murder you; they kill you; they throw you down; and they gush hatred. They boast in all that work, so that in everything they do there is an air of smugness. They are filled with pride.

There are enemies of the church. There are enemies of David. Such enemies who surround the church teach a lie about God and about man and about salvation. That is always a threat to the church. There is that lie of man that says, “I am not nothing. The pulpit cannot make me nothing. Christ is not allowed to make me nothing. I will not be made nothing by the officebearers in the church, by Christ working through them.” Those are the enemies in the church—false brethren who like Saul swear profane oaths and then feign love for the brother and who the next moment are the quickest to take a knife and stab it in someone’s back—quick to shed blood.

Who else are those enemies who surround you? There are enemies not only within the church, but there are enemies also of the false church, of those who stand outside this congregation, surround it with all their eminent power, and who teach a lie. There is the whole world of the ungodly and all their entertainment, all their sins, and all their worldliness. There is the devil and his host who watch as murderers to ruin and to destroy the church. There is the whole host of the antichristian kingdom that fights against the kingdom of God and against his church.

Those enemies always have the church surrounded. And David says this: “They run and prepare themselves without my fault, and the mighty are gathered against me not for my transgression nor for my sin, O LORD.” And now the psalmist is not saying that he did not have sin or that he did not have a totally depraved nature. There are many psalms where David confesses and lays out his sin before God: “Oh, I am a sinner. Be merciful unto me, a sinner.” But he is saying here, “I have done no rebellion.” David says, “I have not deserved the cruel treatment of my enemies; I never deserved the cruel treatment of Saul.” And David appeals to God because he is under suspicion that his integrity is not true. He appeals to God and says, “God, my cause is thy cause, and thou knowest my heart.” Accusations continue to be thrown at the consistory and at the minister that they are unjust, unmerciful, cruel, deceitful, and liars. Not for our transgressions, O Lord, not for our sins. Thou knowest the integrity of our hearts. Thou knowest the love of God that thou hast given us. Thou knowest our cause is thy cause. Thou knowest that we love thy word.

Or this: “Reverend Ophoff and Reverend Langerak

were deceivers when they had a phone call. They were liars when they had a phone call.” You were not there; you do not know what was said! Or this: “Reverend Ophoff lied.” Oh, beloved, I did lie. I hate that lie; I should never have lied. But to take that lie now and grab onto that lie is wicked. That matter was finished. The ungodly surround the church and the prophets. The Lord knows the truth. He knows the integrity of my heart. He knows my cause is his cause. He knows the consistory’s cause is his cause.

David cries out, “Awake to help me from unprincipled, ungodly men. Help me.” David surely was going to lose his life at the hands of his enemies, and David was completely powerless and helpless as they surrounded his home. He utters this petition. Christ is the reality here, and David as the type pleads this petition for the cause of Christ’s church. There Christ stands in his intercessory prayer pleading the cause of this church before the face of God: “Awake to help me, for they rise up against me. They belch out with their mouths. Swords are in their lips. For who, say they, doth hear? Awake.”

And what is the meaning of that word “awake”? “Awake to help me.” Does that mean that the Lord is slumbering? The Lord does not see what is going on here? The Lord does not see the wickedness and all the enemies that surround the church? Does he not see that the wicked prosper? Does he not see the power that the wicked have? Does he not know? Does he not understand? Does he not have urgency in delivering his church from such wickedness? Does he not know the plight of the church? Awake as a slumbering man and arise to help us?

God puts the church in such a narrow place that you might learn not to trust in yourself or to look to man but to look to Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of hosts.

“Behold,” the text says, “look about.” See them with the same haste that the wicked have to destroy the church. Come and save us with that same haste and that same fervor. David calls God to be his witness. He is speaking as if God’s eyes are shut. He is speaking from the view of the believer who sees the wicked prosper. It appears as if God allows that wickedness to go on in the world. By faith David says, “And behold.” He utters this prayer of faith: “I know that thou art always watching. I know that

thou art sovereign. I know that what thou art sending is good for me.”

The church utters this petition as she suffers in the world in a hopeless and powerless situation. How are you going to be delivered from such wickedness and from all the ungodly forces of darkness? Does God not see the way of the church in the world? Is there no urgency to deliver us? Awake to help me, and thou, therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen. Awake, Jehovah, the I AM THAT I AM, the God who never slumbers, the God who never sleeps, the God who is infinite activity and infinite energy from eternity to eternity, who never decreases, who never increases, the God of the covenant, the God who dwells in himself an ever-blessed triune life. Jehovah defends his covenant and rises in defense of his own name and his own covenant, his kingdom, his people, and his church. He is the God of the promise who has sworn by himself, for he could swear by no greater. He says, “I will save my people. They shall never be overthrown by their enemies because Christ, my anointed, accomplished the victory. He paid for all the sins of my people. He earned for them everlasting righteousness.”

Awake, Jehovah, God of hosts. The God of hosts is God’s name as he is sovereign over all things. His sovereignty is a comfort that every event and detail in the circumstance and life of the church is controlled and determined by him. All the universe, all the reins of power, and all creatures are in his hands. They are all as instruments—soldiers in his army—accomplishing and realizing his eternal purpose in the world, which is the glory of his own name.

And he is the God of Israel and of election. He is the God who chose you in Christ, loved you in Christ from all eternity, and determined you to be one in your head, Jesus Christ. He sent Jesus Christ to the cross for your salvation. God chooses his elect people in love, and he damns the reprobate according to his own determination, will, and good pleasure without either ever having done any works. That is the God of Israel—Israel according to election. The God of reprobation says, “I will not be merciful to any wicked transgressor. I will consume wicked transgressors in my wrath. I will destroy them out of the earth.”

“Awake to visit the heathen,” says the psalmist. It was not just the apostate church that was after David but also all the nations of the world. When he says “visit all the nations of the world,” he means “judge them.” Judge the nations, the church’s enemies, all the ungodly, all the host of darkness, and all that opposition that has fought against the kingdom of God since the very beginning. And judge the opposition that has come against the church all history long. Judge the devil who came into the garden, at whose instigation man by his own will fell

into sin. Judge the whole ungodly world against whom Enoch and Noah sharply preached; Egypt who treated Israel cruelly and whom God judged by drowning in the Red Sea; the Canaanites who opposed and fought against the Israelites as they entered the land of Canaan.

All that opposition to God culminated at the cross of our Lord, where the whole host of darkness surrounded him, including the worldly government and the religious men of that day. Men sneered at him. They snarled at him. They encircled him. They spit upon him. They pushed a crown of thorns into his head. They gave him gall and vinegar to drink. And in their opposition they took hold of God's anointed and crucified the Lord of glory. They crucified the Lord of glory according to God's counsel. Man thought he had a victory, but at that cross God crushed all your enemies. In principle he crushed the whole power of darkness that stands against you. He saved you at that cross. That blood was powerful and effectual to wash away all your sins, and by faith you have Christ's victory.

And that is what you wait for as a church. You wait for God in the final day. He will visit the heathen. You see then a prayer for the final judgment. In the final judgment God will come again to judge the nations. He will judge the nations in that great day of the Lord. He will visit the heathen. All the plots, scheming, and devices will finally be laid bare. I can make this my personal confession: "I cannot wait for that day." And my prayer is that you too cannot wait for that day when all the consciences will be opened before men and when the cause of this church will be known to have been the cause of the Son of God. He will visit the heathen.

God puts the church in such a narrow place that you might learn not to trust in yourself or to look to man but to look to Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of hosts. "And be not merciful to any wicked transgressor." It is a prayer for the salvation of the church and the destruction of the wicked.

And God laughs them to scorn. God in his power and might will cast down all the plots, planning, devices, schemes, and calculations of the wicked. He laughs at them. He holds them in derision. And that was the resurrection. The enemies killed Christ—God killed Christ for your salvation, and God used wicked men to do it. In that cross he was merciful to you, and he punished Christ for your sins. All your sins were imputed to him. And Christ died. Then what did God do? He raised up Christ from the dead. He laughed the wicked to scorn: "You thought you would kill my anointed? You believed you had thwarted my promise and my plan? You think you have cast down my covenant and my word?" Three days later Christ arose from the dead, and soon after he would ascend into heaven.

Why then do you fear as a church? Why do you fear the ungodly? Why do you fear the wicked? Why do you fear their plans and their calculations? Why do you fear the wicked who write about you, who slander you, who create narratives about you, and who lie about you? In the greatest wickedness that was ever committed on the earth, God laughed the wicked to scorn. He held them in derision. He will hold the enemies of his church in derision too. He will laugh them to scorn.

The enemies will never succeed. Know that if you stand against the church, you will never succeed. You will never exalt yourself over the church, but the Lord of hosts will laugh you to scorn and hold you in derision, for he is the God of Jacob. And you as a church rest securely in him, high above on that rock that God has given to you: The glorious gospel of grace is that God has fulfilled his promise in Jehovah-salvation. Jesus has saved you from your sins and accomplished all righteousness, the very righteousness of God, which is the righteousness by faith.

God will have no mercy on the wicked. When he finally appears, there will be for the wicked only a fearful looking for of that day, for their end is certain. There is no peace or comfort as they are harried about all this life, and God testifies to their consciences, "You are ungodly, and I am consuming you in my wrath, and you perish all the day long." They feel the fierce wrath of a holy God against sin. In one fell swoop by the almighty power of God, all the church's foes shall be vanquished. The judge will finally appear; the salvation of the church will be perfectly realized; the covenant will be perfected; the kingdom finally will be come; and all idle thoughts, words, plots, devices shall come to light.

I want that day. My prayer is that you want that day. A day of vindication because in this life, very rarely will you ever have it as a church. And it is comfort then for you and for me. You know the church's end; I know my end; you know your end. Your life here does not depend upon the minister, the officebearers, you, your works, or your activities. It depends upon Christ. It depends upon his word and upon the glorious gospel, which is the power of God unto your salvation.

And you stand before him boldly then and utter this petition: "Awake to help me. Save thy church. Destroy the wicked in thy wrath. Scatter thy enemies. Consume them in thy wrath. And I will sing of thy mercy; I will sing of thy power; I will rejoice and be glad, for thou art my defense. Thou art my refuge in the day of trouble."

At the end of the verse, David ends with *selah*, a divine rest, a divine pause. Stand in silence and see the Lord of hosts work. See the God of Israel accomplish your salvation and preserve you. Stand still and see the salvation of our Lord. Amen.

—TDO

I will speak of the glorious honor of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.—Psalm 145:5

THE TESTIMONY OF OUR LORD

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

—2 Timothy 1:8–10

It is not without reason that the apostle says to Timothy, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” It goes without saying that many are ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. We ought to understand the meaning of “the testimony of our Lord.” A *testimony* is a witness, a proclamation of something and the truth of that thing. For instance, one gives his testimony in court that he has seen the accused actually commit a crime. One gives a testimony or a witness of the crime and of the fact of that crime.

The testimony of which the apostle speaks is modified by the words “of our Lord.” These words are to be taken in a subjective sense. This means that our Lord Jesus Christ is the one who speaks this testimony or, if you will, who takes the witness stand, declares something, and affirms its verity. This is clear throughout the passage.

The apostle also exhorts Timothy not to be ashamed “of me his prisoner,” in connection with the fact that the apostle was “appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles,” and for that cause he suffered (2 Tim. 1:11). This is made very clear from verses 9 and 10, where the apostle indicates that God’s giving to us salvation and grace in Christ Jesus—not according to our works but according to the purpose of God before the world began—was “made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Christ Jesus, therefore, manifests the eternal purpose and grace of God and through the gospel brings to light life and immortality.

Our Lord testifies. What does our Lord testify? What

does he declare? What does he affirm as the faithful and true witness? He declares the content of verse 9. In other words, he declares the purpose and grace of God that is given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began. What is the purpose of God? The term “purpose” literally means *a setting forth* or *a placing of a thing in view*. God sets something forth. I believe that the translation “purpose” is somewhat deficient, for it does not convey fully the meaning of this passage. The idea is that God has something before his mind. He sets it forth before himself. It is the mind of God, his thoughts, his view.

This “purpose,” of course, is eternal, as it was before the world began. This “purpose” refers to the eternal thoughts of God, that which God beholds as real and true (eternal). It is God’s conception of something, and God is eternal. God does not behold things in a succession of moments. For God things do not wax and wane, increase and decrease. For God things are not becoming. God does not see things as they develop in time as past, present, and future. God does not see things as was, is, and will be, as that which was not, becomes, and shall be. Speaking generally, God beholds all things in their entirety—the beginning and end and their full development in time—in a moment. At the same moment in his thoughts, God has our beginning and end, yea, and all things concerning us. God’s thoughts or counsel is God’s conception of the reality of all things. The reality of a thing is not when it becomes in time but as it is in the counsel of God.

This is where the term “purpose” is fitting. The eternal thoughts or counsel of God is also God’s will, his purpose. It is what God sets before himself to do in time and history, thus making his thoughts manifest. Moreover,

the term “purpose” indicates that God’s thoughts are sovereign, efficacious, and determinative for time and history. God’s thoughts determine the creature and everything about it—what it is, its time, its ultimate end, its whole course in the world, and its relationships. God, not the creature, determines these things. So also, God sets these things forth before himself to do; hence they are efficacious. God’s thoughts are what happens in time and history, for God does them. For now, let us see that the “purpose” of God in this passage is God’s eternal thoughts, their reality, for they are God’s conceptions according to his will.

The preacher preaches not the Christ of generalities. But the preacher is called to bring to light the truth concerning the elect of God, declaring God’s thoughts concerning us as they are made abundantly clear in the appearing of Jesus Christ as our savior.

What is in the mind of the Lord? It is revealed in time. Therefore, when the apostle says about God that he “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling,” this indicates that salvation, to be brief, is in the mind of God. This is also clear because we are saved and called *according to* God’s purpose. Time is in harmony with God’s purpose and determined by God’s purpose. We must not fail to notice also that this purpose is strictly particular; it is for definite people. “Us” God has saved. In God’s conception salvation and the saved are before himself. This is summarized by the word “grace,” which is the eternal, saving favor of God—the favor of God according to which he blesses the sinner with salvation. To be an object of divine grace is to be saved, for who shall hinder the favor of God and deny God his pleasure? It is God who operates in his favor and performs all his pleasure. “Grace” in 2 Timothy 1:9 indicates the fullness of the salvation of the elect (the only objects of the favor of God) performed by God in his favor for them, all that God has in mind for the elect in Christ, having favor for them.

And this is “given us in Christ Jesus” before the world began. The truth concerning “us,” that is, the elect of God, the objects of his eternal love and favor, is the fullness of our salvation in Christ. That is God’s view of us, and how

God views us is what is true concerning us. That is why in time salvation only can be manifested and brought to the light. That is where the passage turns next. “But is now” indicates that we turn from the counsel of God to what happens in time.

First, the fullness of our salvation in the grace of God is “made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ reveals how God views us, that is, as we stand in the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ, perfectly recreated in the image of Jesus Christ and living with God forever in peace. That is why verse 10 calls Jesus “our Saviour” and likewise mentions that Jesus Christ “abolished death.” Through his death and resurrection, Christ abolished death for us because in the counsel of God, we live. Christ reveals the eternal, gracious thoughts of God concerning us by working them out in time.

Second, we read that Jesus Christ “hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Let us immediately notice that this bringing to light is performed likewise by Jesus Christ. He is not only the one who, manifesting the mind of God, abolished death, but also he brings this to light. What does it mean that he brings life and immortality (salvation) to light? The idea is that Christ also makes us to know. To put it in other words, he makes us to see what God sees. That is, of course, because we are in the dark about the fact that God sees us in immortality in Christ Jesus. Who can know the mind of the Lord? This also implies that we have eyes to see—for how can the blind see? But we must notice chiefly that Christ brings us into the light, into the truth. Christ tells us who we actually are—who we are in God’s counsel—what God sees. Christ, if you will, brings us up to speed. He brings to light the thoughts of God toward us.

This our savior Jesus Christ does “through the gospel.” This implies that Christ is the speaker. Christ is the preacher and the instructor. He is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). And Christ employs preachers through whom he might speak. How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher (Rom. 10:14)? As the apostle indicates, “Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim. 1:11). The task of the preacher, his calling from week to week, is to bring to light “life and immortality” to “us,” the elect, the objects of God’s eternal grace, for Christ is called “our” savior. He has not abolished everyone’s death and given life and immortality to everyone, but for us he has abolished death, to us he has given newness of life, and he has raised us to immortality. The preacher preaches not the Christ

of generalities. But the preacher is called to bring to light the truth concerning the elect of God, declaring God's thoughts concerning us as they are made abundantly clear in the appearing of Jesus Christ as our savior—that is, in his incarnation, suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming. In all this Jesus Christ appears as Jesus Christ, that is, as our savior.

This is the true proclamation of the gospel. This is the testimony of our Lord. It is this point that I seek to emphasize in this article. The preaching of the gospel is the proclamation of a particular promise. The promise is God's holy oath. It is what God swears by his own name is true. That must be our conception of the promise. Think of the prophets who spoke the promises of God. They were not telling the future. They were telling God's view of things. They were declaring God's holy oath concerning the salvation of his people in Christ, given to them before the world began. That is, of course, why the promise was manifested in time, in the future. But the prophets declared the thoughts of God that God had revealed to them, and so also with the preacher. "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7).

That is the only way the gospel can be called "gospel." The gospel, we often say, is *good news*. Good news has to be actual good and actual news. Only the preaching of the particular promise of God is good news. First, it is actual news. It tells us that which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man to conceive. It is the declaration of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Not that salvation from sin and the possession of life everlasting are made possible by Christ, not that salvation can be attained through Christ, but that definitely, really, and truly, Jesus Christ has blotted out our sins and raised us up into newness of life in him. Second, then, the news is also good. It is not a message or news about potential salvation, but it is the declaration that we are saved. It is actual good news. Our life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel.

This promise is particular. In the preaching of the gospel, Christ is speaking to his sheep, to his elect people. He is addressing them and promising them salvation. He is declaring to them, and to them only, that they are saved. Always and ever the objects of the promise are the elect. This never changes. It is impossible that one ever *becomes* an object of the promise. One either *is* an object of the promise or is not an object. This goes back to the counsel of God—his sovereign choice of persons in Christ in love and God's eternal conception of them as perfect in Christ. It is impossible that one is an object of the promise one moment and the next is not an object or not be

an object and then become an object of the promise. For instance, it is impossible for God to forgive and then not to forgive or not to forgive and then to forgive. Always and ever, the elect are the objects of the promise, and the reprobate are not the objects of the promise (to put reprobation negatively). Never does the activity of man change this; never does one become an object of the promise, that is, by performing some activity.

In this connection we understand that the promise declared in the preaching must be preached particularly, especially in light of the fact that the preaching of the gospel is a general proclamation of the particular promise. Many hear the promise. Elect and reprobate alike hear the promise of God declared. But God's promise is not to or for all who hear but for the elect and them only—to definite persons. And in scripture these definite persons are often indicated by some spiritual activity or characteristic. For instance, let us notice that in the beatitudes we read of promises, such as "they shall see the kingdom of heaven," "they shall be comforted," and "they shall obtain mercy." In short the promise is summarized by happiness—happy are they. This promise is to "the poor in spirit," "they that mourn," "the meek," and "the merciful," or very commonly in scripture to "whosoever believeth."

When we read such in scripture, we must understand that these promises are indicating specific, definite persons. These promises are indicating who the elect are, that is, the objects of the promise. In fact, these are names for the elect. The elect are believers, the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, and the merciful. When these words are used in scripture, they are really God's pet names for the elect. This is because that is who the elect actually are. That is true in God's eternal conception of them, and it is who God makes them in time. It is who they and they alone are. We could even say that God indicates the objects of the promise by demonstrating the fact that they are objects of the promise; the promise of God is why they believe, mourn, and hunger and thirst after righteousness. As these are the works of the Spirit within them, they also are names that the Spirit within us recognizes in the word of God. When the scripture says those who believe or those who put their trust in God, the elect perceive that God is addressing them. He is calling them by their spiritual names; the Spirit receives the things of God.

To illustrate this, let us say that I seek to get the attention of a particular man who is running in a crowded place. I would say, "You who are running, come here!" I already have a particular person in mind, and I merely address him and call him from among many. Employing the same illustration, it is clear that when such phrases are

used in scripture, they never can be conceived of as conditions. One cannot become an object of the promise. If I shout my address, and some other man starts running, he would not make himself an object of my address. I never had him in my mind. My message was never for him. I already had in mind the person whom I was addressing, and what I have to say is for him only.

But the Arminian conception of the preaching of the gospel is precisely that God “promises” salvation or some blessing, and then man has to do some activity indicated in the text. And by doing that activity, he becomes an object of the promise, gets the blessing, or gets saved.

This is the same conception of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), which she expresses with the phrase “in the way of.” Really, the PRC puts the sinner in a sort of halfway house. He possesses salvation in some sense, and in another sense he does not. His sins are forgiven, but they really are not forgiven. He objectively has justification but not subjectively. And it is through repentance that he becomes an object of the so-called promise of the forgiveness of sins. While he does not repent, he does not receive forgiveness. When he does repent, he is forgiven. While he walks in the way of obedience, he receives blessings. But when he is disobedient, he is not blessed. For the PRC the sinner is ever becoming and not becoming an object of the promise—one moment he is an object, and the next he is not, for the PRC hinges the promise on the activity of the sinner.

In this connection I turn again to the preaching of Rev. Daniel Holstege in Wingham Protestant Reformed Church. His preaching demonstrates that he, his congregation, and the PRC in general are thoroughly Arminian. I remind the reader concerning Holstege and his preaching, as is ever the case with Arminians and false teachers, that he is subtle. The sermon titled “The Blessed Mourners” is the second sermon of his series on the sermon on the mount.¹ His text is Matthew 5:4: “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” The text itself is marvelous and simple. It indicates who the children of God are—they are mourners. The text also indicates the promise of God to them—they shall be comforted. And the text indicates the beauty, goodness, and kindness of God to his people, for he makes them happy.

I do not want to go into a detailed analysis of this sermon. I do not need to do so again. And had Holstege stuck along the lines where he began and carried them through his sermon, I would not write about this sermon. He begins quite well, speaking generally about the beatitudes:

In these beatitudes the Lord Jesus teaches us the spiritual characteristics of his disciples, the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. To those whom God has chosen to be his people and redeemed by the blood of his Son, he has given the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts these spiritual qualities and activities, so that these are the characteristics of God’s elect children, as they manifest themselves in the world.

Sadly, Holstege departs from these lines. While he says this and starts well, he does not actually believe this or intend to preach this to his congregation. Soon enough, he takes off his Reformed mask to reveal an Arminian face. Perhaps I speak knowing the content of the sermon, but his Arminianism is indicated already in the title of his first point: “Their Mourning.” It ought to have been titled “The Mourner.” If Holstege had done that, then he could have stuck with what he said in his introduction. He could have explained that the mourner refers to the elect child of God and explained who the elect child of God is in this sin-cursed world, as he lives by the Spirit, sees spiritual things spiritually, and yet still lives in his old, corrupt nature.

The elect child of God is a mourner. He is the ungodly sinner, and he cannot help it, for he is totally depraved. Yet, living by the Spirit, out of his new, regenerated heart, he hates all the works of his hands, for they are wholly defiled by sin. He confesses with the apostle, “That which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7:15). He confesses, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (vv. 18–19). He exclaims with the apostle, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (v. 24). I do not really need to explain this. The child of God knows this; he is well-acquainted with his wretchedness. He is a mourner.

But Holstege is more interested in explaining what proper mourning is. I do not have a problem with explaining the mourning of the child of God. Of course, a child of God does not sorrow as the world sorrows. However, Holstege is interested in explaining proper mourning because he seeks to make the mourning of the believer the crux of the text. This gradually becomes clear.

Later, Holstege explains that not all who mourn for any reason are blessed. He mentions the drunkard who

1 Daniel Holstege, “The Sermon on the Mount (2): The Blessed Mourners,” sermon preached in Wingham Protestant Reformed Church on July 12, 2026, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/71226181994913>. All quotations from Holstege in this article are from this sermon.

ruins his life by drunkenness and mourns over the consequences of his sin. He mentions the “unbeliever of a different religion, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Muslim” (I note that Holstege is highly averse, to say the least, to calling a nominal Christian an unbeliever) who mourns for loss, tragedy, and failure. After the example of the drunkard, Holstege asks, “Is he blessed?” After the example of the unbelievers, Holstege asks, “Are they blessed?”—obviously indicating that the answer is in the negative. Fine enough.

Then he says,

Sometimes even believers mourn over the wrong things or for the wrong reasons; sometimes a child of God gets so intensely into his favorite sports team, and he’s cheering them so much that when they lose that game that he had so much staked on, he actually weeps. Is he blessed as he’s weeping over that? Or there can be a child of God who is mourning over the fact that he has been caught in a certain sin, and he was exposed before the whole church for the shameful thing that he was doing, and his pride has been injured, and therefore, he mourns over that. Is he blessed?

Well, I can agree that the sorrow of the believer who weeps for his sports team is carnal and that the sorrow over the shameful consequences of sin and not the sin itself is wrong. However, I cannot agree that that believer and that child of God are not blessed. Under no circumstances is the *believer* (someone who is united to Jesus Christ by faith) or the *child of God* (someone who is adopted into God’s household, an heir of salvation, and indwelt by the Spirit of adoption) not blessed. To put it positively, the believer, the child of God (an elect), is always blessed. God’s word to his elect at all times is “blessed.” But not according to Holstege.

He continues by explaining that the members of his congregation must understand this text in light of the previous beatitude, so that they have this idea: “Blessed are the poor in spirit who mourn.” And he goes on to make some weird distinctions. While he is convoluted and confusing, the idea that he is trying to convey is that believers are capable of mourning, being regenerated, but they must avail themselves and mourn, and that, in the right way. Later, he says,

So the question that you and I face as we come to this beatitude is, am I sorry for my sin? Am I *sorry* for my sin? Do I, have I ever mourned and wept over the sinful things that I have done in my life?

And transitioning from his first point to his second, he proclaims, “We come now to the comfort that God

gives *to those who mourn in that way* [emphasis added].” Holstege makes the text all about the mourning and emphasizes that we must mourn in the right way because according to him, if we do not mourn in the right way, we are not comforted, we are not blessed.

Tossed to and fro, then, are the mourners. Blessed sometimes and at other times not. This is wicked cruelty. The text tells Holstege who God’s people are. They are wretched. They are ungodly sinners. They are mourners; that is simply who they are; they cannot be otherwise. And God indicates what the preacher is to say to God’s people to comfort them, especially in light of the fact that they are mourners. The preacher must bring to light their life and immortality, their salvation in Christ, their righteousness in Christ that secures for them all the blessings of God, and the promise that God will never leave them nor forsake them. In sum, happy shall they be!

**The preaching of the gospel is the
proclamation of a particular promise.
The promise is God’s holy oath.**

Happy are they, for they shall be comforted. The word *comforted* literally means *to call to one’s side*. It is the promise that God remains near to them and brings them near to his side. It is the promise of the Holy Ghost, who dwells in them and in Christ, makes them living partakers of Christ, and assures them of eternal life. Hear this, all who mourn: Happy are you! For though you know your sin to deserve death, God shall never take away his Holy Spirit from you. For though your sins be as scarlet, yet they shall be as white as snow. For though all your deeds are wicked, your salvation is according to the purpose and grace of God, given to you in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world.

This is the particular promise of God. This is the testimony of our Lord. This is the testimony of which Holstege is ashamed. The particular promise to him is weak and foolish because to him God is weak and foolish. And with Holstege the PRC is ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, and with them almost the entire nominally Christian and Reformed church world is ashamed too.

Well might the exhortation of the apostle be heard by us: “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”

—EDK

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

THE TRUTH: ITS ANTITHETICAL EFFECT

They rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned. And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? But it shall not prosper. —Numbers 14:40–41

The church has battled over the doctrine of the antithesis from the very beginning in the garden until now. The antithesis was a key doctrine that led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in 1924–25 and was also fundamental in the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) in 2021.¹

During the battle over common grace, Protestant Reformed ministers often sounded the warning that the doctrine of common grace would tear down the antithesis and bring worldliness into the church.² Protestant Reformed church fathers argued against a common grace of God for the wicked that it would break down the antithesis between the elect and the reprobate. Because the doctrine of common grace teaches that the reprobate can do some good by this so-called common grace, the ministers concluded that there would be some cooperation between the church and world.³

Those early Protestant Reformed church fathers often argued the above points from the logical implications of the false doctrine of common grace. The truth always divides. I contend that it is an absolute fact that all false doctrine tears down the antithesis: If you are not for the truth, you are for the lie. If you are not in the camp of God and his truth, you are in the camp of the devil, who is the father of lies, and his lies. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44).

The term *antithesis* has the idea of a stark contrast. This contrast is shown in scripture between light and

darkness, good and evil, God and the devil, grace and work, and free and meritorious. More than ever before we are in an age where the mention of the doctrine of the antithesis has fallen silent.

Herman Hoeksema experienced that silence in his day, and he wrote,

Of late this principle of the antithesis has generally been denied or silenced into oblivion. For a time those that were not at all in favor of the antithetical life-view still pretended to defend it, only claiming, that in this present time the antithesis is never absolute but only relative in actual manifestation. It is absolute in spiritual principle, but by virtue of the operation of a common grace there is also a certain practical synthesis in this world between the children of light and those of darkness. But lately one does not hear any more, even of this so-called relative antithesis. The antithesis is forgotten, both in theory and in practice.⁴

If that abandonment of the antithesis was true for Hoeksema in 1928, how much more is it true today.

With that aspect of the doctrine of the antithesis explained, the purpose of this article is to show how the truth of the gospel divides, how those who do not believe the gospel are forced by God and his truth to be outright enemies of the gospel, how the truth tears off the masks of hypocrisy from those who pretend to be sympathetic

¹ See Aaron Cleveland, “The No of the Yes,” *Sword and Shield* 5, no. 4 (September 2024): 35–38.

² See Homer C. Hoeksema, “The Organic Conception, the Antithesis, and Common Grace,” *Standard Bearer* 54, no. 17 (June 1, 1978): 389–93.

³ See Marinus Schipper, “The Antithesis and Common Grace,” *Standard Bearer* 29, no. 14 (April 15, 1953): 335–36.

⁴ Herman Hoeksema, “Antithesis, Synthesis and Dualism,” *Standard Bearer* 4, no. 15 (May 1, 1928): 353.

to the truth but are haters of it and lovers of the antichristian kingdom, how that same truth drives unbelievers who are close to the truth to the camp of the enemy and to become friends with that enemy, and how the truth of the gospel divides the unrighteous from the righteous and divides the kingdom of darkness from the kingdom of light and preserves God's elect in the true church of Jesus Christ.

Herman Hoeksema beautifully explained that antithetical effect of the gospel:

The effect of the course of the white horse through the world is not only positive, but also antithetical. The running of this horse has its effect upon the enemies of the church. For a while the influence of that white horse enlightens them also. They even taste the beauty of the kingdom. The word of God has general enlightening influence and even a certain civilizing power...But the chief trouble with those who understand the gospel intellectually is that they deny that Jesus is the Christ. Therefore, they constitute the power of Antichrist. They aim at the establishment of a kingdom without Christ and without God, a kingdom of man, the same kingdom Satan has tried to establish ever since man subjected himself unto the power of darkness. For this purpose they use all the institutions God has given and instituted in the world. More and more the state, in combination with other states, must serve the purpose of realizing this antichristian kingdom. Toward the establishment of this kingdom the church must also cooperate, as she has fallen away from the truth and is the apostate and the false church. The church must preach a social gospel. It no longer must speak of sin and guilt, of righteousness and holiness, of the need of atonement and of regeneration. But it must preach the gospel of human love, the gospel that man is not impotent but divine, that he is not guilty but a child of God by nature. Thus the church must help to realize the antichristian world kingdom. The church also must become increasingly a world church, the attempt at which is plainly seen in the ecumenical movement of our day. The same is true of the schools, both higher and lower, which are pressed into the same service: to realize the kingdom of Antichrist. All of this is the antithetical side of the effect of the running of the white horse through the world.⁵

In Genesis 4:3 we read, "In process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD." It is of high importance that we understand the phrase "process of time." Cain knew the truth. He knew that he was required by God to bring a bloody sacrifice. And that truth of the gospel forced Cain, as a reprobate, to bring a different offering to the Lord, a sacrifice of his own works and will. It must be abundantly clear that Cain's sacrifice was not much different than Abel's. It was not that Cain held to a religion that was an outright denial that God existed; the difference was very slight. According to the counsel of God, Cain brought a very similar offering to Abel, and Cain claimed that in his offering he was worshiping the one true God, but Cain knew full well that he brought the work of his own hands, which was antithetical to the offering he was called to bring. Cain knew the promise and what the bloody sacrifice represented. Over the process of time, the gospel of salvation found in Jesus Christ's sacrifice alone and shown in the sacrifice of Abel brought out Cain's unbelief and hatred for that full and free salvation. Abel's sacrifice drove Cain, who was an outwardly religious man, to align himself with the kingdom of the devil and to carry out the wicked act of murdering his own earthly brother, Abel.

Abel's sacrifice drove Cain, who was an outwardly religious man, to align himself with the kingdom of the devil and to carry out the wicked act of murdering his own earthly brother, Abel.

The warning that the gospel-truth of salvation in Jesus Christ alone drives men into false doctrines and associations with enemies of the truth must be applied to our day. The Reformed truth held to in the RPC has not only driven the PRC into the conditional doctrine of repentance unto forgiveness, that God cannot forgive man unless and until man repents. But the truth also has driven the PRC into the camp of the enemy to join forces with the enemy, those with whom she once contended against the lie. What else explains the fact that many in the PRC who once confessed to hold to the doctrine of the antithesis now sing at Men Sing Grand Rapids alongside those whom they once opposed? In the October

⁵ Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:521–22.

2025 program, many Protestant Reformed men joined their voices with men from other Reformed denominations to sing antithetical lyrics such as “Let my foes assail in vain...False and faithless are my foes, in their mouth no truth is found; deadly are the words they speak, all their thoughts with sin abound.”⁶

This used to be the confession of the PRC against the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, the United Reformed Churches, the Heritage Reformed Congregations, and the Netherlands Reformed Congregations; now these opposing denominations sing together in one confession. As they sing together against their common enemy, it should become apparent that the enemy is not the various false doctrines they hold to among their denominations, such as the conditional covenant, the well-meant gospel offer, conditional fellowship, theistic evolution, justification by faith and repentance, and the federal vision. The enemy cannot be those false doctrines because the men also sang psalter number 370 together: “How good and pleasant is the sight, when brethren make it their delight to dwell in blest accord.”⁷ If the enemy is not the false doctrines that abound in these denominations, who is the enemy?

As soon as the Lord said that the Israelites would not enter Canaan for another forty years, the truth of the gospel that God, not their own might, would gain them the victory drove the people to say the very opposite of what they first had said.

The truth of the word of God that is preached in the RPC and written on the pages of *Sword and Shield* drove the PRC—in men’s eyes in remarkable haste—into the hands of those who were once the PRC’s enemies. This truth is the full and free salvation of the elect child of God without man’s works, repentance, or even one sigh of faith for his justification. This is the same truth that confronted Cain, which said, “Thou shalt not bring of

the works of thine own hands before God for your justification,” and Cain was angered by it to the point of slaying his earthly brother, Abel.

The same gospel that drove Cain to kill Abel drove Esau to hate his own brother, Jacob, as found in Genesis 25:19–34. Esau did not care about the birthright blessing; he was willing to sell it for a bowl of pottage. Esau had always hated Jacob, as is always the reprobate’s attitude toward the elect, but it was the truth that brought out of Esau the expression of that hatred. As soon as that blessing was bestowed upon Jacob, and Esau heard it, Esau hated Jacob and desired to kill him.

Sword and Shield has often warned of the danger of joining the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). I will not reference the articles because of their vast number, but one can visit the Reformed Believers Publishing website and search “NAPARC,” and one will find at least twenty different articles that have referenced it. The truth that has been written about NAPARC is driving the PRC to join this antichristian institution.

For a long time many in the PRC have desired to join NAPARC as a member denomination, but they have not been bold to express their desire outright. But in a recent *Standard Bearer* article, Prof. Barry Gritters is bolder. Although Professor Gritters does not come right out and say that he desires the PRC to join NAPARC, he lays out a masterpiece of questions about joining NAPARC for the readers to answer for themselves. It is not difficult to see that Professor Gritters desires the PRC to be a member of this wicked organization. The professor writes that the PRC needs to face these questions:

Which erroneous teachings would, and which would not hinder the PRCA from becoming a member of an ecumenical council? A form of theistic evolutionism in some of the denominations forbids us to join a council, but allowance of divorce and remarriage does not preclude a (closer) corresponding relationship. What is the difference?⁸

The professor goes on to show how the constitution of the contact committee of the PRC allows for the denomination to join NAPARC. What becomes very apparent is that Professor Gritters is using his tricks again to push his agenda. Without coming out and saying that he desires to join NAPARC, he uses questions to get his message across. It should also be stated that the NAPARC meeting that the professor references was held

6 No. 10:1–2, 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).

7 No. 370:1, 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).

8 Barrett Gritters, “The 2025 PRCA Visit to NAPARC,” *Standard Bearer* 102, no. 8 (April 2026): 250.

in November 2025. Is it just a coincidence that his article was published two months before the meeting of the Protestant Reformed Synod 2026, at which the synod would be discussing that topic?

The final passage I would like to point out regarding how the truth creates an antithetical effect is Numbers 14:40–41, which is quoted at the opening of this article. In the context Israel had come to the edge of the land of Canaan, and Moses sent out spies to search the land to see if it was a good land and to search out the strength of the people in the land.

We then have the familiar history of the report of the ten spies versus the report of Joshua and Caleb. After the Israelites had sided with the wicked report of the ten spies, which said that Israel was not strong enough to take the land, God said that all the people ages twenty and up, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, would be slain in the wilderness over the next forty years, and the succeeding generation would enter the land (Num. 14:29–31).

What was the reaction of the Israelites to this word of God? “They rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned” (Num. 14:40).

After the Lord had promised the Israelites the land, they rebelled and said, “We are not strong enough.” This shows that the doctrine of the Israelites was a doctrine of works. It was not going to be God’s mighty hand and outstretched arm that would gain them the victory; it would be their own works and strength that would gain them the land of Canaan.

As soon as the Lord said that the Israelites would not enter Canaan for another forty years, the truth of the gospel that God, not their own might, would gain them the victory drove the people to say the very opposite of what they first had said. Instead of saying “we are not strong enough” anymore, the truth forced them into attempting to take the land by their own works, and they were destroyed.

So the question is, how is it that the PRC is holding hands with those who used to be her enemies? How is it that Reverend McGeown can say that the nominal Reformed and Presbyterians are his brothers and that their false doctrines are not salvation issues?⁹

How is it that Zion Protestant Reformed Church is doing evangelism—approved by the consistory, I would assume—with Frontline Street Ministry and Truth on

Fire? From Frontline’s March 2026 Facebook post:

Brothers and sisters from Zion PRC along with saints from OPC, HRC, and URC, stood shoulder to shoulder filled with joy to bring the gospel to an otherwise spiritually dry corner.

According to Zion’s March 2026 Facebook post, Reverend Guichelaar and some of his congregants, in collaboration with Frontline and Truth on Fire, stood side by side along the road holding up signs that said, among other things, “Stop and hear how your sins can be forgiven.” A quote from Frontline’s Facebook page on April 7, 2026, summarizes its theology as follows: “Christ is available, but you must trust him or perish.” It is understandable then that members of Zion can stand shoulder to shoulder with Frontline, since that is the PRC’s theology too.

How is it that Professor Gritters can say that the churches of NAPARC are committed to scripture and the Reformed confessions?

On the one hand, our synod wrote into the CC’s constitution that the PRCA desires to participate in interdenominational councils: “The Committee shall participate in ecumenical councils.” The constitution defines what a *Reformed* ecumenical council is: a gathering of churches who are committed to Scripture and the Reformed creeds, who recognize each other as true churches, but who have “significant differences in doctrine and practice that keep them from forming into one denomination.” In other words, our synod recognized the possibility and legitimacy of joining a council of churches who both hold the Reformed creeds and yet have significant differences from us.¹⁰

The following quote demonstrates from recent history how the PRC used to refer to the doctrines of those whom the PRC now calls brothers and sisters:

With its pointed reference to the defense of the gospel of grace in the Canons of Dordt, the “Formula of Subscription” makes plain that it would be wicked for the PRC to yield to the temptation to regard the truth of particular grace as secondary, and what this wickedness would be. The doctrine that the grace of God in Jesus Christ in the preaching of the gospel and in the covenant

9 See Tyler D. Ophoff, “McGeown’s Fables (1),” *Sword and Shield* 6, no. 8 (January 2026): 12–19; “McGeown’s Fables (2),” *Sword and Shield* 6, no. 9 (February 2026): 15–21; “McGeown’s Fables (3),” *Sword and Shield* 7, no. 1 (June 2026): 12–17.

10 Gritters, “The 2025 PRCA Visit to NAPARC,” 249.

is particular, not general, is fundamental to the gospel of salvation by the sovereign grace of God alone. It is not a “distinctive” of the PRC. It is not a parochial teaching. It is not of merely historical interest. It is not Western. It is the gospel of Holy Scripture as confessed in the Canons of Dordt and in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Insofar as a church abandons or attacks the truth that the grace of God in Jesus Christ in the gospel is particular—for the elect in Christ alone—that church abandons or attacks the gospel and the God of the gospel. “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:15, 16).”

Denial of particular grace in the covenant of grace explains why Reformed and Presbyterian theologians in reputedly conservative churches are now advocating the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by faith and the works of faith. To avoid restricting grace in the covenant to the elect children of believers, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have adopted a covenant doctrine that conditions a general promise, universal grace, and a salvation intended for all the children without exception *upon the faith of the child*. Today, perceptive theologians are taking the doctrine of a conditional covenant to its logical end: justification and salvation in the covenant are by faith and faith’s works. The error, it should be noted, is not only the addition of “faith’s works.” The error is also that faith itself is made an obtaining or meriting work of the sinner, rather than the mere instrument, given by God to His elect in Christ, through which the sinner receives, as pure gift, the righteousness of Christ.

How foolish it would be for the PRC to yield to the temptation to set the issues involved in the common grace controversy of 1924 aside as insignificant when they see where the doctrine of common grace has brought the CRC.¹¹

I have often wondered how it is that the PRC so quickly is leaving the truth. But this should not come as

a surprise to us. The truth has not only the power to save but also the power to damn. The truth has the power to gather and to drive away. It is not only the power of a savor of life unto life but also a power of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16).

The truth has not only the power to save but also the power to damn. The truth has the power to gather and to drive away.

The call to those in the PRC and all their brothers and sisters in other Reformed and Presbyterian churches is to repent! The call is to flee! Flee from the lie! Join yourselves to the true church where the gospel is faithfully preached, which is found in the RPC, that you may find rest for your souls. Open your eyes to see how the truth has driven you to the camp of the wicked and to regard as your brothers and sisters people in denominations against whose false doctrine you once battled. You are not reforming; you are joining with the antichristian movement. These alliances Satan is using to unite these churches against the truth and the kingdom of light, which will come to its fullest manifestation in the last days.

Time and time again, scripture shows that the antithesis is between the elect, those who truthfully profess the name of God, and those who are closest to them, even members of their own families, and not those first of all who are the most outwardly wicked. To deny this and to broaden the antithesis is against scripture and the confessions and is un-Reformed.

Q. 30. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

A. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 95)

—Greg Kalsbeek

11 David J. Engelsma, “A Temptation of the PRC,” *Standard Bearer* 78, no. 11 (March 1, 2002): 245–46.

NEWS FROM THE BOARD OF REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing plans to hold the seventh annual association meeting on October 23, 2026, at First Reformed Protestant Church. The address of the church is 694 Jackson Street, Grandville, Michigan. The time of the meeting is to be determined. Rev. Earl Kamps intends to give the keynote address on the topic “The Efficacious Work of the Holy Spirit.”

The retiring board members this year are Andy Birkett and Ed Ophoff III. The board takes this opportunity to thank these men for their years of service on the board. Jason Cleveland, Henry DeVries, James Jansma, and Ed Ophoff II, have been nominated to fill the two vacant seats on the board.

Soon the secretary of the board will email the agenda to the association members with further details of the meeting. In the meantime, especially to be noted are the following motions that the board has taken:

Art. 14. Motion was made to amend the constitution by removing the class of associate membership from Reformed Believers Publishing and to give regular membership to the current associate members. It was noted that all amendments required for this will be forwarded to the association for approval.

Ground: Men and women alike are free in their

office of all-believer to give a witness of the truth of the gospel through regular membership in the organization of Reformed Believers Publishing.

Motion carried.

Art. 15. Motion was made to amend the constitution to limit nominations for board membership to men only. It was noted that all amendments required for this will be forwarded to the association for approval.

Ground: It would not be prudent to have our women serve as board members. “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”

I Corinthians 10:23

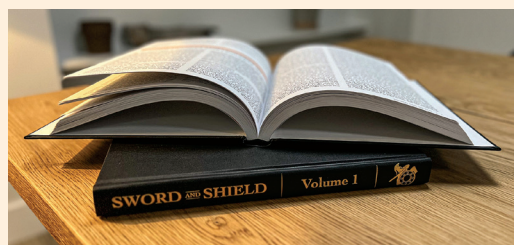
Motion carried.

The board also reminds our readership that any men or women who desire to join us in the glorious cause of Reformed Believers Publishing to publish and promote the truth of justification by faith alone can download and fill out the membership request form that is found on the Membership page of the Reformed Believers Publishing website and email the form to office@reformedbelieverspub.org.

—Lee Wiltjer, secretary

Reminder to Order Bound Volumes

The sixth volume year of *Sword and Shield* was completed with the May 2026 issue. The end of the volume year marks the time for readers to order bound volumes. If you want your own twelve issues of volume six bound, bring them to the office of Reformed Believers Publishing at 325 84th St SW, Suite 102, Byron Center, Michigan, or give them to a board member. The cost is \$35. If you cannot find an issue or two, note which issues are missing, and Reformed Believers Publishing will supply them at no charge. If you want a bound volume of new issues, email your request to office@reformedbelieverspub.org. The cost is \$45. The deadline to order bound volumes has been extended. Please turn in your own issues or place your order as soon as possible. There also are copies of bound volumes two through five available for \$45 per volume.





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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

In your patience possess ye your souls. — Luke 21:19

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it. Whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. In your patience possess ye your souls.

Remember Lot's wife. A life she had in Sodom. Flee from Sodom she was called to do. Ran out she partially did. She looked back, longing for her former life. A pillar of salt she became, rooted to the spot. Seeking to save her life, she lost it.

Whosoever seeks to save his life shall lose it. *In ease* he seeks to possess his soul. All the calculations, all the weighing of pros and cons, all the love of ease and the praise of men, and all the clinging to the comforts of the familiar will serve only for the loss of life. Saving his life—earthly wisdom—he shall lose it.

Whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. This is the heavenly wisdom Christ teaches.

“In your patience possess ye your souls.”

Jesus speaks of the last days; and, behold, it is the last days. Ever since Christ Jesus went to heaven, it has been the last days, the last hour. Thus the gospel, the church, and believers exist in the world as it were imperiled every moment. Seducers and false prophets shall come and say they are Christ, and many shall be deceived. Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Nation will rise against nation, wars and rumors of wars will terrify multitudes. Great earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and fearful sights will make the hearts of many shake.

Worse, enemies will lay hands on you and persecute you and deliver you up before the church and the world, before kings and governors. Fear not! Christ will be in your heart and mouth by his Spirit to give you an answer. And you will seal your doctrine in your persecution, a testimony that the adversaries will be unable to gainsay or resist. You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, sisters, kinsfolk, and friends. You will be hated of all men for Christ's sake and for the word of the gospel that you speak and that you represent.

In that possess your souls!

The word “souls” means lives. Imperative. You keep them. You save your lives! You do not lose them.

In your patience, brethren. Precious gift of the Holy Spirit.

“Patience” is endurance. It is endurance especially of suffering. Here suffering for the sake of Christ and of the gospel at the hands of those who hate Christ, the gospel, and also you for the gospel's sake. Steadfastly, in the face of the intense suffering for the gospel's sake, faith clings to Christ, to his promise, and to the hope of glory. The believer lays his soul and his life in the hand of God as his God, trusting his promise that he cares for him and that all things are for his profit.

Naturally, every man desires to possess his life in safety. He gathers to himself many arguments, many aids, many fortresses, and many defenses to keep his life in safety.

Christ here teaches a different way. “In your patience possess ye your souls.” That we every day and in every way are prepared to die, to suffer under the cross. Being ready always to cast away *all* for Christ's sake.

Losing our lives, we *shall* save them!

—NJL