



# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 7

MAY 27, 2023

*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.  
—Psalm 27:5*

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## MEDITATION

And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

—Exodus 2:11–12

**T**his is a hard passage for the flesh to understand. Moses, beholding an Egyptian taskmaster smiting a Hebrew slave, secretly slew the Egyptian and buried him. Where is the sense in that? After all, Moses was an Egyptian, was he not? Moses was the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses was beloved of Egyptian royalty. Moses was instructed in all the might and the wisdom of the Egyptians. Oh, yes, Moses had been born to Hebrews, but he had only lived in their home for three years or so. For thirty-seven years Moses had lived in the pharaoh's palace as an Egyptian prince. Moses had a bright future ahead of him in Egypt: pleasure, position, power. And what were the Hebrews to Moses? Moses did not know any Hebrews, aside from his family, perhaps. The Hebrews were merely slaves. In fact, they were Moses' slaves, if he wanted them. They built Egypt's treasure cities. They tended Egypt's fields. But Moses was the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

It is a puzzle to the flesh: the Egyptian Moses killed the Egyptian taskmaster and delivered the Hebrew slave.

But Moses did not calculate according to the flesh. Moses saw by faith. By faith Moses knew three things. First, by faith Moses knew that he was not an Egyptian but a Hebrew. When he went out to see the Hebrews and look upon their burdens, he knew them as "his brethren" (Ex. 2:11). By faith he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter when he was come to years (Heb. 11:24). The pharaoh and his daughter were not the people of God. The Hebrews were the

people of God (v. 25), and the Hebrews' God was Moses' God.

Second, by faith Moses knew that he must deliver Israel from the Egyptians. Moses did not know the details. Moses did not know the time. And Moses did not know his brethren's mind. Moses supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them, but they understood it not (Acts 7:25). Nevertheless, Moses knew that God's purpose with him was the deliverance of Israel, just as his parents had known by faith that he was a proper child.

Third, by faith Moses knew that it was far more blessed to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin in Egypt for a season (Heb. 11:25). In Egypt were all the treasures and pleasures of the flesh. Those treasures and pleasures were considerable. In the slave huts of the Hebrews were all the reproaches and afflictions of God's people. Those reproaches and afflictions were considerable. But hidden behind Egypt's treasures and pleasures were death and hell. And hidden behind the Hebrews' reproaches and afflictions were life and heaven.

Now we must see by faith. How was it that hidden behind the Hebrews' reproaches and afflictions were life and heaven? Because the reproaches and afflictions of God's people were the reproaches and afflictions of Christ (Heb. 11:26). Jesus Christ was with his people in the iron furnace of Egypt. Moses could not find Christ in the soft palaces of godless Egypt.

But Moses could see Christ among the lowly Hebrew slaves. For Christ was a servant, though he is Lord of all. Christ bore the reproach of the whole world, though he is the king of glory. By faith Moses recognized the reproach of Christ among the beleaguered Hebrew slaves. And by faith Moses had respect to the recompense of the reward: God's gracious gift of life and heaven through his only begotten Son.

Thus it always is for God's people here below. They eschew the whole world and are killed all the day long. And as they die they count themselves happy in Christ. The flesh can never

understand it, for it is not something to be understood by the flesh but by faith.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. (Heb. 11:24–26)

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

**T**his issue of *Reformed Pavilion* arrives on the eve of a solemn yet joyful event. Tomorrow, May 28, 2023, a new church will meet for worship for the first time. The church is so new that it does not even have a name yet. The church was formed this past Monday, May 22, when some sixty-five souls separated from the Reformed Protestant Churches and formed the church anew. The Act of Separation and Joining by which the church was formed is published elsewhere in this issue for the reader's perusal. The church thus formed is a Reformed church, as the reader will see from the Act. For those who separated from the Reformed Protestant Churches, the separation gives rise to a multitude of thoughts within us, but God's comforts in Christ delight our souls (Ps. 94:19). We give thanks to our faithful savior, who alone gathers, defends, and preserves his church by his word and Spirit.

A cordial invitation is extended to all to worship with us tomorrow and any following Lord's days. Our worship times are 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. We will be meeting for the time being at Hudsonville Christian Middle School, located at 3925 Van Buren St., Hudsonville, MI 49426.

This issue of the magazine also includes Dewey Engelsma's next article in his series detailing some of the events that led to the Act of Separation and Joining.

In other matters, we have received a letter from a reader with good questions that deal with the regulative principle of worship. A warm welcome to our correspondent, and all our readers are again invited to send in your letters. This issue is rounded out by a book review, in addition to some of our regular rubrics.

The Lord comes quickly. Watch and pray.

—AL



### How Did This Happen? (3)

**I**t is impossible to watch what is unfolding before our eyes and not see that what is taking place today is the same as that which took place in 2020 and 2021 in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) as a whole.

The word of God brought a rebuke, and the people rejected it.

Man's natures and man's idols are the same throughout time and history.

Will God rule, or will man rule?

And it always comes back to the preaching.

What will you do with the preaching of God's word?

Will you bow your neck to the yoke of Jesus Christ and submit yourself to it, or will you harden yourself against it and reject it (see Belgic Confession 28–29)?

There has always been a twofold response to the preaching. Some laugh and mock when they hear the word, and others are humbled so they obey the word, having been given that humble heart by God (see II Chron. 30:1–12).

Turns out the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and the PRC are composed of the same men and women. They walk into church wise in their own conceits and stand ready to judge the preaching. The preaching will not stand in judgment of them, but they will stand in judgment of the preaching.

But the word of God does not take into account the preconceived notions that you have when you walk into church. The fact that you love a certain hymn or that a certain spiritual song bubbles up in you is of no moment to Jehovah God. The fire that burns within you might seem noble and righteous and pure and holy, but if it is

not what God has commanded, then it is with fire that you will be consumed (see Lev. 10:1–2).

Think about what just happened at First Reformed Protestant Church.

Reverend Lanning preached a sermon in which he (gently) pointed out that the opening hymn has no warrant in our worship service.<sup>1</sup>

This should not have been objectionable.

But it was.

Men can now say, "I don't even care about that hymn!" but they certainly cared about that hymn the evening of March 5, 2023, and in the weeks that followed.

The consistory took the hymn away (temporarily) and replaced it with a Psalter number.

The people grumbled and complained, and the consistory gave them their hymn back.

Even though it meant that the consistory had to place that song into the transmogrifier and turn it into a psalm.

How it got back into the worship service was of no moment to the congregation. It was back, and that was all that mattered.

Even the fact that classis has now spoken and has said that "Praise God" is a hymn and even though classis has acknowledged that that hymn is not a part of article 69 of the Church Order—none of that makes a lick of difference.

It's back.

So the people will stand up and continue to sing "Praise God" before both services on Sundays.

The reason that hymn is in the worship services at First RPC is because man wills it to be there.

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lanning, "No Image Worship," sermon preached on Sunday, March 5, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=35232335114953>.

So it stays.

That is will worship. What First RPC engages in Sunday after Sunday is will worship. Having erected an idol, they bow their heads to it every Sunday and do it while professing a love for God.

Turns out all the big to-do about article 69 was just a bunch of hot air. Now that the denomination has spoken at classis, we know that Elders Jon Langerak and Gord Schipper—men who troubled First RPC by not shaking Reverend Lanning’s hand because he was allegedly militating against article 69 of the Church Order—troubled the churches about something that was “immaterial” (to use the word of classis).<sup>2</sup> Whether a song is found in article 69 of the Church Order or not apparently doesn’t matter. Article 69 doesn’t matter. The churches, according to classis, have been trampling that article underfoot for years, and there is no need to correct course. The definition of *immaterial* is, according to Merriam-Webster, “of no substantial consequence: unimportant.”

After all of this grievous upheaval and trouble in the Reformed Protestant Churches, which started because Elders Langerak and Schipper were up in arms about article 69, what is the takeaway? What is the conclusion? This: it was all immaterial.

What about the other matter that was so serious, so significant, that Reverend Lanning just had to go?

Wasn’t Reverend Lanning teaching conditional theology when he said the following?

So there is a question of the application of the regulative principle to the singing of the church, especially this question: Does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody?...This is the matter of your worship. It is the matter of God dwelling with you and bringing you into his covenant fellowship through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Men have clung to that script with might and main, saying things like, “That statement clearly demonstrates that the sermon was conditional!”

They refused to listen to those who denied the charge.

Maybe they will listen to classis.

This statement in its context shows that Rev. Lanning was simply stating that the regulative principle is a matter of interest for the church because it *pertains* to her worship, which worship is a matter of God dwelling with his church, and which worship is a matter of covenant fellowship through Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

That charge too against the pure gospel now vanishes like a foul odor in the wind.

What is left after considering all of the carnage?

Man’s will.

All this has taken me aback.

Amid church reformation, to be confronted with the reality that most of the people with whom you thought you were one are not all that interested in reformation but rather are comfortable being the PRC but with the initials rearranged just a bit is surprising.

Reformation came to the RPC, and the people tolerated it for a little while. And then the Holy Spirit came to the RPC to reform her concerning her singing—as is always the case in reformation—so that the RPC would return to psalm singing in her worship, and the people said, “No, we will not have that. We will tolerate the Holy Spirit’s work of reformation no further. We like singing the psalms! Just don’t take away the few little idols that we have erected in the sanctuary!”

The people were led in this reaction by the consistory of First RPC.

<sup>2</sup> Advice of Committee 1: Appeals of Rev. Andrew Lanning and Mr. Dewey Engelsma, recommendation 7, which advice was adopted at the May 18, 2023, meeting of the Reformed Protestant classis. A copy of this material and other material referenced in this article can be obtained upon request at [info@reformedpavilion.com](mailto:info@reformedpavilion.com).

<sup>3</sup> Advice of Committee 1: Appeals of Rev. Andrew Lanning and Mr. Dewey Engelsma, recommendation 2, ground 2, which advice was adopted at the May 18, 2023, meeting of the Reformed Protestant classis. The emphasis is classis’.



And that consistory in turn was led—by the nose—by Reverend Langerak.

Since we are still answering Reverend Langerak's question, "How did this happen?" let us pursue this question more deeply.

How did this happen?

It happened because the congregation was led by Protestant Reformed men.

It happened because the congregation consists of Protestant Reformed men and women.

The PRC stands on an utterly ridiculous principle like "exclusive psalmody almost." Then the Holy Spirit comes to the RPC to free her from bondage to that principle, and what does Reverend Langerak say? "You must sing the psalms, although not exclusively but almost exclusively."<sup>4</sup>

"Almost exclusively."

What a thing that is.

And the people embraced it.

Here was my folly.

I thought that if a Protestant Reformed man walked out of the Protestant Reformed Churches and walked into a Reformed Protestant church, then he became something different than what he had been. So something like Clark Kent's stepping into a phone booth and (*voilà!*) coming out as Superman.

But I was even more foolish.

I thought that if that same Protestant Reformed man walked into a Reformed Protestant consistory room, he would be transformed into a different kind of elder.

I thought he would be transformed into a different man, a different elder than he had been while he was an elder in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

You know, he will now deal justly and honestly, according to the word of God.

But it turns out that is not the case.

It is not the case at all.

The consistory of First RPC is a Protestant Reformed consistory.

Seeing (again) the consistory of a church turn over and then a few short months later seeing (again) the faithful minister of the congregation be cut down is revelatory.

Consider the violence that took place in the consistory room of First RPC in the space of only a few weeks. The men who worked this violence were more violent than the men who occupied the office of elder in the PRC. Have there ever been this many men cut down in such a short amount of time?

I shudder to think of the violence of the city of First Reformed Protestant Church (see Ezek. 7:23; Nah. 3:1).

Consider the respect of persons that took place in the consistory room of First RPC in the space of only a few weeks.

On March 12 Elder Jon Langerak and Elder Gord Schipper did not shake Reverend Lanning's hand after the evening service. At the consistory meeting on March 15, "it was agreed that the two elders who disagreed with the sermon ought to bring a protest to the consistory specifying their grievances."<sup>5</sup> The next meeting was scheduled for two weeks later, on March 29.

On March 26 Elder Paul Starrett declined to shake then Seminarian Luke Bomers' hand after Luke's sermon "Visited by the Dayspring." That Sunday night, Vice-President Tom Bodbyl, who was acting as chairman of the consistory in the absence of Reverend Lanning, told Elder Starrett that he had to protest that sermon.

Elder Bodbyl then tried to schedule a meeting for the very next night, March 27, which would leave very little time for Elder Starrett to put together a protest and certainly less time than was granted Elders Langerak and G. Schipper. The only reason the meeting did not take place on March 27 was that Elder Starrett was out of town for work that day.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Langerak, "The Indwelling Word," sermon preached on March 19, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.

<sup>5</sup> Consistory announcement to the congregation regarding Reverend Lanning's suspension, distributed on Friday, March 24, 2023.

On Tuesday, March 28, two days after the sermon was preached, the consistory met in a special session to deal with Elder Starrett and Elder Van Dyke, the two elders who had refused to shake Luke's hand after the sermon on March 26.

Elder Starrett came with his protest in hand and gave it to the clerk at the beginning of the meeting.

During the meeting the chairman, Elder Tom Bodbyl, demanded that the elders who did not shake Luke's hand after the morning service give their reasons for not shaking the seminarian's hand.<sup>6</sup>

Let's stop for a moment and compare what has just taken place.

Elders Langerak and Schipper didn't shake Reverend Lanning's hand and were told they "ought to bring a protest," and they were given two weeks to do so. Elders Starrett and Van Dyke were hauled before the tribunal two days after they didn't shake the seminarian's hand and were told they must explain themselves.

So Elder Starrett, in the two days he was given by the chairman, wrote a protest.

And what did the consistory do? Before they received his protest, they took a motion from the floor (there was no advice from a committee to consider) to suspend Elder Starrett from the office of elder. That motion passed, and Elder Starrett was unceremoniously cut down and thrown into the ditch, with his protest thrown on top of him for good measure.

That protest would never see the light of day.

The violence of that is shocking. Even the world, when it has a man on death row, allows that man's protest (and probably multiple appeals) to be heard before they give him the gas.

Not so with the consistory of First RPC.

A man brings a protest, and the consistory—instead of dealing with that protest, recognizing that they are dealing with a man who was placed into office by Jesus Christ himself and who by

his testimony is sounding a warning to the consistory—removes him from office, rendering his protest moot.

But that was not enough for the consistory.

Having cut Elder Starrett down and removed him from his Christ-appointed office, the consistory spoke lies about him. "Elder Starrett has admitted to the consistory that he is publicly teaching the false doctrine of legalism to the congregation that Reverend Lanning is teaching."<sup>7</sup> This makes it sound like the consistory, after hours of work, perhaps using the "good cop, bad cop" routine that no doubt involved the use of klieg lights shining directly into Elder Starrett's face, finally were able to draw a confession from him. "Yes! Yes! I was going around teaching the people legalism!"

That statement of the consistory, distributed to the congregation in an email on March 31, was a lie. Elder Starrett was not teaching the people legalism. He would never admit to teaching legalism. Elder Starrett hates legalism and will not abide it for an hour. What he told the consistory was that he loved the truth of God that was taught by Reverend Lanning, and he would shout it from the mountaintops. That is glorious. That is true leadership. But he was dealing with brutal men. And the elders did what brutal men do: they cut him down.

The consistory behaved so unrighteously that two other elders, Elder Meyer and Elder Van Dyke, had to resign. This is understandable. When a group of elders behaves wickedly and when there is absolutely no hope—when the foundations are destroyed—then it becomes time for the righteous man to simply walk out the door.

It is possible that some reading this do not know Elders Meyer, Starrett, and Van Dyke. The best way I can think of to describe them would be the way that Jesus described Nathaniel in John 1:47—Israelites in whom there is no guile.

That description cannot be used to describe the men who remain.

<sup>6</sup> Consistory meeting minutes, March 28, 2023, article 3.

<sup>7</sup> Consistory meeting minutes, March 28, 2023, article 4.



But what about those resignations?

Elder Meyer, in the consistory room, told the other elders that he believed exactly as Elder Starrett did; that he would confess the same truth as did Elder Starrett; and that if anyone asked him, he would tell them that the consistory was wrong in the decisions it had made.

For these reasons Elder Meyer told the consistory that they had to suspend him as well.

But they didn't do it.

We all know Elder Meyer's history, and to suspend him would not look good at all.

Why, that would make First RPC look just like Hope Protestant Reformed Church! We can't have that!

These men are political.

And crafty.

So they refused to do it.

They cut down Elder Starrett but hypocritically refused to do the same to Elder Meyer.

They just went on to make it so intolerable in that room that Elder Meyer had to resign his office. This allowed the consistory to save face in the eyes of the people. (As if God in heaven does not see all of their wicked machinations.)

Adding cruelty to the wickedness, elders now mount the pulpit and in their congregational prayers publicly lash Elders Meyer and Van Dyke regarding their alleged desertion of office.

One prayer in particular, that offered by Elder Matt Overway, stood out for its cruelty and brought to mind the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:34: "and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues."<sup>8</sup>

As one man said, watching all this unfold makes one wish for the tender mercies of Classis East.

The charge of desertion of office is a favorite charge of the false church. Consider Crete Protestant Reformed Church's judgment about their then-pastor, Reverend Nathan Langerak,

after he separated himself from his congregation. "By this act, he has made himself guilty of the gross public sins of schism, faithless desertion of office, and perjury (cf. Art 80 CO)."<sup>9</sup>

Bryan Van Baren and I were also charged with desertion of office when, as elders, we left a consistory meeting, having witnessed the willful and wicked way in which the consistory was conducting itself. The members of the RPC approved that action; but now, when Elders Meyer and Van Dyke find themselves in the same position, they are criticized and treated cruelly on account of it. That is called hypocrisy.

We in the Reformed Protestant Churches prided ourselves on being different. Oh, how we were filled with pride that we were no longer Protestant Reformed!

And God has completely exposed us in our pride and hypocrisy.

We have been exposed.

Reverend Langerak has been exposed.

Those who have taken the time to study his sermons and his speech on this controversy have found them to be confusing and contradictory, lacking a theme, and simply representing the expressions of a man who has a lot on his mind and uses the pulpit to deliver himself of those thoughts.

We could name his speeches and sermons on the controversy "Euroclydon," as all they are is a tempestuous wind.

Who knew this about him?

Did you?

I didn't know this.

I do now.

During the heat of the controversy in the PRC, Reverend Langerak's consistory at Crete Protestant Reformed Church told him he must take a break from preaching the controversy, and they instructed him to preach on Psalm 23. This was the foolish attempt by a wicked consistory to get its minister to put down his sword.

<sup>8</sup> Congregational prayer of Sunday, May 14, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuzyoorkACM&t=16s> (see 38:22–39:42).

<sup>9</sup> Letter from the consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church to the Protestant Reformed Churches, May 9, 2021.

And what did Reverend Langerak do once free from that consistory? He took the same action as that which he once decried, and the very next sermon after preaching “The Indwelling Word” (which sermon raised a mob to a fever pitch), he preached on Psalm 23.<sup>10</sup>

The consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church has also been exposed.

The consistory of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church lied to its congregation, and the consistory of First RPC has followed suit. To get the hymn “Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow” back into the worship service, the consistory of First lied to the congregation by calling it a psalm.

We all remember Reverend Spriensma singing some ditty from the pulpit at Byron Center PRC, and oh, how this vexed our souls! Our consistory has now taken that same spirit right into its bosom and adopted it as its own.

And the congregation is completely indifferent.

The consistory did Humpty Dumpty proud in its manipulating the words *hymn* and *psalm*. “‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’”<sup>11</sup>

The consistory of First RPC lied to its congregation in its decision to suspend Reverend Lanning.

This is what the consistory wrote:

To teach that if the congregation sings any versification of the scriptures (other than the Psalms) then the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man’s law is met is legalism.<sup>12</sup>

This is what Reverend Lanning taught:

You have the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, perfect and complete. He has accomplished it and finished it, so that now this commandment for you is the rule and guide of your gratitude, your thankful life to God for what he has given in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

The Lord Jesus Christ heard this law and loved this law and was eaten up by the zeal of God’s house in his perfect worship of Jehovah; and that counts for you, so that when you appear before God in your own conscience, appear before God at the final judgment, and the question is put to you, “How did you worship? How did you do in worship?” and the answer of Jehovah God himself to that question is, “You were perfect. You were perfect. I count his worship as yours.” You live, congregation, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And now what is your response? Live and do this in gratitude to God for the perfect worship and salvation of your savior. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images.” Amen.<sup>14</sup>

The people of God, if they were under the regulative principle for their salvation, for their acceptance with God, would never get to him. He’d never get in the house to his dinner. But Christ fulfilled it because when he came to earth, he worshiped God exactly as God required. And he still does. He always has and always will worship God absolutely perfectly. That’s your freedom. That’s the liberty of the gospel for the church. And now the church, hearing that, loves the regulative principle. You couldn’t love it if you were

<sup>10</sup> Nathan Langerak, “The Lord Our Shepherd,” sermon preached on March 26, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=326231319361354>.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*; <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/throughthelookingglass-54.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, May 18, 2023, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Lanning, “No Image Worship.”

<sup>14</sup> Lanning, “No Image Worship.”

under it. You'd have to hate it. It would be nothing but a scourge and a whip on you all your days. But the church of Jesus Christ, hearing the gospel of Christ, who has fulfilled the regulative principle, loves the regulative principle.<sup>15</sup>

The consistory has been exposed in such a way that Byron Center PRC was more honorable than the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church.

It would have been unthinkable for the consistory of Byron Center PRC to reach back into the archives and find a synodical decision from her mother, the Christian Reformed Church, to support her decisions. But that is exactly what the consistory of First RPC did. On Wednesday, March 29, the consistory emailed to the congregation a report from a subcommittee of her mother, the Protestant Reformed Churches, calling it a "beautiful summary." So, to bolster their position that the consistory does not want hymns, they emailed a report from a Protestant Reformed study committee—which committee was pushing for hymns.

In the consistory's email to the congregation touting this Protestant Reformed subcommittee report, the consistory wrote, "The consistory has no interest in bringing hymns into the worship services."

The hypocrisy of it all was that this was about one week after they did bring a hymn into the worship service.

Why didn't the consistory include in its email to the congregation the warning that was issued by the editor of the *Standard Bearer* when his analysis of that study committee report was included in the magazine?

It is not unrealistic to envision future proponents of hymns in worship appealing to the report, approved by the synod of 2001, as a ground for opening up the

worship to hymns, since the authors of the report themselves saw the report as the basis for the introduction of hymns.<sup>16</sup>

These men behave and speak like Protestant Reformed men because they *are* Protestant Reformed men.

This is also what the consistory said:

Rev. Lanning's Formula of Subscription vow requires him to acquiesce to his consistory's judgment on creedal matters. He is called patiently to submit to their decision. He can speak the "truth" to them and ask for their deliberations on it, but if he believes himself aggrieved by their decision, he is to wait until broader assemblies have made their judgment on the matter. His Formula of Subscription vow regarding creedal matters states, "... *reserving for ourselves, however, the right of an appeal, whenever we shall believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the consistory, the classis, or the synod, and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.*" Definition of acquiesce: to accept, agree, or allow something to happen by staying silent or by not arguing.<sup>17</sup>

That position is Protestant Reformed.

It is almost as though we did not just go through a controversy where the truth of the Formula of Subscription and Church Order article 31 was restored to our churches. And if it was restored, that's all over now, because the consistory's position is exactly that of Professor Gritters and Professor Dykstra, the Church Order experts who were called upon to instruct the PRC amid the controversy.

After declaring on March 23 that Reverend Lanning's sermon was legalism, the consistory

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Lanning, "The Regulative Principle of Worship," sermon preached on March 12, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

<sup>16</sup> David Engelsma, "Synod of the PRC 2001," *Standard Bearer* 77, no. 17 (June 1, 2001): 390.

<sup>17</sup> Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, May 18, 2023, 63; emphasis is the consistory's.

did not know what to do next. So Reverend Lanning informed the elders that they had to suspend him. But they were not prepared for that. So Reverend Lanning had to write the articles of his own suspension, to which the consistory added its own grounds. Even Byron Center PRC did not have Reverend Lanning braid his own hangman's noose.

After Byron Center PRC had suspended Reverend Lanning, they went to the next classis meeting seeking his deposition. They knew this to be the route to take, as unpleasant as it probably was to them. They had charged Reverend Lanning with sin and turned down his protest, so the necessary next step was to take the matter to classis. The consistory of First RPC is not nearly as noble as was the consistory of Byron Center PRC. The consistory of First RPC did not take deposition to the May classis, even though the charge of legalism had been made and Reverend Lanning's protest turned aside. (When I asked an elder about this, he treated it as an absurdity that I would even ask such a thing.) Did they just forget to take deposition to classis? Or did they think this would win them some political points? One just does not know.

Maybe through their meetings with him, they could see Reverend Lanning was softening, and they just needed more time.

The committee of elders hadn't met with Reverend Lanning in the almost two months leading up to classis.

What about the response of the people?

This is what the people are saying.

"The church doesn't need Reverend Lanning; Reverend Lanning needs the church!" "He should have brought it to classis." "He should have talked to his consistory first." "He charged the other ministers and churches with sin!" "The pulpit is not the place for this." "He didn't follow the Church Order!" "He is militating!"

Those are the exact words that have come out of the mouths of members of the Reformed Protestant Churches.

They are also the exact words that we heard when we were members of the PRC.

At one point as I was analyzing things, I thought to myself, "The one thing I have not yet received is a 'Professor Dykstra' email, asking me to save Reverend Lanning's ministry."

And then, almost on cue, I received an email asking me to help save Reverend Lanning's life and ministry.

God is judging us by exposing us so that the world can see that we are no different than our mother church.

And he has covered our eyes and ears so that we cannot see it.

The Reformed Protestant Churches are being exposed.

We took a thin, almost translucent sheet, laid it over a corpse, and declared to all the world, "Behold! Isn't she beautiful!"

We are being exposed as being no different than the PRC—as those who will not be instructed by God and his word but as those who do the instructing.

We were warned.

From almost the very first sermon in the RPC, we were warned that we were no different than the PRC. We were told time and time again that we had in us everything that we saw in the PRC and more. Who can forget one of Reverend Lanning's last sermons, where he said he was afraid for us, that we could be the greatest Pharisees the world had ever seen?

By the space of two and half years, Reverend Lanning ceased not to warn us (see Acts 20:31).

He did that in a sermon on Malachi 3:7, "God's Call to Return to Him."

The response of Judah, the response of Israel, was to refuse that call and to be lifted up in pride against that call and to say to Jehovah, "You're mistaken in that call. What in the world do we have anything to return for?" If you hear that in your own heart or if you hear that from this pulpit or if you hear that in the church of Jesus Christ—"What do we have to return for?"—then you stand before the stinking pride of man. That's



what you stand before. You do not stand before the confession of the godly. You stand before the pride of man.<sup>18</sup>

We heard the word of God say to us,

“We stand! We have never gone anywhere! We need not return.” That is the pride of man, and that is in your heart; that is in my heart. You and I, who are plummeting in our sin, have the audacity of the pride to say, “But we’re the best that there is. Go everywhere you can; we’re the best that there is. We have no need to return.”<sup>19</sup>

We listened.

We nodded.

We even walked out of church and said, “Could you believe that sermon!?”

But we did not believe it.

We in the RPC had arrived.

We were better than the PRC.

But we weren’t.

Our hearts were unchanged.

And, having been weighed in the balance, the Reformed Protestant Churches have been found wanting.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 35, in its instruction on the second commandment, points the reader to 1 Samuel 15:23. “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”

What sin had Saul committed to warrant this judgment from God?

What had he done, after all, but save the “best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good” after his victory over the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:9)? Had he done it for some carnal reason?

Not at all. Just ask him. He had done it “to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God” (v. 15). What a noble purpose indeed! Who could condemn that?

God could.

“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (v. 22).

The consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church and the members with it are determined to go their willful way.

They have lied and deceived and murdered in a way that would make their mother proud.

The response that is heard from the members of First Reformed Protestant Church and the members of the denomination has been the response of unbelief.

When told that a song they were singing had no warrant for being in the public worship of Jehovah God, their response was this: “You cannot tell me I have been doing it wrong for these many years!” Or this: “You can’t tell me I am an idolater!”

While John Calvin knew and confessed that man’s nature was a “perpetual factory of idols,” the response of the RPC was to deny even the possibility.<sup>20</sup>

The response of faith to being told in the preaching that your worship of God is not right is this: “Yes, that is right. Since the days of my fathers, I have gone out of the way. I am an idolater. Point me to my savior, and show me the way of gratitude.”

We were told that if we ever hear from the pulpit that we are doing things right, that we are doing just fine, then we should know that we are standing before “the stinking pride of man.”

That is exactly what Reverend Nathan Lang-erak of Second Reformed Protestant Church has

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Lanning, “God’s Call to Return to Him,” sermon preached on June 6, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nloJz1JhY>.

<sup>19</sup> Lanning, “God’s Call to Return to Him.”

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 108.



been preaching and teaching to the members of the denomination.

“You are okay. You are doing things just fine. There is no need to change anything.”

The members of the Reformed Protestant Churches have itching ears. They have heaped to themselves teachers—Reverend Nathan Langerak, Reverend Luke Bomers, and Seminarian Tyler Ophoff—who go from town to town and from city to city assuring the people that their worship is just fine and that that they shall have peace.

The denomination will not endure sound doctrine, so they have heaped to themselves these teachers, who will teach them according to the lusts of their hearts (II Tim. 4:3).

Reverend Langerak asked the question, “Lord, what happened?”

He knows what happened.

And now we all know what happened.

Christ was displaced, which can only mean one thing.

Man and man’s will have been enthroned in the Reformed Protestant Churches.

—DE

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**T**hank you for continuing to receive and answer questions on exclusive psalmody. The question of exclusive psalmody has led to a desire to study and understand all of the elements of worship. I understand the Reformed Pavilion is at pains to teach us the starting point we must always begin with is the question: What does God require?

*“How important it is for the church to begin from the right starting point! Not this: How can you say it is sin for me to...? But this: What does God require?”* (pg 37, Reformed Pavilion, vol. 1, Issue 1)

When we think of the element of hearing His Word, or preaching (LD 38), we can see the requirement set forth by God in 2 Tim 4:2 to “preach the Word.” By “the Word,” I understand this to mean the inspired Scriptures. How does the Heidelberg Catechism, as a creed and not the inspired Word, fulfill this requirement? If the use of anything other than the 150 Psalms in singing is forbidden as sin, how can we *preach*

*the Heidelberg Catechism as the text* when it is a man made summary of the Word?

In connection with the above inquiry, I ask if you would be willing to also explain our use of the Apostles’ Creed in worship?<sup>1</sup> The following was stated in the Vol. 1 Issue 3 of the Reformed Pavilion:

*“The reciting of the Apostles’ Creed can also be considered the same element of worship as the preaching of a sermon, included in Lord’s Day 38 as “to hear His word.” There are some who would make the Apostles’ Creed to be the same as praying and therefore to fit in Lord’s Day 38 as “publicly to call upon the Lord.” I don’t think I would have a doctrinal problem with that, but it seems to me that the Apostles’ Creed fits better as part of the word of God proclaimed. After all, the Apostles’ Creed is identified in Lord’s Day 7, Q&A 22 as the brief summary of “all things promised us in the gospel.”* (pg 5-6)

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly as a side note, John Calvin had the Apostles’ Creed *sung* before the Lord’s Supper was administered (<https://www.wscal.edu/resource-center/calvin-and-the-worship-of-god>). In addition, our Lord’s Supper form quotes the Apostles’ Creed in its prayer.

The thrust of this second question is not about what element the Apostles' Creed fits in, but rather how this part of worship fits in with the question: What does God require? Where is the command or what scriptural warrant do we have for the recitation of the Apostles' Creed? How can we recite a creed that is an accurate, faithful, orthodox summary of the Word, when it is not actually "the Word"?

In conclusion, I am struggling with how to examine and study all of the elements of worship the same way I see the element of singing being dealt with in this current controversy. Do we ground the particular, specific contents of each element in the second commandment as well? If so, what is the scriptural warrant or command for these contents?

Love in Christ,  
Christina Overway

## Response

A warm welcome to our correspondent. God has blessed *Reformed Pavilion* with correspondents who have serious questions about the grand issues of worship. May the Lord also bless the magazine with sound answers that edify his people.

Our correspondent's question is not about exclusive psalmody as such but is more broadly about the regulative principle of worship. Our correspondent rightly makes much of the question, "What does God require?" In this our correspondent follows the Reformed confessions in Lord's Day 35, Belgic Confession 7, and Belgic Confession 32. The term that we give to this matter of what God requires is the *regulative principle of worship*. We are to worship God in no other way "than He has commanded in His Word" (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96).

Our correspondent's first question is about preaching the Heidelberg Catechism. Where does God require us to preach the Heidelberg Catechism? Our correspondent's second question is about using the Apostles' Creed in worship. Where does God require us to use the Apostles' Creed? Our correspondent connects exclusive psalmody to these questions as a matter of consistency. If we are consistent, shouldn't we need the same scriptural warrant for the content of our preaching (Heidelberg Catechism) and our confessing (Apostles' Creed) as we do for our singing (psalms)? These are excellent questions

that take us into the simple yet deep doctrine of worship.

### Heidelberg Catechism Preaching

Let's begin with our correspondent's first question, which deals with the content of our preaching. Where does God require us in scripture to preach the Heidelberg Catechism? Or, as our correspondent puts it,

When we think of the element of hearing His Word, or preaching (LD 38), we can see the requirement set forth by God in 2 Tim 4:2 to "preach the Word." By "the Word," I understand this to mean the inspired Scriptures. How does the Heidelberg Catechism, as a creed and not the inspired Word, fulfill this requirement? If the use of anything other than the 150 Psalms in singing is forbidden as sin, how can we *preach the Heidelberg Catechism as the text* when it is a man made summary of the Word?

God requires us to preach the Heidelberg Catechism in the very same passage that our correspondent cites: II Timothy 4:1–4.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season;

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

Our correspondent is correct that “preach the word” means *preach the scriptures*. Now notice that the apostle also describes the *content* of the scriptures. He describes the content of the scriptures as “doctrine” in the sense of teaching: “exhort with...doctrine.” He also describes the content of the scriptures with a slightly different but related word, which the King James Version also translates as “doctrine” but this time with an emphasis on the *content* of what is taught: “sound doctrine.” He also describes the content of the scriptures as “the truth.”

Preach the word! And what is the content of the word? Doctrine, sound doctrine, and the truth.

Doctrine, sound doctrine, and the truth—these exactly describe the Heidelberg Catechism. The Catechism is the *doctrine* of the scriptures. The Catechism is the *sound doctrine* of the scriptures. The Catechism is the *truth* of the scriptures. In its title the Catechism describes its content as “the Christian religion”: “Heidelberg Catechism or Method of Instruction in the Christian Religion.” The Church Order’s description of the Catechism’s contents is “the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism” (article 68). As the summary of the doctrine, sound doctrine, and truth of the word, the Heidelberg Catechism answers to the apostle’s calling to preach the word in its doctrine, sound doctrine, and truth.

## Apostles’ Creed

Our correspondent’s second question deals with the Apostles’ Creed. Where in scripture does God require us to use the Apostles’ Creed in worship? Or, as our correspondent puts it,

The thrust of this second question is... how this part of worship fits in with the question: What does God require? Where is the command or what scriptural warrant to we have for the recitation of the Apostles’ Creed? How can we recite a creed that is an accurate, faithful, orthodox summary of the Word, when it is not actually “the Word”?

First, God requires the church to confess his name and his truth in worship. This is evident from the many confessions of God’s name by his church in scripture. When Israel entered the land of Canaan under Joshua, the entire nation stood upon Mount Gerizim and upon Mount Ebal and confessed, “Amen,” as the Levites spoke blessing and cursing (Deut. 27:11–26; Josh. 8:30–35). When Judah returned from her captivity in Babylon, Ezra read the law and blessed the Lord, and “all the people answered, Amen, Amen” (Neh. 8:6). When Jesus asked his disciples, representing his church, whom they said that he was, Simon Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Upon this rock Jesus builds his church (Matt. 16:15–18). When Paul wrote to Timothy, he apparently referred to a confession in use by the church. What we translate as *without controversy* could just as well be translated *confessedly*: “And confessedly great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (I Tim. 3:16). Considering all this, God requires the church to confess his truth in worship.

Second, the content of all the confessions in scripture is essentially a summary of the gospel. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” is the entire gospel in one sentence. It is the good news of Jesus’ identity: the Son of the living God. It is the good news of Jesus’ office: thou art the Christ. It is the good news of Jesus’ work of saving his church as God’s anointed prophet, priest, and king. It is the good news of God’s mercy and condescension to his helpless and sinful people by sending them his only begotten

Son. It is the good news of the covenant of grace that the God who lives in covenant fellowship in himself as the living God takes his people into that fellowship through his Son. It is the good news of everlasting life, for if the living God has so favored us with his Son, then we also shall live with him. The entire good news of deliverance and salvation is contained in that brief confession “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

So it is with the confession *amen*. Though it is but one word, that confession contains the entire gospel. The church’s *amen* means that the entire word of God that has been spoken to her is true. The entire word is certain. The entire revelation of God in Christ is sure. The word *amen* incorporates into itself the whole Bible, the whole gospel, and the whole truth and confesses that it shall truly and certainly be.

The Apostles’ Creed is exactly such a confession. It is essentially a summary of the entire gospel. Our Heidelberg Catechism calls the Apostles’ Creed “the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith” which “briefly teach us” “all things promised us in the gospel” (Lord’s Day 7, Q&A 22). The Apostles’ Creed is patterned after the church’s confession in I Timothy 3:16, which enumerates the truths of the person and work of Jesus Christ. God requires confession of his truth in worship, which confession is a summary of the gospel. The Apostles’ Creed answers to that requirement.

Third, God has not compiled a book of confessions for the church to use in worship the way he has compiled a book of songs. Therefore, the church patterns her confession after the confessions that she finds in scripture, similarly to the way that the church patterns her public prayers after the prayers in scripture. Sometimes the church’s confession is a simple yes, as in public confession of faith. Sometimes the church’s confession is a recitation of the being and works of God, as in the Apostles’ Creed. The church’s confession is even found in her church membership, so that without ever saying a word, a believer declares by his membership in a particular

church his agreement with the truth taught in that Christian church. A man’s church membership is his *amen* to his church’s doctrine.

## Consistency

Our correspondent is concerned that all the elements of worship be dealt with consistently. If the regulative principle of worship governs the *content* of our singing (psalms), then it must also govern the *content* of our preaching (Heidelberg Catechism) and the *content* of our confessing (Apostles’ Creed). As our correspondent puts it,

In conclusion, I am struggling with how to examine and study all of the elements of worship the same way I see the element of singing being dealt with in this current controversy. Do we ground the particular, specific contents of each element in the second commandment as well? If so, what is the scriptural warrant or command for these contents?

Hopefully the explanations given above help our correspondent see the scriptural warrant for Heidelberg Catechism preaching and for the use of the Apostles’ Creed in worship. A few comments could be added.

First, perhaps this is the simplest way for all of us to understand the matter of consistency in content. God gave us a book of psalms. God did not give us a book of sermons. God did not give us a book of confessions. Therefore, the command to sing psalms means that we use God’s book of psalms. The command to preach the word in its doctrine, sound doctrine, and truth means that we make sure the doctrine we preach is sound. And the command to confess God’s name means that we make sure the confession we make is sound.

Second, our correspondent’s questions highlight the importance of the regulative principle of worship. Our correspondent is wrestling with the question, what does God require in his word for the church’s worship? That struggle only makes sense in a church that believes the

regulative principle of worship. In a church that questions, weakens, is suspicious of, or even throws off the regulative principle, there is no need to ask, what does God require in his word for the church's worship? In such a church, the question is instead, how is the Spirit leading us to worship God? or what makes us feel reverent and worshipful? or what does our gospel freedom permit us to do in worship? The difference between the regulative principle and the rejection of the regulative principle is stark. In the regulative principle the will of God determines worship. In the rejection of the regulative principle, the will of man determines worship. In truth, the gospel freedom and liberty of the church is not that she is free to do as she pleases but that she is free to do as God pleases.

Third, our correspondent mentions that the church in Geneva under John Calvin sang the Apostles' Creed before the Lord's supper. This is an interesting note, but it is an anomaly in Calvin. Calvin's reformation of worship in Geneva was a return to psalm singing. There were other anomalies in Calvin's Geneva: Calvin forbade musical accompaniment, and Calvin required singing the melody in unison and discouraged singing in four-part harmony. Thankfully for the church, the regulative principle is not what Calvin or this or that or the next man required but what God requires.

Finally, the regulative principle is meant to do two things. First, it is meant to show us how impossible it is for us to worship God rightly. When we stand before God's command to worship him, we are exposed as willful, arrogant idolaters and blasphemers. God's command for

us to worship him only as he has commanded means that we are to worship him perfectly right down to the marrow of our bones and the depths of our souls. Our only hope before such a command is that our savior has already worshiped God perfectly. From the marrow of his bones, the depths of his soul, and the bottom of his heart he completely and fully obeyed God's command for worship. The zeal of God's house ate him up. The one thing he desired was to dwell in the house of God all the days of his life. Christ's perfect worship has been counted as our perfect worship, so that God accepts Christ's worship as our worship. And Christ has covered all of our corrupt worship with his saving blood. The law of the regulative principle cannot condemn us who are in Christ. The perfect worship of Christ answers to God's perfect law.

Second, the regulative principle is meant to be the guide and rule of our thankful life. Redeemed by Christ's blood, with all his perfect worship already counted as ours, we now enter God's house in gratitude to serve him in love and thanksgiving. For the child of God in Christ, the regulative principle is not a cruel master, for the child of God is not under it. For the child of God in Christ, the regulative principle is the most lovely thing, for it asks the same question that the Spirit in his heart is crying out: "What does God require, that I may serve and thank him?"

Thanks again to our correspondent for sharing her struggle with these significant questions. May the Lord evermore give us the wisdom of our Lord and the peace of his finished work.

—AL





## BOOK REVIEW

*Believers and Their Seed: Children in the Covenant.* Herman Hoeksema. Translated by Homer C. Hoeksema. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1971. 164 pages, hardcover, no current price available. [Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning]

The following pages intend to serve the purpose of instruction in the doctrine of the covenant” (vi). So wrote Herman Hoeksema in his foreword to *Believers and Their Seed*.

“Instruction in the doctrine of the covenant.” By these words the reader is alerted that *Believers and Their Seed* is a book of great significance. First, because the doctrine of the covenant is the main topic of the entire Bible. Hoeksema considered the covenant to be “the great controlling idea of Holy Scripture” (84). Hoeksema considered the covenant to be “the great and basic idea of God’s Word” (85). Hoeksema considered “the truth of God’s Covenant” to be a pillar in the temple of God (9).

Second, *Believers and Their Seed* is a book of great significance because in this book Herman Hoeksema developed his unique but thoroughly Reformed doctrine of the covenant. Hoeksema’s doctrine of the covenant was not unique in the sense that he wandered from the Reformed faith. Rather, Hoeksema’s doctrine of the covenant was unique because he returned the doctrine of the covenant to the biblical and confessional truth that God is God. Whereas Reformed theologians and churches were busy wandering away from their confessions in their covenant doctrine, Hoeksema returned to the confessions in his covenant doctrine. Though the book is relatively brief, it is full of careful exegesis of scripture and the confessions on the covenant.

This makes Herman Hoeksema’s *Believers and Their Seed* a contender for the most important book that Hoeksema ever wrote. There is inevitably going to be folly in one’s declaring

that this or that work of Hoeksema was his most important. He wrote so much, and most of it was edifying, profitable, and significant. But it is still a safe declaration that *Believers and Their Seed* is at least a contender for Herman Hoeksema’s most important book. In *Believers and Their Seed*, he developed the main lines of his covenant doctrine, from which he would not depart throughout his ministry. Hoeksema’s covenant doctrine has long been recognized as his main doctrinal distinctive.

So significant was Hoeksema’s development of the doctrine of the covenant that one theologian has declared him to be the “doctor of the covenant.” “As other theologians were the ‘angelic doctor,’ or the ‘doctor of grace,’ Hoeksema was the ‘doctor of the covenant.’”<sup>1</sup>

*Believers and Their Seed* was first published in 1927 as a series of articles in the *Standard Bearer*. That alone is significant. Hoeksema was not even three years out of the Christian Reformed Church when he wrote this foundational text for his covenant doctrine. Written in Dutch under the title *De Geloovigen en Hun Zaad*, the articles were soon published as a booklet and then republished in Dutch in 1946. The booklet was first translated by his son, Homer Hoeksema, and published in English in 1971. The 1971 publication was used for this book review. The book was republished in 1997 with the addition of some helpful prefatory material. I understand that the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) is considering republishing the book again. If you do not have *Believers and Their Seed* on your shelf yet but would like to, now would be a good time to reach out to the RFPA to let them know your interest.

<sup>1</sup>David Engelsma, *Believers and Their Seed: Children in the Covenant*, revised edition (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997), ix.

## The Occasion

The occasion for Hoeksema's offering instruction in the doctrine of the covenant in *Believers and Their Seed* was the age-old question of *membership* in the covenant. Who belongs to God's covenant? The question especially concerned whether the children of believers were members of the covenant. In the title of chapter 1, Hoeksema called the question of children's covenant membership "The Covenant Problem." He opened the chapter, "Questions arise repeatedly in connection with the place which our children, the children of believers, occupy in God's covenant...What is the place of the seed of believers in God's covenant?" (9).

## The Approach

Hoeksema's approach to the covenant problem was to take hold of the doctrine of the covenant in its essence. That is, what is the central idea of the covenant? What actually is God's covenant with his people? Even though the occasion for instruction in the doctrine of the covenant was a "covenant problem," the focus must not be the question of the salvation of infants. Hoeksema called a focus on the salvation of infants understandable but "regrettable."

Oftentimes in this manner the discussion of God's covenant has degenerated into a discussion concerning the seed of the covenant and then has turned especially upon that question of their salvation. A question of relatively little dogmatical worth was thus changed into the chief question. The result has been that the truth of God's covenant has also been impoverished and adulterated through this exclusive focusing upon that one point. (11)

Hoeksema was not being cold or unfeeling toward believing parents in their concern for their children, especially those believing parents who suffered the loss of an infant. Far from it. Hoeksema brought the gospel of God's covenant to those families. Listen to the prayer that

Hoeksema put in the mouths of those parents, the words of which are the last words of the book:

Lord, in Thy name I have brought forth a child. And from Thy hand I have received it. I have consecrated it to Thee, in order that it should be a child for Thy covenant. And now Thou hast taken the child away from me. In that same faith wherein I consecrated him to Thee, I leave him with Thee, without being filled with anxious doubt concerning the salvation and election of this child, but knowing that Thou, according to Thy good pleasure, which by faith to me is always good, dost save Thy children out of my seed! (159)

Rather than being heartless toward believing parents in their loss, Hoeksema explained the sound covenantal foundation of those parents' comfort. Their comfort could not rest in speculation. Their comfort could not rest on the impoverished covenant theories circulating in the Reformed circles of the day. Their comfort must rest upon God and his covenant with believers and their seed. It was of utmost importance, then, that those parents knew what God's covenant was.

Therefore, Hoeksema's approach was to arrive at the doctrine of covenant *membership* by beginning with the covenant *idea*. "What is really God's covenant?" (13). What is the essence of the covenant? What is the meaning of God's covenant?

This starting point also set Hoeksema's instruction in the very bosom of the Reformed faith.

The covenant idea is very really one of the most important doctrines in the confession of the Reformed churches, and rightly so. This doctrine is really more characteristically Reformed than the doctrine of election. (11)

Now for a Reformed man the question concerning God's covenant with us and our children is very important. If from

this viewpoint we would speak of a Jachin and Boaz in the temple of the truth of God, then we certainly should not speak, as did Prof. H. J. Van Andel in his “The Foe Within The Gates,” of the doctrine of Common Grace and the doctrine of Particular Grace; but we should indeed speak of the truth of God’s Sovereign Grace, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the truth of God’s Covenant. (9)

In harmony with the Reformed faith, Hoeksema developed the doctrine of covenant membership by taking hold of the essence of the covenant. And he did this for the instruction and comfort of the Reformed parent, to whom God had given covenant children.

### **Pulling the Weeds: Heynsian Covenant**

Before he could develop the idea of the covenant positively, Hoeksema had to pull up the weeds of wrong covenant views that were widespread in Reformed churches.

Right here we must immediately remark that there has never been any unanimity about this subject among Reformed people. In fact, it cannot even be said that there is a single covenant conception which has won for itself the exclusive name of Reformed in distinction from all other views...There is wide difference of opinion with respect to the idea of the covenant itself, apart now from the question concerning the place of the children of believers in the covenant. (13)

In chapters 1 and 2, Hoeksema began by analyzing the covenant doctrine of Prof. William Heyns, who had been Hoeksema’s professor at Calvin seminary when Hoeksema had been a student and whose covenant view was well established in the Christian Reformed Church. Heyns’ doctrine was that the covenant is essentially God’s promise. “First of all, there are those who seek the essence of the covenant in the promise of God: ‘I will be to thee a God.’ Thus writes Prof. W. Heyns” (13). Hoeksema quoted

Heyns at length to demonstrate that this was Heyns’ view. A few excerpts from Heyns as quoted by Hoeksema:

The essence of the covenant, whereby it is what it is—a covenant of grace—lies herein, that it is the promise “to be to thee a God” given in the form of a covenant, a contract. Every covenant of God with men was a promise given in the form of a covenant. (13–14)

To have a part in the essence of the covenant, therefore, means to have a part in the promise of the covenant; when God by baptism seals unto us His covenant, this means that participation in the promise of the covenant is sealed unto us, and that as a promise to the fulfillment of which God has *obligated* Himself in the way of *abiding* in the covenant (the same as abiding in Christ, John 15:4). (14–15)

Those who are not elected have a part in the essence, that is, in the promise of the covenant, as a promise to the fulfillment of which the Lord has formally obligated Himself in the way of abiding in the covenant. (15)

The application of salvation must first of all be that of *an objective bequest*... whereby there is *given us a divine right* to salvation, and this takes place in and through the covenant. And, secondly, there must be a *subjective being made partaker*...and this takes place through faith, or rather through the Holy Spirit, Who works faith. (16)

Hoeksema summarized Heyns’ covenant doctrine with regard to its “*objective bequest*” and “*subjective being made partaker*” this way:

Thus, [all covenant members] have a divine right to salvation. They also have a divine promise, which is sure and steadfast, that God will make them partakers of the salvation in Christ. And they also receive in the subjective sense of the

word a certain grace, a certain power, whereby they are able, too, to accept those benefits and to beseech the Holy Spirit for His grace. (19)

Herman Hoeksema thoroughly rejected Heyns' doctrine of the covenant. Hoeksema's analysis of Heyns' covenant view is captured in the title of chapter 2, "Arminianism Injected into the Covenant." Hoeksema went on:

And then we can immediately state that our chief reason [for rejecting Heyns' view] is that the presentation of Prof. Heyns is nothing else than the old Pelagian error applied to the doctrine of the covenant. (20)

[Prof. Heyns] wishes to describe the essence of the covenant in such a way that it includes all the children of believers, that this essence of the covenant indeed concerns all who are born in the sphere of the covenant in the historical sense. Hence, he also does not conceive of the promise of God as absolute and unconditional, but as relative and conditional. The essence of the covenant is the promise in the sense of a conditional offer. (22)

It will be evident to the reader that this is nothing but Pelagianism applied to the historical sphere of the covenant. After all, it is the doctrine of Pelagius and Arminius that every man possesses the light of nature, and that therein he has received from God a certain grace; that, moreover, God on His part comes with a well-meant offer of grace in the gospel and offers Christ to all; and that it finally depends on this light of nature and on the use which the sinner makes of this light whether or not he will also become a partaker of this offered grace. Everything revolves about the free will of man. What God says and what God does is conditional; and it depends completely upon man whether that which is conditional shall also become reality and certainty.

Now Pelagianism simply applies this to all men. But the doctrine of Prof. Heyns is precisely the same, except that he applies it to the narrower sphere of the covenant in its historical sense. (24)

Hoeksema carefully worked through the supposed proofs from the confessions that Heyns had proposed for his covenant view. Hoeksema showed that Heyns had twisted the confessions to fit his doctrine. Hoeksema's conclusion regarding the Heynsian covenant was this: "This presentation must be totally rooted out. It lies wholly in the line of Pelagius and Arminius" (33).

## **Pulling the Weeds: Presupposed Regeneration**

In chapters 3 and 4, Herman Hoeksema turned to pull another doctrinal weed in the Reformed flower bed, that of presupposed regeneration, made popular in Reformed churches by Dr. Abraham Kuyper. Hoeksema summarized Kuyper's view:

According to this view, the entire church of Christ here on earth, with respect to all its members, young and old, is to be considered as the gathering of the elect and the regenerated, as long as the opposite does not very definitely appear; and it is to be presupposed of every child, head for head, and soul for soul, who is born in the sphere of the church, that he has already been regenerated through the grace of the Holy Spirit. (34)

Hoeksema quoted from several passages in Kuyper's books in which Kuyper developed his view of presupposed regeneration. The quotations are hard to follow because Kuyper's theory of presupposed regeneration was speculative, it introduced the odd doctrine of a special "baptismal grace," and it robbed baptism of its saving significance. Hoeksema assessed Kuyper's doctrine as "philosophy" and "philosophical reasoning" (40). "This view offers us philosophy instead of the Word of God, stones in place of bread" (42).



Hoeksema rejected Kuyper's presupposed regeneration.

It should also not escape our notice that in the confessions of the Reformed churches there is not a trace of such a view to be found. Nowhere is it asserted that baptism is administered to infants on the ground of the presupposition that all the children born in the covenant, head for head, are regenerated. (50)

Infant baptism and the propriety of infant baptism cannot rest upon a presupposition. (53)

The presupposition of which we are here speaking is a spiritual and psychological impossibility, for the very simple reason that we know beforehand that what we wish to presuppose is not true. It is altogether impossible to presuppose something of which we are certain that it is not in harmony with reality as revealed in God's Word and as we learn to know it from history and from our daily experience. Now we *know* that not all the children of the covenant in the external sense of the word are regenerated. We *know* that not everyone who is born in the church is also elect. That knowledge leaves this presupposition without any basis, therefore; and indeed, it makes this presupposition impossible. (54)

Having rooted out the weeds of the Heynsian covenant and presupposed regeneration, Hoeksema spent the remainder of the book, chapters 5–11, developing the “correct conception of believers and their seed” (58). “We shall have to ask wherein the essence of God's covenant is to be sought, how God realizes that covenant in history, and why and in what sense the seed of believers is comprehended in that covenant” (60).

## The Essence of God's Covenant

According to Herman Hoeksema, the essence of God's covenant is friendship. The covenant is

not essentially a promise. The covenant is not essentially an offer. The covenant is not essentially a means to obtain salvation. The covenant is not essentially an agreement. Rather, the essence of the covenant is God's living relationship of friendship, communion, and love with his people.

The essence of the covenant is to be sought in this living relationship of friendship whereby God the Lord is the sovereign friend of His people, and they are the Lord's friend-servants, partaking of His fellowship, by grace possessing and manifesting His life and fighting the battle of His cause in the midst of the world. (65)

Hoeksema's doctrine of the covenant as essentially friendship was rooted in Hoeksema's doctrine of God. Hoeksema's doctrine of the covenant was theological and theocentric. His doctrine arose out of the fundamental principle of his theology, that God is God. Even without any reference to the creature, God himself lives a covenant life.

First of all, then, we would proceed from the idea that God is a Covenant God. He is that in Himself, even apart from any relation to His creature. From eternity to eternity the infinite God lives a divinely perfect covenant life in Himself. (60)

God's covenant life as the covenant God is the life of the Trinity. Hoeksema described the perfect unity of God's being and the personal distinction of the three persons. That trinitarian life of God the Father with God the Son in God the Holy Spirit is the covenant—a life of communion, love, and friendship. And in that communion of God with God in God the essence of the covenant is found.

Thus, then, God is the eternally living One in Himself. There is the most perfect unity of Being in God, and nevertheless personal distinction: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, willing and thinking, living and loving in the one, eternally-good and



perfect divine Being, thinking and willing and loving always the same, and knowing one another perfectly, and yet so, that each of the three Persons lives that divine life according to His personal attributes. It is herein that the essence of the covenant is to be found. That life of God is a covenant life, a life of the most intimate communion of love and friendship, resting in the unity of God's Being and living through the personal distinction. The Lord God is a covenant God. (62)

Hoeksema applied this truth of God's covenant life in himself to God's relationship of friendship with the creature. The essence of God's covenant with his people is communion and friendship because God has been pleased to take the creature into God's own divine life. Hoeksema's description of God's covenant fellowship with his people is profound and moving.

Now it has pleased God, according to His sovereign good pleasure, according to the counsel of His will, to reveal this covenant life outside of Himself and to make the creature a partaker of that divine covenant life, and that, too, in the highest possible sense of the word. For He is pleased to dwell with His people and to spread His tabernacle over them. He wills to walk with them and to cause them to walk with Him. He desires to speak with them as a friend with his friends, and to cause them likewise to speak with Him. He is pleased to make them partakers of His life and to make them walk in His light. He wills to be known by them, even as He knows them. He desires that they shall see Him face to face. He is pleased to have them dwell with Him under one roof, to eat and drink with them, to have most intimate fellowship with them, to reveal to them His secrets. (62)

Hoeksema insisted that the covenant remains God's covenant, not the creature's. The creature always remains subservient to God.

Those friends of God are, according to the counsel of His will, at the same time His servants in that friendship. For God is eternally God, and there is none beside Him. No one ever becomes equal to God, though His creature may bear His image and may be like Him, yea, may know Him even as he is known and may live with Him in covenant friendship. When God, therefore, establishes His covenant with creatures whom He in His sovereign grace has chosen and prepared thereunto, then in that covenant He is the Friend-Sovereign while the creature is His friend-servant according to the ordinance of that covenant. (63)

In harmony with God's sovereignty and the creature's subservience, Hoeksema maintained that membership in God's covenant was determined by God's sovereign will in election and reprobation.

To this must be added that according to that same counsel of His good pleasure, the Lord realizes this covenant along the antithetical line of election and reprobation, of grace and sin, of light and darkness, unto the higher revelation of His glory and the greater glory of His covenant friends. (64)

And because God's covenant with his elect people was their participation in his own covenant life, Hoeksema maintained that God's covenant could never be a mere temporary means to an end. Rather, God's covenant is everlasting.

For this reason, moreover, God's covenant is not a mere way unto salvation. It is eternal! And it shall then only be fully revealed when our Lord Jesus Christ shall come again and when God shall forever spread His tabernacle over all and when they shall dwell with Him in everlasting perfection, knowing Him and seeing Him face to face. (64-65)

Hoeksema summarized his doctrine of the covenant as essentially friendship over against other conceptions of the covenant.

The essence of the covenant, therefore, is not to be sought in a promise, and that, too, a promise in the sense of a certain general offer to the children of believers, as Prof. Heyns would have it. Neither is it to be sought in the idea that the covenant is a certain way, or manner, of salvation by which God would make us partakers of everlasting glory, as many others describe the covenant, thereby actually denying that God's covenant is eternal. Nor does it consist in a certain agreement between two parties according to which mutual stipulations and conditions must be met, as it is also often presented: for the covenant is God's, and He bestows upon His friends all that is necessary for the life and the battle of the covenant. But the essence of the covenant is to be sought in this living relationship of friendship whereby God the Lord is the sovereign friend of His people, and they are the Lord's friend-servants, partaking of His fellowship, by grace possessing and manifesting His life and fighting the battle of His cause in the midst of the world. The realization of that covenant as it shall presently be revealed in everlasting glory constitutes the history of salvation; the struggle in the cause of that covenant is the battle of the ages. (65–66)

What a glorious covenant! What a gracious God! Even in the middle of a book review, who can help but exult in God's covenant of friendship and fellowship! Who can help but wonder at the condescension of our merciful covenant God, who takes such as us into his own living fellowship!

### God's Covenant with Adam

Having established that the essence of God's covenant is living fellowship and friendship be-

tween the covenant God and his elect people, Hoeksema applied that covenant conception to the vital matter of God's covenant with Adam.

The Reformed tradition in 1927, when Hoeksema first wrote these articles, was infected with an unbiblical and unconfessional view of God's covenant with Adam. The view was that God's covenant with Adam was a covenant of works. Hoeksema summarized the covenant of works thus:

The Covenant of Works is then commonly presented as a certain agreement between God and Adam (and in Adam with the human race), according to which Adam could *merit*, in the way of obedience, *eternal life*, and according to which he would die in case of disobedience. But now Adam does not merit eternal life. He becomes disobedient and dies, and we die in him. And now what Adam did not merit, that Christ obtains for us through His perfect obedience. (67)

This view of God's covenant of works with Adam reigned in Reformed circles then, and it remains a very popular view among Reformed theologians yet today. This view apparently was also ingrained in the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1927, who were so recently removed from the Christian Reformed Church at the end of 1924.

Many of these ideas are so deeply rooted in the thinking of our people that they simply consider them as the Reformed and Scriptural presentation without giving them a thought, though they are to be found neither in Scripture nor in the confessions...Such, in general, is the view which is always and again inculcated and which without a second thought is imbibed in the catechism class and in theological schools. If one puts these things differently, then many are of the opinion that he is departing from the truth and ought to be branded a heretic. (66–67)

Hoeksema rejected the Reformed tradition of a covenant of works. God's covenant with Adam was not an agreement; it was not essentially a promise with mutual stipulations; it did not carry any condition; and Adam could not merit with God in that covenant. "One certainly does not find a promise that Adam could *merit eternal life* in the way of obedience" (66). If the covenant of works were true, then God's covenant with Adam was mostly a failure. The human race could have been saved in Adam, but now most of it perished in Adam. About the covenant of works Hoeksema said,

It really always makes us stand nostalgically with our noses against the fence of Paradise, with the futile wish in our souls that Adam had not fallen! For after all, if it be true that Adam also was able to earn that which Christ now bestows on us, if only he had remained standing, then it remains eternally tragic that the first Paradise is no longer there and that we did not receive eternal life through the obedience of the first man. (67)

Over against the conception of God's covenant with Adam as a covenant of works, Hoeksema taught that God's covenant with Adam was essentially a covenant of friendship. It was not the highest friendship of eternal life, which the elect have only in Christ. Nevertheless, it was a covenant of life.

Adam stands in God's covenant. He was created as covenant friend-servant, adapted to God and to fellowship with Him...God dwells with Adam in Paradise, and in God's fellowship Adam can and may eat of the tree of life in the midst of the garden. (68–69)

We propose that the covenant consists essentially in a relation of friendship, that God the Lord had placed Adam in Paradise in that relation to Himself already through his very creation after the image of God, and that in that relation he possessed life and was blessed. (74–75)

Adam's place in the creation, his creation in the image of God, his work among the other creatures as their king, his antithetical life over against the devil and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, his obedience to God, his home in paradise—all of this is to be explained out of God's covenant with Adam. God was Adam's friend-sovereign, and Adam was God's friend-servant.

According to Hoeksema, Adam did not merely live in God's covenant for himself but as the head of the human race. "Now Adam stood in that covenant of God with and for and at the head of his seed, the human race" (76). This headship is both organic and judicial. With regard to organic headship, "The entire race of men, therefore, is literally in that first pair of human beings and comes forth organically out of them" (76). With regard to judicial headship, "[Adam] represents our race before the face of God" (77). Adam's fall, then, plunged the entire human race into sin and corruption and death. By that fall God's covenant with Adam was broken, and the first revelation of God's covenant disappeared.

Adam's place in God's covenant required absolute and unconditional obedience. If he became disobedient, then he thereby broke God's covenant, as far as he was concerned; then he forfeited God's favor and he lost life; then he must surely die. (75–76)

Now that first man Adam falls through the temptation of Satan and through his own wilful disobedience. And through his fall the first revelation of God's covenant disappears. (78)

For since he sins as head of the race, through his guilt condemnation comes upon all. And since he sins as father of us all and as bearer of our nature, no one shall ever again be able to bring forth a clean thing out of an unclean. And since, finally, he lies at the root of our race, his one sin shall unfold itself in many sins of

the thousands and millions of his descendants, until in the entire race that one root-sin has borne its complete fruit and the measure of iniquity is full. (79–80)

## God's Counsel and the Covenant

Having established that God's covenant with Adam was not a covenant of works but a covenant of friendship, Herman Hoeksema went on to connect God's covenant to God's eternal counsel. It was not Adam but God who determined what happened to God's covenant with Adam. The entire fall of Adam into sin and death was according to the sovereign decree of God to establish his covenant with his elect people in Christ.

Now according to the counsel of the Lord God, Christ stands behind Adam; and from this point of view the fall of Adam serves to make room for the King Whom God had anointed over Zion, the mountain of his holiness. The first servant of the Lord falls. But when he falls, God says, "Behold my Servant, whom I have chosen." The first Adam falls away in order to make room for the Second. Thus, certainly, the matter must be presented. The fall of Adam took place according to God's determinate counsel. No Reformed man may doubt that for a moment. For God's counsel stands, and He does all His good pleasure. (80)

You may not only explain the fall of Adam from Adam's free will. He falls according to God's decree. (81)

If we conceive of Adam's fall from the viewpoint of God's counsel, then the first Adam must fall in order that the Second may come. For God, for the greater revelation of His glory and the higher exaltation of His covenant and the more glorious salvation of His children, had in mind some better thing for us than that which was revealed in the first Adam or which ever could have been realized through him. He willed to establish His

covenant not in that first man, who was of the earth, earthy, but in the Second Adam, Who is the Lord from heaven, Who is God of God and presently enters into our nature in order to make us partakers of the life of God so as the first man never knew it. That counsel of the Lord also the fall of Adam serves. When now the first man falls according to that counsel of the Lord, Christ stands behind him, in order, as head of a better covenant, immediately to become manifest and upon the ruins of the first house of the Lord in the first Paradise to build a much more glorious house of the Lord as the Servant of Jehovah and the High Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. (81–82)

And so God's covenant is now the life of the friendship of God in Christ. In that covenant there are no offers and no conditions. The covenant is solely God's. He establishes His covenant. He chooses and saves. He ingrafts us into Christ, and He sanctifies. He makes us friends of God for His name's sake in the midst of the world. And He then also fights His own battle in us through Christ unto everlasting victory. And we are, through His grace, of God's party. And when presently the battle has been fought, then He gives us, out of free grace, the crown of victory, a crown of life, a gracious crown. (82–83)

In the remaining chapters of *Believers and Their Seed* (7–11), Hoeksema applied the truth of election to the so-called covenant problem: "What is the place of the seed of believers in God's covenant?" (9).

In chapter 7 Hoeksema demonstrated that God establishes his covenant with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations. "The Lord God always and again establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations, or, if you will, with believers *and their seed*" (86). There is always a twofold people. One is the seed



of the serpent; the other is the seed of the woman. Working with the classic passages on the covenant and the seed—Genesis 3:15, Genesis 9:9, Genesis 17:7, and Acts 2:39—Hoeksema demonstrated that

there can be no doubt but that God also in the new dispensation establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations. With thee and with thy seed after thee! That is and remains the rule also for us. (93)

Hoeksema concluded chapter 7 with a defense of infant baptism over against the Baptist denial of infant baptism. Hoeksema's defense of infant baptism was that it rests on the ground of God's covenant with believers and their seed.

In chapter 8 Hoeksema developed the truth that within the line of continued generations, there is a twofold seed. Not every child of believing parents is in God's covenant. Hoeksema applied the truth of God's election and reprobation to the matter of the twofold seed.

God's sovereign good pleasure makes separation also in the historical people of God's covenant in the world; and among them also He executes the counsel of His election and reprobation. (109)

There is an Israel according to the flesh and an Israel according to the Spirit. And they are not all Israel who are of Israel. There is an elect kernel, and there is a reprobate shell. And God will be merciful to whom He will be merciful also within the sphere of the historical covenant in the world. (110–11)

In chapter 9 Hoeksema explained the organic idea in scripture. Scripture treats Israel as God's people when, in fact, there were many in Israel who were not God's people.

The people of God in this world, as they concretely exist and develop in the line of successive generations, may not be viewed and treated as a mixed multitude. Neither may the view be tolerated that we

may presuppose that all in the church are elect and regenerated. The only possibility left is that we hold fast to the organic idea, which Holy Scripture presents again and again. (114)

Hoeksema used the figure of an organism which has both fruitful and unfruitful branches. Hoeksema developed this organic idea as an exegetical principle to explain all those passages where God apparently addressed his promise of salvation to many people, even though many of them were not saved by that promise. Understanding the church as an organism through which the lines of election and reprobation run will prevent the believer from falling into conditional theology.

But if you hold fast to the organic idea, then all the difficulties disappear. Then you have here the one people which is nevertheless twofold; one vineyard which nevertheless brings forth a twofold fruit. (118–19)

In chapter 10 Hoeksema explained the reprobate in the sphere of the covenant. The reprobate are not members of the covenant. They are only in the sphere of the covenant. They live in the closest possible connection to the elect members of the covenant but without the promise of God, the grace of God, or the covenant of God.

We believe that essentially the covenant of grace pertains to the elect alone, whom God regenerates in time and on whom He bestows faith and conversion, according to His eternal good pleasure. All the elect and only the elect are saved. (132)

The reprobate in the sphere of the covenant are baptized, just as the elect. The reprobate come to church, just as the elect. The reprobate sit under the preaching of the gospel, just as the elect. But the reprobate have nothing of salvation or the covenant in common with the elect.

There is neither in baptism nor in holy communion a general offer of grace. It is simply not true that God in holy baptism



promises and seals something to all who are baptized. No more than this is the case with His Word, with the gospel of salvation, no more is it true with respect to the seals of God's covenant. (140)

What is God's purpose with the reprobate in the sphere of God's covenant?

In the first place, we answer that it is exactly God's purpose as far as such ungodly members of the covenant themselves are concerned, that sin shall come to complete manifestation as sin. God must be justified when presently he judges... In the second place, it is exactly through this divine arrangement that the antithesis comes to manifestation and the battle for the cause of God's covenant in the world is fought. The believers do not have their fiercest battle with those who are outside, but with those who in the external sense of the word are within. These are always inspired in principle, and presently manifestly, with the spirit of the Antichrist. It is through them that the church on earth suffers and battles and wrestles for the sake of God's covenant. The spiritual seed is persecuted and harassed by the carnal seed. The latter kills the prophets and nails the Lord of glory to the accursed tree and causes the blood of the servants of God to flow upon the earth. But in all this it nevertheless serves to make God's elect people ripe, through suffering and battle, for the final glory. For that people has the victory, through their King, Who is given to them by Israel's God, and according to His eternal good pleasure. (144-45)

In chapter 11 Hoeksema turned to the question of children who die in infancy. The family who loses a child in infancy cannot be set upon sentiment or upon a false doctrine of a universal covenant or upon any false and empty hope. One must stand upon things that are certain, as God has revealed them. The certainty is not this, that every infant of believers is saved. But the

certainty is this: "The Lord saves *His seed* out of our seed" (158). And therefore Hoeksema concluded,

And if, now, from the midst of such a family children are taken away, children who certainly could not yet consciously assume any attitude toward the covenant of the Lord, then such parents ought not to stand at that death and that grave of their children doubting. They do not say, "My child is baptized, and therefore it is saved." But they say indeed, also at that grave: "Lord, in Thy name I have brought forth a child. And from Thy hand I have received it. I have consecrated it to Thee, in order that it should be a child for Thy covenant. And now Thou hast taken the child away from me. In that same faith wherein I consecrated him to Thee, I leave him with Thee, without being filled with anxious doubt concerning the salvation and election of this child, but knowing that Thou, according to Thy good pleasure, which by faith to me is always good, dost save Thy children out of my seed!" (159)

Thus Herman Hoeksema concluded his treatment of God's covenant with believers and their seed.

## An Inexplicable Error

In light of the tremendous development of the doctrine of the covenant in *Believers and Their Seed*, I am tempted to minimize the following error. But it is not a small error. Herman Hoeksema dismissed and very nearly mocked an article in the Canons of Dordt. The article is Canons 1.17:

Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

About the article Hoeksema wrote:

This article leaves much to be desired as far as clarity and sharpness of definition are concerned; and it cannot be denied that in the form in which the matter is here cast it really cannot be considered an item for a confession. In a confession the church expresses what it believes concerning the truth of God revealed in the Scriptures. And it can hardly be said that the church here does that. If the Synod of 1618–19 had really wanted to express a definite view concerning the salvation of children who die in infancy, then there would have had to be something entirely different in this article of the Canons of Dordrecht. (149)

And later: “From this point of view it certainly would not have been any great loss if Article 17 of Canons, I-A, had never been included” (152).

The most that Hoeksema would grant to Canons 1.17 is that there might be some “room” for it (158).

Hoeksema’s dismissal of Canons 1.17 is jarring and uncharacteristic. Herman Hoeksema was a confessional theologian. He did not disparage the confessions. He developed his theology out of scripture according to the Reformed conception of scripture in the confessions. Indeed, in this very book, *Believers and Their Seed*, he masterfully exegeted the baptism form, the Lord’s supper form, and the Heidelberg Catechism to expose the error of Professor Heyns. Therefore, Hoeksema’s attack on Canons 1.17 is jarring and discordant.

Hoeksema’s dismissal of Canons 1.17 is all the more inexplicable when one considers that Canons 1.17 teaches the very doctrine of the covenant that Hoeksema had just developed in *Believers and Their Seed*. Canons 1.17 implies that God’s covenant with man is essentially fellowship. It speaks of God’s being pleased to call infants out of this life. What they are called out of—this life—implies what they are called unto—God’s presence. The idea of God’s calling his

elect infants out of this life unto himself is an idea that is rich in fellowship, communion, and friendship.

Canons 1.17 also teaches that God establishes his covenant of grace with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations. The article speaks of “the children of believers” and “the covenant of grace in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended.” This truth of God’s covenant maintained in the line of continued generations is on the foreground in the article.

Furthermore, Canons 1.17 ties God’s covenant to election, so that the elect and only the elect are covenant members. When the article says that children of believers are holy “in virtue of the covenant” and that godly parents have no reason to doubt “the election and salvation of their children” who die in infancy, the article unites election and the covenant. In light of the article, no Reformed man may say that there are reprobate children in God’s covenant. No Reformed man may say that God makes a covenant promise to every child of believers head for head. In light of the article, a Reformed man must say that membership in the covenant is determined by God’s decree of election.

Canons 1.17 also implies that God’s covenant is entirely gracious and entirely unconditional. The article does this when it speaks of the covenant membership of infants who die in their infancy. Infants cannot fulfill conditions. They are helpless. They are passive. God’s covenant with such an infant cannot possibly be a bargain with that infant in which the infant fulfills certain conditions and thus merits further covenant blessings. The particular infants about whom this article speaks—those who die in their infancy—will not even grow up to do anything that could be called a condition. All their days, few as those days may be, they are nothing but helpless and passive. God’s covenant with such infants, as it is with all his elect, is a purely gracious and unconditional covenant.

Canons 1.17 teaches a covenant between God and his elect people that is essentially friend-

ship, that is entirely gracious, and that is established with believers and their seed along the lines of election and reprobation. That was exactly Hoeksema's doctrine of the covenant. One staggers to understand why Hoeksema would dismiss the article.

Perhaps Hoeksema's dismissal of Canons 1.17 can be explained from the widespread practice of dealing with the covenant soteriologically. Over against this Hoeksema was determined to deal with the covenant theologically. Hoeksema saw it as extremely unsatisfactory that the doctrine of the covenant was not developed out of God's own covenant life but out of man's salvation.

The entire covenant is frequently considered as nothing else than a way of salvation; and then, of course, the great advantage of that covenant people lies in the fact that also their children are saved. If the subject of the covenant comes under discussion, many think not so much of a relation between God and His people as of a relation between believers and their seed. And if the question of being saved is then presented as the chief idea of the covenant, it follows that the question of the salvation of infants automatically is placed on the foreground. (146)

Hoeksema wanted nothing to do with a covenant that placed man and his salvation on the foreground. The covenant was God's, and it must be of God, through God, and to God. One even senses that Hoeksema was somewhat frustrated that the Reformed world would only deal with the covenant as a means for getting saved. Perhaps, then, when Hoeksema came to Canons 1.17, which treats the salvation of infants who die in infancy, Hoeksema imagined that the article partook of such a superficial view of the covenant.

Thus it is also to be explained [in light of the interest of parents who have buried children], perhaps, that an article concerning this question was included in the Canons of Dordrecht (I, A, 17). (148)

However, Canons 1.17 is no superficial article. Hoeksema even recognized the beautiful purpose of this article in the Canons of Dordt. He saw it as a defense against the wicked slander of the Arminians against the Reformed doctrine of God's sovereign election and reprobation.

Especially when, in connection with this, we take into consideration the fact that the Arminians delighted in depicting the presentation of our Reformed fathers as monstrous, and berated them that they took pleasure in the idea of a hell full of innocent little children, it is understandable that the Synod of 1618–19 undertook to make of this matter a point of confession. (148)

Closely connected with that thought was the pastoral need of parents who had to bury a child.

The last question which we wish to discuss in connection with our subject is that concerning the salvation of children of believers who die in infancy...

It is also readily to be understood that as often as this question comes under discussion, much interest is shown in it, especially by the many parents who themselves have had to bring their children to the grave. (146, 148)

What Hoeksema identified in the above two observations is the correct line of thought for understanding Canons 1.17. The point of Canons 1.17 is not to make a dogmatic statement about the salvation of every child of believers who dies in infancy. Who can know such a thing? Rather, the first purpose of Canons 1.17 is to declare that the God of election and reprobation is not a tyrant but a merciful covenant God. Over against the Arminian slander that the God of election and reprobation is a capricious tyrant, gleefully slinging innocent infants into hell, the article declares that God is a covenant God, who comprehends the elect children of believing parents in his covenant. God is not a tyrannical God but a covenant God.

The second purpose of Canons 1.17, which purpose is evident on the surface of it, is to comfort believing parents whose child dies in infancy. Their comfort cannot be found in speculation. Their comfort cannot be found in conditions. Their comfort cannot be found in false hope. Their comfort cannot be found in self-deceit. Rather, their comfort is found in the truth that God is a covenant God to believers and their seed according to his good pleasure in election. Such parents have no reason to doubt the election and salvation of their infants who die in infancy, for God is a covenant God.

The spiritual descendants of Herman Hoeksema take hold of his covenant doctrine. But the spiritual descendants of Hoeksema may not follow his dismissal of Canons 1.17. Rather, members of Reformed churches confess the doctrine of this article of the Christian faith. And office-bearers in Reformed churches vow “diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing” (Formula of Subscription).

## A Marvelous Development of the Covenant

With that serious error noted, Herman Hoeksema’s *Believers and Their Seed* is a marvelous development of the Reformed doctrine of God’s covenant. There are especially three things that stand out in Hoeksema’s covenant doctrine in *Believers and Their Seed*.

First, Hoeksema restored the doctrine of the covenant to the Reformed faith. The Reformed faith is that God is God. The Reformed faith is that God is sovereign. Reformed theologians and denominations in Hoeksema’s day were taking the covenant away from the Reformed faith. William Heyns was making the covenant subject to man’s will and man’s work. Abraham Kuyper was making the covenant a matter of speculative philosophy. Over against these departures Herman Hoeksema returned the doctrine of the covenant to the Reformed faith.

Hoeksema’s restoration of the doctrine of the covenant was not merely that he taught an unconditional covenant. Rather, Hoeksema’s restoration of the doctrine of the covenant was his insistence that the church deal with the covenant theologically. Hoeksema rightly observed that almost everyone dealt with the covenant soteriologically. The covenant for most was merely a matter of what man could get out of it. Hoeksema took back the covenant by locating it in the life of the triune God. Hoeksema made the great significance of the covenant of grace to be God’s revelation of his covenant life outside of himself. The covenant was thus restored from being about man to being about God. Reformed doctrine must start from the viewpoint of God, for the Reformed faith is that God is God.

It was no small feat to return the doctrine of the covenant to the Reformed faith. Errors regarding the covenant were widely accepted in Hoeksema’s day. William Heyns was the premier theologian in the Christian Reformed Church of Hoeksema’s day. An entire generation of Christian Reformed ministers had imbibed Heyns’ covenant doctrine in seminary, so that it was the overwhelming covenant conception in both the Christian Reformed Church and in the newly formed Protestant Reformed Churches. Abraham Kuyper was the premier Reformed theologian of all time, perhaps second only to John Calvin with regard to influence in the Reformed church world. For Hoeksema to reject Heyns’ covenant doctrine and for Hoeksema to reject portions of Kuyper’s covenant doctrine were monumental tasks. In doing so Hoeksema brought the covenant doctrine of the Reformed churches back to the confessions and back to scripture. Hoeksema again subjected the doctrine of the covenant to the sovereignty of God.

As a whole, Reformed churches did not take heed to Hoeksema’s development. Most Reformed churches today still hold to a conditional covenant doctrine, which clashes with and denies the Reformed confession of God’s sovereignty. Most Reformed churches today, including those that stand in a direct historical line



from Herman Hoeksema, are tempted to treat the covenant soteriologically rather than theologically. *Believers and Their Seed* is significant these many decades after its writing as a continued call to the church to deal with God's covenant from the point of view of God. This approach to the covenant is blessed for the child of God, who is brought into God's own covenant life through Jesus Christ, the head and mediator of the covenant.

Second, Hoeksema developed the essence of the covenant as friendship and fellowship. By this the covenant was taken out of the sterile board room and brought into the lively family room. The covenant is not the cold contract of the bargaining table, but the covenant is the warm fellowship of the dinner table.

Hoeksema's development of the covenant as fellowship is irresistible. Not only because the life of the family in fellowship is infinitely more appealing than a hard-bitten business deal in which two men hold each other to their contract as it were with a knife to each other's throats. But Hoeksema's development of the covenant as fellowship is irresistible because it is true. God took enormous care to describe his covenant in terms of love and friendship. "I am your God!" he cries. "And you are my people!" This has ever been the cry of the husband and the wife, the parent and the child, the friend and the friend: I am yours, and you are mine!

Hoeksema's development of the covenant as fellowship also restored the covenant to the preaching of the gospel. The gospel does not tell men that God has made a contract with them, and now they had better hold up their end of the contract if they want God to hold up his end. This is the false doctrine of the covenant of works and of every conditional covenant conception. Rather, the gospel tells God's people that God has graciously brought them into his family through Christ because God willed it and it pleased him. When God tells his covenant people to obey, it is not to obtain anything in that covenant but to thank and praise God for that covenant. This is the warmest, most comforting

good news there is: welcome to God's family for Jesus' sake.

Third, Hoeksema connected God's counsel and God's covenant. The significance of the connection between God's counsel and God's covenant cannot be overstated. We could fairly say that election is the heart of the covenant. We could fairly say that election is the determining feature of God's covenant. We could fairly say that election is the most important thing to understand about God's covenant.

It is not merely this, that election determines the members of the covenant, though that is wonderfully true. It is not even merely this, that election determines the blessings of the covenant, though that also is wonderfully true. But it is this, that God determines the covenant! Because the covenant is rooted in God and in God's election, there is simply nothing whatsoever that the covenant member can do to loose himself from that covenant. What a glorious truth! The believer is capable of every heinous sin, and he knows it. The believer is corrupt to the core in his nature, and he knows it. If there were anything that the believer could do to destroy God's covenant, he would do it, and he knows it. But the covenant is God's. The believer is a member of the covenant by God's unchangeable election of him. The believer has all of the blessings of the covenant by God's eternal election of him. It is the truth of election that makes the covenant sure and firm to the believer.

Hoeksema's theological opponents in later years would curse the Protestant Reformed Churches for Hoeksema's connection of God's counsel with God's covenant. Several decades after the writing of *Believers and Their Seed*, the theory of a conditional covenant made its way into the Protestant Reformed Churches through the influence of Dr. Klaas Schilder. The favorite accusation of Hoeksema's doctrine by his opponents was that it equated the covenant with election. As far as that accusation goes, it was entirely wrong. Hoeksema did not equate the covenant with election. But he certainly did teach that the covenant was governed by election and



determined by election. When he did so, he was simply teaching the Reformed doctrine of the covenant.

For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of *the most precious death of His Son* should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, *whereby He confirmed the new covenant*, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and, having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever. (Canons of Dordt 2.8; emphasis added)

Hoeksema would continue to refine his doctrine of the covenant through the years, but *Believers and Their Seed* was his major development of the doctrine. The essence and the basics of his covenant doctrine are all there. Let the spiritual children of Hoeksema take note. Let the entire Reformed church world take note, for that matter. This is the only doctrine of the covenant that is truly Reformed.

And so God's covenant is now the life of the friendship of God in Christ. In that covenant there are no offers and no conditions. The covenant is solely God's. He establishes His covenant. He chooses and saves. He ingrafts us into Christ, and He sanctifies. He makes us friends of God for His name's sake in the midst of the world. And He then also fights His own battle in us through Christ unto everlasting victory. And we are, through His grace, of God's party. And when presently the battle has been fought, then He gives us, out of free grace, the crown of victory, a crown of life, a gracious crown. Now that covenant of God is for us and our children. (82–83)

—AL



# ACT OF SEPARATION AND JOINING

**Introduction:** The following Act of Separation and Joining was prepared by Deacon Keith Gritters, the last remaining faithful officebearer in First Reformed Protestant Church. The reasons for the Act are enumerated in the document. Deacon Gritters signed the Act on May 21, 2023, and distributed it to the congregation of First RPC. On May 22, 2023, families and individuals representing some sixty-five souls also signed the Act. By this the Lord Jesus Christ established a new Reformed congregation in the West Michigan area. “In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee” (Isa. 54:14). —AL

## Act of Separation and Joining

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

—Confession of Faith, Article 28

“We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church.”

—Confession of Faith, Article 29

With astonishment and grief, we have observed the apostatizing of the Reformed Protestant Churches by the denomination’s corrupting the marks of the true church and manifesting the marks of the false church, as those marks are set forth in our Confession of Faith, Article 29. The glorious gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone has not been preached purely but has been polluted with the filth of man and his will, while the pure gospel has been declared to be legalistic and

conditional. False doctrines and errors multiply exceedingly through heretical sermons and speeches. Church discipline has not been exercised faithfully, especially in the punishment of false doctrine, but has been exercised against those who stand for the truth. Teachers and defenders of error are exonerated and protected by the church, while discipline is wrongly applied against faithful watchmen. The denomination zealously guards the empty honor of men but allows the majesty of Jehovah and his truth to be trampled underfoot by the idolatry, false worship, and blasphemy of false doctrine in God’s house. The sacraments cannot be administered purely as Christ has appointed in his Word but have been stolen away from Christ’s sheep who cannot affirm their unity with an apostatizing congregation and denomination. The Word of God as the rule according to which all things are to be managed in the church has been ignored and disdained, and the will of men prevails. The Church Order and the biblical principles of Reformed church government have not been applied faithfully or righteously but have been ignored, applied only selectively and unevenly, and twisted by the earthly wisdom of men. The church ascribes more power and authority to the ordinances of her ecclesiastical decisions than to the Word of God. She turns to man for wisdom and relies more upon him than upon Christ. She will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ in the reproofs and rebukes of his word. She slanders

and reviles those who love the truth and confess it, hate the lie and repudiate it, rebuke her for her errors, and live holily according to the Word of God. “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment” (Isa. 59:14–15).

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

As God by his Spirit has graciously shown us our iniquities and pricked our hearts with grief for our transgressions, we have labored quietly and peaceably before his face and among his people to amend our ways and our doings. Through the antithetical preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by our pastor, through the witness and labors of our elders and deacon, through our cries for God’s mercy and grace to turn us, through our protests and appeals to the assemblies, through our publishing and writing, through our speaking often one to another in the fear of the Lord, and through our membership in his church, we have sought the old paths, God strengthening us. The response has been a growing storm of slander, opposition, and false charges against God’s Word and against us, along with a bolder strengthening of the hands of the evildoers that none doth turn from his way. “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:13–14). “For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (II Peter 2:18–19).

The denomination’s opposition to the Word of God has now become plainly evident to all in the unjust and ungodly suspension and deposition of our pastor and elders for their public testimony against the church’s sin of the false doctrine of will worship and for their public rebuke against her toleration of error. In their charge of legalism against the Word of God, the assemblies have elevated the will and traditions of man as that which governs the church in her worship. Judging our pastor’s faithful sermons and our elders’ sound doctrine to be false doctrine, the Reformed Protestant Churches have fulfilled the apostle’s prophecy: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (II Tim. 4:3–4). Adding sin to sin, the judges of our pastor and elders willfully ignored and then twisted the Word of God to suit their purposes, lied before God’s face to God’s people, and committed the very sins that they had wrongly accused our officebearers of committing.

The unjust suspension and deposition of our pastor and elders is a particularly stark and obvious mark of the false church, which “persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry” (Confession of Faith, Article 29). The false church has always been known and identified by her persecution of God’s prophets. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:10–12; see also 21:33–46; 23:34–39; Acts 7:51–53).

We desired to continue in fellowship with the denomination for as long as God gave us a place, trusting our heavenly Father to make our calling clear. By the church's expulsion of our pastor and elders, she has made our place impossible and has effectively cast us out, for the church has shown that she will no longer hear the Word of the Lord. "To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it" (Jer. 6:10).

For this reason, the undersigned, officebearer of First Reformed Protestant Church and members of the Reformed Protestant Churches, now flee from the coming destruction, according to the solemn warnings of the Word of God. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction" (Jer. 5:30–6:1; see also 6:10–12). "Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it" (Jer. 6:17–19).

According to the Word of God and the holy duty of believers, we separate ourselves from

this untoward generation and come out from among them and will have no more fellowship with the Reformed Protestant Churches until such time as God may be pleased to restore them (Acts 2:40; Isa. 52:11; II Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4; II Chron. 7:14; Confession of Faith, Article 28). In the meantime, the Son of God has gathered us by his Word and Spirit as living members of his body and has joined us to his church in this place (I Cor. 1:2; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21). We declare at the same time our desire to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed members and to unite ourselves with every gathering founded on God's infallible Word, in whatever place God has also united the same (Eph. 4:1–6; Confession of Faith, Article 28).

Hereby we testify that in all things we hold to God's holy Word and to the Three Forms of Unity founded upon that Word, namely, the Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ, we hold to the Church Order, studiously taking care in its implementation that we do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted (Confession of Faith, Article 32).

Finally, as officebearer and members of Christ's church, we hereby declare that we do not recognize the unjust suspension and deposition of our minister and elders, but continue to recognize them as our pastor and overseers, according to the ordinance of Christ, who calls his servants through his church (Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 4:14).

Done this day, the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2023  
Jenison, Michigan

w.s. Keith Gritters



## Article VIII. The Fallen King (continued)

**W**e have agreed thus far that the sinner, that Adam after he fell, as far as his relation to God is concerned is guilty, worthy of, obliged to receive punishment.

Hence, this punishment was inevitable, man must die!

Even as the relation between the act of sin and the guilt of sin is undeniable, so is also the relation between guilt and punishment. The guilty must be punished.

Perhaps we smile at the reading of such statements of what we consider self-evident truths. These truths are never doubted, you say, still less denied. Every one knows that the guilty sinner must be punished, that there is an unbreakable connection between guilt and punishment.

And yet, it will do no harm to remind us of these truths, and to have them clearly stated in all their significance once more, so that they may be definite and concise before our consciousness. It is, after all, astounding to find how much misunderstanding there still is, even among our own people, in regard to some of these simple and fundamental truths. The conception is, after all, very frequently more or less that the guilty sinner as such can be an object of the pity and compassion, of the sympathy and mercy of God. The sinner is so poor, so miserable, so wretched! And because he is so unspeakably wretched, God pities him. And because he pities the suffering sinner and is so filled with compassion towards him, he removes his suffering and gives him eternal life! Also this conception is an attack upon the sovereignty of God! Even this feeling, stealing unawares often over the hearts of the strongest among us, is sinful.

And over against this we must most positively maintain that there is no peace for the wicked, and that the guilty sinner as such can never be an object of compassion and pity.

Mind, we do not deny that God is a God of mercy and compassion! If He were not, the case would be absolutely hopeless. Then there would be no salvation possible. Then there would be but one possibility, namely, that the sinner, the guilty sinner, that rebelled against the Most High, would perish in everlasting woe. But surely, God is merciful, infinite in compassion. The Word of God is aglow with the fire of His mercy. And, therefore, we do maintain that mercy is an attribute of God's being. But what we deny is that the sinner in his guilt can possibly be an object of that mercy. What we do deny is, that anyone, no matter what his state may be, anyone that is miserable and wretched, is an object of that mercy. We are no objects of the mercy of God just because we are in misery. If that were the case, we would arrive in the first place at a very strange conception of the Most High. Then the case would be thus, that the Lord of heaven and earth would first maintain himself over against the guilty, punish him, inflict suffering and death upon him; but that the moment God beholds the suffering coming upon the guilty sinner, He pities him and removes it from him. God, in other words, would be the most changeable being conceivable. Then hell would be a great mystery. For in hell the devil and all the wicked suffer eternally the punishment of sin, and yet they are never the objects of the compassion of God. It will be a mystery how this merciful God can ever find divine pleasure in



that terrible suffering in hell everlasting! And yet that is the case. It is not thus, that God suffers perhaps more than the inhabitants of hell because His divine heart bleeds with mercy at the sight of their woe, but this that also hell is the maintenance of God's sovereignty and good pleasure. Scripture tell us that the rich man in blackest woe and indescribable agony does not even find a place of mercy when he cries out for just one drop of water to cool his tongue! And, therefore, there is no manifestation of mercy in hell. God's mercy is not even stirred by the sight of the suffering in eternal woe! But then it cannot be maintained that the very fact that one is miserable makes him as such an object of the mercy of God. Besides, then we can never understand Christ. In the first place, we can never understand why His coming was necessary at all. If God is filled with mercy towards the sinner as such, if He spreads the wings of His compassion over the guilty in his rebellion, then we can never understand why it were necessary that God sent Christ even for the salvation of His own people. But besides, from that point of view we shall never be able to comprehend the significance of the Anointed One in all His fullness. Christ is not only come to save and to reveal God's mercy. He is also Judge, a sign that shall be spoken against, a rock of offense; the Gospel is a savor of life unto life, but also a savor of death unto death. And, therefore, if we would understand Christ in all His significance, we must start out from the only correct point of view, that God must maintain Himself, does maintain Himself, vindicates His sovereignty at all times and forever over against the creature. Christ is also the maintenance of that sovereignty of God over against the devil and all the power of godlessness and guilt!

God must maintain Himself and His Sovereignty also over against the guilty sinner. And, therefore, over against him He must manifest Himself as the absolutely Righteous and Just.

What is God's righteousness? In order to obtain a clear and satisfactory answer to this question, we must be careful not to make the creature the standard, the criterion for the Creator.

That is always a dangerous method. We found that this leads to the absurdest and most wicked conception of the love of God. And the same is true in regard to God's righteousness. Man is righteous when he is in harmony with the law. In other words, our righteousness is determined and judged by a standard that is above us, by an objective criterion. Righteous we are if we are in harmony with that standard, unrighteous if we are in disharmony with it. But, of course, this same idea cannot be applied to God, for the simple reason that there is no law above him. He is the absolute Sovereign of heaven and earth. It is not so, that He is righteous because He is in harmony with any law, but just the reverse, any law is righteous because it finds its source in Him. God stands above every law. He Himself is the source of all law, makes all laws, maintains all laws, and judgest according to His own laws, and no one can say, "What doest Thou?" And therefore, the righteousness of God can never mean that He is to be compared and found in harmony with a higher law, that stands above Himself.

Once more, let us remember, that God created the world a kingdom, and that means, too, that He has sovereignly ordained all His ordinances and laws for every creature. When He created the world, He did not make a chaotic mass of objects, thrown together in a haphazard manner, without any relation between them. He did not make sun, moon and stars, seas and rivers and lakes, trees and flowers, man and beast, as separate objects in order to let them determine their own relation to one another and to their God. No, God also created their relations. God did not make chaos but kosmos, harmony, a kingdom. To everyone of His creatures God has assigned its place in relation to all the rest. And that relation of every creature to all the rest, and of the whole to Creator, is the law of the creature. The sun cannot wander through space at random, but must travel a certain path, in relation to the earth, and all the planets are controlled likewise, by what we call the law of gravity. The tree must be planted in the soil, the flower must bathe in the light of the sun, the fish must find its life in the water, the bird must fly

in the air. The tree cannot walk over the face of the earth, the fish cannot exist on the dry land, the bird cannot swim in the water. There is a definite relation, a definite place assigned to every creature, and that definite place is its law. And altogether these creatures, standing each in its place as assigned by the Almighty, form one beautiful whole, one grand kosmos, the world, the kingdom of God. But this is also true for man. God assigned him his place. True, there is a difference between man and the rest of the world, for the simple reason that man is conscious of the law of God, is a rational and moral creature that must keep his place freely, from voluntary obedience. But this does not alter the fact, that also to man God has assigned his place, given His own law. And that place of man was that he should be the king-servant. Have dominion over all things and love the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his mind and with all his soul and with all his strength. That was God's law for man.

In the second place we must also understand that the law which God set for every creature was entirely in harmony with the very nature and being of that creature. It is not so, that God made creatures of a certain type and character, and that He assigned to them a place, and gave them a law that was in disharmony with their being; but so that in the case of every creature there is harmony between his being and the law of God. The law of the fish, to live in the water, is in harmony with the being of the fish; the law of the tree is in harmony with the essence of the tree. And so it is with all of creation. So it is also with the law of God with respect to man. The law was adapted to man and man to the law. There was harmony. And this implies at the same time, that the creature can be happy only as long as he remains in harmony with the law, only as long as he retains the place and the relation assigned to him by God. As soon as he transgresses, trespasses the boundary of the law, he is doomed to destruction. Pull the fish out of the water, and its death is certain. Uproot a tree and it must wither. Imagine that the sun would leave its path, destruction would be the

result. The law of God is the happiness of the creature, transgression of the law is his death. And this same truth holds also for man. God has also assigned to him the sphere in which he could live and prosper. That sphere was the love of God. Transgression of the boundary of that sphere must be his death.

That would not be the case if it were conceivable that God would change His law in accordance with the condition of the creature. It were conceivable in the abstract that God would withdraw His law for the fish, the moment that fish would jump out of the water, so that it could live outside of its normal sphere. It were conceivable in the abstract that God would have done the same thing with man, that he would have retracted or changed the law He had given to man, so that man could live and be happy, even though he had left the sphere of the law and become a subject to the devil. But that is not the case. For God is righteous. He is firm and immovable in regard to all His laws and ordinances. His precepts are fixed and He maintains them. They cannot be altered. It is in this light that we can understand such beautiful expressions in the Word of God as the exclamation of the poet in Ps. 89:14: "Righteousness and justice are the foundations of Thy throne!" God has established a Kingdom! And in that Kingdom he is enthroned. For that Kingdom He has established His own laws. If He would not maintain them, His Kingdom would become chaos, His throne would totter. But He does maintain them. He is righteous and just. And, therefore, righteousness and justice are the foundation of the sovereignty of God in all the world. He is the rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He. Deut. 32:4. But if this is clear, then we will also understand, that He must reveal Himself as a God of righteousness to man that transgressed His law. Also for man He maintains it. Or, if you please, God maintains Himself, His sovereignty, also over against the guilty sinner that rebelled. And therefore, death is inevitable.

There is no peace for the wicked.

The mercy of God can never spread itself over the guilty sinner as such. The soul that sinneth must die.

And, therefore, we come to the conclusion, that Adam was guilty because he sinned, and that he died because he was guilty.

You remark that Adam did not die immediately? And that is true. Adam lived upon earth more than nine hundred years. The question might, therefore, be asked: why did not God kill Adam immediately after he sinned and create a new man? And the answer is not so difficult. In the first place it may be said, that God must be justified to the full. It must become manifest that God is righteous and just, and that His word is true over against the word of the devil. For that purpose the sinfulness of sin, the horrible character of sin must be revealed. The real character of sin could not come to full manifestation in Paradise, could only develop itself as the human race developed. Adam committed a principle sin. The horrible nature of that sin could hardly be known at first. True, a thorn and a thistle sprang up in the earth, the woman brought forth in travail, and the man earned and ate his bread in the sweat of his brow. But for the rest, sin could hardly be seen in all its terrible character. There was as yet no war and bloodshed, no adultery and fornication, no theft and robbery, simply because life had not developed to such an extent that sin could reveal itself in different spheres. It is only in the history of man, that sin in all its horribleness can become manifest. The Man of Sin is the ultimate development of the sin committed in Paradise, and God is fully justified in the history of sinful man.

But in the second place, we should never forget that Adam, when he sinned, fell in the arms of grace immediately. Back of the Covenant of works stands the Covenant of grace. Back of the first Adam stands the second. And it is this fact that prevented Adam from falling immediately in the claws of eternal death. God meant to overcome the devil and his whole dominion, He planned to develop His Covenant of grace, in which the devil is defeated and His own grace and power is victorious. And, therefore, Adam might not die in the fullest sense. He became the natural father of two people, the people of the serpent, and the people of God, election and reprobation both had to be realized through him.

And yet man died. He died the spiritual death. He became a slave of sin. To a certain extent he lost the image of God. And, although he still was allowed to retain a shadow of his dominion for some time, so that also the kingdom of Satan could develop, yet in principle he had lost his glory and his power and his dominion. He had become a slave of Satan, a slave of sin. The “being able not to sin” had changed into the “not being able not to sin.”

The sinner is guilty.

Because of his guilt he is punished.

That punishment is death.

That death also implies spiritual death, so that he can never do any spiritual good any more. Thus is the chain of sin.

Terminating in eternal death!

—Holland, Mich.

