



# REFORMED

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*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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Editor: Rev. Andrew Lanning  
*From the Ramparts* Editor: Dewey Engelsma

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And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.

—Exodus 23:10–12

### The Weary Refreshed

**I**n the judgments from Sinai, God returned to the matter of the sabbath. God gave Israel a sabbath day—one day out of seven. On the sabbath day the entire household was to rest: father, mother, son, daughter, manservant, maidservant, stranger, ox, and ass. God also gave Israel a sabbath year—one year out of seven. For six years the Israelite farmer would plant his barley, his wheat, and his lentils and would gather his crop. For six years the Israelite vigner- on would cultivate his vineyard and gather his grapes. For six years the Israelite olive grower would cultivate his oliveyard and gather his olives. But the seventh year was a sabbath. The farmer, the vintner, and the olive grower must leave their lands alone. Their lands would still produce crops, the cultivation of the previous six years bearing fruit yet in the seventh. But the farmers were all to leave the seventh year's crops in the field and not gather them in.

God's return to the matter of the sabbath was not merely to repeat what he had said before. Nor did God return to the sabbath merely to emphasize the importance of sabbath keep- ing. Rather, God revealed something new and wonderful to his people regarding the sabbath. The wonderful thing was this: sabbath keeping was an Israelite's act of love to the hungry poor and to the burdened weary. There were so many weary in Israel! The handmaid was weary, as were her children. The stranger was weary. Even the ox and the ass were weary in their labor. The

Israelite kept the sabbath day "that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed." And there were so many poor! The people were hungry. Even the beasts were hungry. The Israelite kept the sabbath year "that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat."

How unexpected and how wonderful is this revelation of the sabbath! We might imagine that we keep the sabbath for God's sake. But what need does God have of all our sabbaths? Our sabbaths do not profit him, nor did God make man for the sabbath. No, a child of God does not keep the sabbath for God's sake (let the reader understand). Or we might imagine that we keep the sabbath for our own sakes, that we might have a day to reset. But what profit is there in our ease while our brother groans under his burden and the belly of the poor is empty? No, a child of God does not keep the sabbath for his own sake (let the reader understand). Rather, the sabbath is for satisfying the poor and the hungry. The sabbath is for refreshing the weary and the heavy laden. The sabbath of God is "to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house...when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh" (Isa. 58:7).

Now behold our Lord, who has fulfilled the sabbath law of love to all his poor and weary

people! For our poverty is our sin, and our toil is our utter inability to redeem ourselves. But listen to the Lord of the sabbath:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28–30)

How our Lord has loved the poor, the helpless, the weak, the weary, the laboring, the hungry, the empty, the wretched—the sinners and debtors and heavy laden! He who was rich became poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might become rich!

Here is your sabbath: refresh the weary. For here was Christ's sabbath: his weary people refreshed!

—AL

## THE SCRIVENER

### The Sovereign God of Salvation

#### Introduction

The topic of today's speech is "The Sovereign God of Salvation."<sup>1</sup> This topic is grand and interesting. The topic that we consider is nothing less than the topic of God himself: the sovereign God of salvation. And there is no topic more grand, there is no topic more interesting, than the topic of our God.

This topic is also rare today. Many talk about God, but who speaks of the sovereignty of God? No one understands—including ourselves, first of all—the sovereign God of salvation. And this topic is personal. It is personal because it has to do with my salvation. It has to do with your salvation. This topic is also comforting because the truth that God is sovereign in my salvation means that my whole hope and all of my comfort are found outside of myself, in Jehovah God. And there alone is comfort.

I would like to begin by reading Isaiah 44:1–8, in which God declares himself to be God alone and in which he declares himself to be the savior of his people. In Isaiah 44 God is speaking to the Old Testament nation of Israel, which was a picture and type of the New Testament church,

so that this declaration of God in Isaiah 44 is his declaration to his people yet today.

Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are

<sup>1</sup> This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given June 7, 2025, in Singapore. The speech can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fck1dJuPCLQ>. We hope to publish the question and answer session of the speech in a future issue of the magazine, the Lord willing.

coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

In this passage God speaks to his people—his people who are weary, his people who are thirsty, his people who are empty—and declares himself to be the sovereign God of their salvation. This morning, then, let us open up this topic of the sovereign God of our salvation. First, we will consider the great truth; second, we will consider the persistent lie that contradicts that truth; and third, we will see the enduring reality.

### The Great Truth

The great truth of the sovereign God of salvation can be stated very, very simply, and it is this: God saves sinners. It is as simple as that: God saves sinners.

The problem that we as mankind have is that we are terrible, terrible sinners; and no one knows it. Nobody considers sin to be the great problem of mankind. What men consider to be their problem is the problem of health. Men consider their problem to be the problem of wealth. Men don't want to be poor; men don't want to be sick. Men consider their problem to be a certain weariness in this life. They consider their problems to be very superficial and things that pertain merely to their earthly bodies. But the great problem that mankind has is that we are sinners.

We can understand that problem when we understand who the great God of salvation is. God is a holy, holy God. He is such a holy God that the holy angels, who are mighty, spiritual creatures who stand before him day and night in heaven, cover their faces and their feet in his sight. Their feet are not holy enough to stand on the same ground as Jehovah and their eyes not holy enough to look upon that holy Jehovah. And remember how wonderful the angels are as creatures. When men in the Old Testament saw them, they fell down like dead men before them.

They were terrified seeing these great and powerful creatures. These great creatures, the angels, stand before the holy God with their faces and their feet covered. Our God is a holy, holy God.

The holiness of God means that he is perfectly devoted and dedicated to himself. We use the word *holy*, but sometimes we don't understand fully what that word means. The word *holy* means that God is perfectly devoted to himself, which means that God looks at himself with perfect consecration. It means that God is a consuming fire, as he came down on Mount Sinai and as he is described in Hebrews. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). With all his holy being, he is perfectly consecrated to himself. God loves himself as the triune, holy God.

God, in that holy dedication to himself, cannot behold sin with any pleasure. His eyes are too holy, too perfectly devoted to himself, to behold sin with any pleasure.

That is our God: that holy being who is higher than the heavens and the earth and who is devoted to himself.

And what about us? What about us in comparison with that God? We creatures here below are sinful. We sin in our hearts; we sin with our hands; we sin with our mouths. We creatures, in fact, are thoroughly corrupt. That is a hard thing to convince people of. It is a hard thing to convince ourselves of because our flesh always thinks that we are good people. In fact, we are better people than many, many other people. We are better people than that person we can see here or there. We are better people than the wicked sinners that we might know about here or there. We convince ourselves that we are pretty good people. But that is not the case. We are not good people. We are sinful. We are fallen in Adam. We are corrupt, so that we carry with us a totally depraved nature; and that totally depraved nature does nothing but sin. It hates God. It hates the neighbor. It knows nothing of love for God and of love for the neighbor. That is what we carry around with us our whole lives upon this earth as sinners. And now, who are we to stand before the holy God?

What is the great problem of man? Not how to get another dollar, not how to get a few more years of health. The great problem of mankind is that we stand before a holy God every single day! And his eyes are too pure to behold evil. And when he looks, he doesn't look as a man looks; he doesn't see the way you and I see. We can cover up our sins in front of our fellow men. But when God looks, he sees right through us, right to our hearts. He knows what our thoughts are. He knows what our nature is. Jehovah God is a holy God, and we are sinners before him. This is the great problem of mankind: that we are sinful.

The Bible uses several pictures to help us understand the nature and the awfulness of that corruption. The Bible describes our sin as leprosy. It describes our sin as lameness; as a withered hand; as blindness; as dumbness; as deafness; as death, even. Our sin is this thorough corruption, so that spiritually, we are dead. That is our corruption. That is our filth. That is our problem. We humans are sinful.

Now, how are you, how am I, going to stand before such a holy God, who is so perfectly devoted to himself that he cannot look upon sin with any pleasure?

The solution to this problem of man is that God saves sinners. He saves sinners! That is an astounding thing. God saves sinners? God, who is so high and holy, saves those who are so lowly and depraved as us? God saves sinners? That would be like going to the sickest person you could find, with the most contagious disease—going to a leper, perhaps, or going to someone who is on the verge of death with a terrible, terrible illness—and picking that person up; carrying that person into your house; laying that person on your bed in your bedroom; giving that person a place at your table; and giving all of your money to that person, so that the whole of your wealth belongs to that person now. That is what salvation is like. It is God's coming to those who are utterly helpless, utterly poor, utterly sick, utterly dead, and taking us to himself.

And what does God do with us as he takes us to himself? He says to us, "You are mine! You people, who are so wicked and iniquitous, are mine! You belong to me! In fact, I'm going to call myself your God, and I'm going to call you my people." That is love language; that is covenant language. That is the language of those who are very, very close. "I am yours, and you are mine." That is the way God speaks to us. "I am your God, and you are my people." God takes us into his house; he gives us a place at his table; he takes us into his embrace, into his arms; and he says about us, "Not only have I given you a place with me, but you are my children now, my sons and my daughters. And you are going to live with me forever and ever; and all my riches, everything that I have, is yours"—not physical, earthly riches but the wealth and the riches of heaven. This is the marvel, the wonder, of the truth of the sovereign God of salvation: God saves sinners such as us.

It may be that a man remains very, very poor all his life, so that he is never a wealthy man. It may be that a man is very, very sick all his life, so that he struggles with cancer or another dread disease. But God comes to his people and gives to us the wealth of heaven, the wealth of an inheritance with him, the wealth of comfort and peace, so that, though we have nothing on the earth, we have everything of God and everything of his salvation. This is the wonder of the sovereign God of salvation: God saves sinners.

That raises a critical question: How can it be that God saves such as us? How does God save sinners such as us? The wonder of God's saving us sinners is that he does so through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the savior by whom God saves sinners.

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the savior by whom God saves sinners? It means that Jehovah God, the high and lofty God, came down to us through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God—he is the second person of the Trinity—and Jesus Christ is man, born of the virgin Mary. Jesus is God and man united together as one, so that one of the names of Jesus is Emmanuel,



which means *God with us*. The holy God came down to us sinners through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He came right into our poverty. He came right into our sickness, right into our death, right into our filth, right into our sin. And he came down into our filth as one who himself is not filthy, one who himself is not naturally poor, one who himself is the Son of the living God. He came down to us and came into our poverty, came into our sin, came into our filth, that he might save us.

And the way of that salvation is wonderful. It is so wonderful that no one could ever imagine it. You could never come up with such a beautiful way of salvation. That beautiful way of salvation is this: Jesus took your place. He took your place as a sinner, so that you and I, who sin, you and I, who are corrupt and filthy, have all of our filth, all of our corruption, laid on Christ. All of his people have all of their filth and corruption laid on Jesus Christ, so that he was filthy, and he was sinful, and he died—not for any sin of his own but for yours and mine. The Lord Jesus Christ took our place, as our substitute, under the curse of God, so that the holy God, who looks right through your and my façade, who looks right through our appearances and sees right to our hearts—Jehovah God looked right through Jesus Christ to his heart and said about Jesus’ heart, “You are guilty. All the sin of my people is yours. All of it belongs to you—not because you did it but because I count what they did as yours.” That is what the cross was about. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross—because God counted him guilty with the sins of his people.

What does that mean? When God looks through your appearance at your heart, when he looks right through you and with his holy eyes looks into you, what does he see? He sees absolute perfection. No sin! No sin whatsoever. None. Why? Because we have been so good? No! We have sinned; all we have done is sin. Even our best works are polluted with sin. But when he looks through us, what he sees is the Lord Jesus Christ because everything that Christ did

was counted as ours. Or, as Paul says in II Corinthians 5, “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (v. 21).

And that is not all. That would be enough. That would be enough for an eternity of praise to God. But that is not all. Not only was Jesus Christ our substitute in bearing our sin and our iniquity; but he also has been our substitute as the one who has obeyed God perfectly, so that every single thing that God requires—which is love of God, love of the neighbor—Jesus Christ has fulfilled. Christ has perfectly measured up to Jehovah God, to his being, so that Christ in his human nature was as devoted to God as God is devoted to himself. Christ did that in our place, so that now when God looks through you and me, what he sees in our hearts is perfect consecration to God—not because you did it, not even because you begin to do it. What he sees there is Jesus’ perfect consecration to him, which he counts, or imputes, as ours.

That is the wonderful way of salvation. That is the marvelous miracle of salvation. God saves sinners through Jesus Christ’s taking our place under his curse and under his law. Marvelous, marvelous salvation.

That salvation in Jesus Christ, then, is not a matter of earthly gain. It may be that the child of God never gains anything on this earth. In fact, it may be that all his life, all he ever does is lose—lose his name, lose his reputation, lose his freedom someday, lose his life for the sake of the gospel, lose his place, lose everything for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet the child of God is rich and full with the blessings and the comforts of heaven.

That is what we read about in Isaiah 44 as well, as God speaks to his people, saying to them,

For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. (vv. 3–4)

This is the overflowing of God to his people in Jesus Christ. This is what he gives to all of those whom he has chosen for himself: a marvelous, marvelous abundance, so that we can't even comprehend it. Our minds always think in terms of something for something, so that if I want, let's say, a refill of my drink, then I have to go pay for a refill. God doesn't give something for something; he gives something for nothing. He gives everything for nothing. He pours out to us his riches and his fullness and his salvation, so that we, who are sinners and have no right to stand before him otherwise, are filled with God and all of his goodness and have with him an inheritance forever and ever, one that can never be taken away. Though men kill the body, they cannot kill the soul. God keeps, and God blesses and abundantly overflows to his people.

That is what Jesus said in John 4 as well, when he was at Jacob's well with the Samaritan woman.

Whosoever drinketh of this water [that comes out of this well] shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:13–14)

Salvation is simply unending. It is simply full abundance as God pours out to us all of the riches of salvation in Christ, so that every single time the child of God says, "I need more. I am empty," God fills him and pours out on him all the riches of salvation in Christ, so that he has comfort and peace and blessing in his earthly sojourn.

That is the wonder of salvation. That is the truth that God saves sinners.

And now, what about the word *sovereign*? The *sovereign* God of salvation, or God *sovereignly* saves sinners. The word *sovereign* means, first, *mighty, able, powerful*. God is a sovereign God. His arm is not shortened, so that he can't reach all the way down and give salvation. His hand is not weak, so that, desiring and determining to

give that salvation, he fails to give it. God is mighty; he is sovereign; he is all-powerful, so that the sovereign God does not fail to bestow that salvation upon his people through Jesus Christ. Look at Jesus Christ. Behold him. There is the sovereignty of God. What did it take for God to come in our flesh? That is a miracle, a wonder that we cannot fathom, cannot wrap our minds around. God became flesh? The Word became flesh and dwelt among us? In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily? There is the sovereignty of God in coming to his people.

And that word *sovereign*, second, means that God *alone* can do this. Who else is sovereign? Who is sovereign other than Jehovah God, who can come in our flesh, put all our sins upon Jesus Christ, and give all of his righteousness to his people in Christ? Who can do that, other than Jehovah God? There is no one else. That God is sovereign means that he alone can do this.

That means—and here your flesh and mine is going to be offended, offended greatly—that you cannot, and I cannot. You cannot deliver yourself of your sins. I cannot deliver myself. There is nothing you have in yourself and nothing I have in myself that can deliver us from our sins. There is no desire you have in yourself that is enough to deliver you from your sins. There is no determination that you have in yourself, no merit that you have in yourself. There is nothing you and I have in ourselves that can deliver us. God alone is sovereign. God alone saves sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that means that there is nothing else in this world that can save us. Money cannot do it. Health cannot do it. Wealth cannot do it. Reputation cannot do it. There is nothing in the world that can deliver us from our sins—only God through Jesus Christ.

There is a word that the Reformed faith uses to describe the fact that only God can do this, and that is the word *alone*. God *alone* saves sinners—not mankind, not with the help of mankind, not by your strength or your will or might, not by mine; but God alone saves sinners. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that lovely? God saves sinners



and God alone. If it were up to me, I never would be saved, never could be saved. If it were up to you, you couldn't be saved. But God alone saves sinners through the wonderful miracle of Jesus Christ. God is sovereign in our salvation.

Sinner, believe in Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can help. He is the only one who can deliver and save. No one else can. He alone does.

We have been talking about salvation—the sovereign God of salvation. When we talk about salvation, the fact that God alone can do it, we are actually talking about God. God is the main topic in salvation. The main topic in salvation is not you, not me, not what happens to us, not how we get delivered. The main topic is God. And this truth that God is sovereign in salvation means that there is only one God. The one who saves is the one who is God. Remember what we have seen about salvation. Remember what we have seen about what it takes, through Jesus Christ, to save sinners, so that sinners can stand before the holy God and live with him and be his friends and his family. The one who saves, then, is God. The fact that God saves means that God alone is God. If you save yourself, you are God. If I save myself, I am God. If you contribute to your salvation, if you add to it, if you cooperate with God in accomplishing your salvation, you are God. And if I cooperate with God in adding to my salvation, then I am God. When we talk about salvation, we are talking about who is the God, who alone is the God. Because God saves, God is God. And again, we can use that word *alone*. Just as God alone saves, so God alone is God.

That is the marvelous truth about the sovereign God of salvation.

### The Persistent Lie

There is a persistent lie that goes against that truth of salvation. It is a very deceitful lie that attempts to place on God's throne someone else besides God. It is an attempt to have God as God *and* someone else as God. Not God *alone* is God, but God *and* someone else are God. Not God *alone* saves, but God *and* someone else save.

This persistent lie began with the devil. We read about that in Isaiah 14. The devil was a holy angel at his creation. God did not create the devil wicked. God was perfectly sovereign over the devil's fall into sin, but God created the devil good. The devil, in pride, fell.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isa. 14:12–15)

There is the devil's fall. Do you see what the devil did? Do you see what he wanted? Do you see what his lie and his deceit was? "I will be like God! I will sit with him. He can have his throne; he doesn't have to go anywhere; he can be exalted above the stars; I'll let him stay there—but I am going to be there with him. I'm going to sit next to him. I'm going to be God with the most high." It was the lie that God is God *and* someone else is God with him—in this case, the devil.

That is the lie that the devil spoke to Eve in the beginning, in the garden of Eden. When the devil came to Eve in the form of a serpent and spoke to her, what was his lie to her? First he had questioned God's word: "Yea, hath God said?" But then the devil told Eve, "If you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will not die. Rather, God knows that in the day that thou eatest thereof, *ye shall be as God*." Some translations of the Bible use the plural there—gods—but the translation should be God with a capital G. "Ye shall be as God" (Gen. 3:5). The devil's—Lucifer's—dream, his deceit, he was transferring to Eve. "Eve, you can be God too. Mankind can be God." And that has been man's deceit ever since. From the garden of Eden until this day, the deceit of mankind is that

we can be God. We can sit with God; we can be equal with God.

That was what Cain's sacrifice was, when he brought of the fruit of the ground to God. That sacrifice represented Cain—all his sweat of his brow, all his bloody hands' tearing the thorns out of the ground, all his labor for the whole growing season to produce a crop; and now his crop is full, and his crop is good, and he comes to God and lays that crop on the altar, which means Cain was laying himself on the altar. "Accept me, God, for what I have done." There was Cain, thinking that he was equal with God.

That was what the Tower of Babel was. The Tower of Babel was mankind's getting together—to do what, according to Genesis 11? To "make us a name" (v. 4). What kind of name? The name God. This tower wasn't just an engineering feat to see how high man could build a tower, but this was an assault on heaven. It was a bridgehead to heaven so that man could assault God; man could go up and sit with him on his throne; and man could get himself a name alongside God. But God had to come down to see the tower. Even after man did all of his work; even after man, with all his conceit, thought that he would be equal with God, God had to come down to see what man was doing way down there. The Tower of Babel was simply that same old deceit and conceit that man can be God.

That is the same conceit and the same deceit that is very, very popular today. This conceit especially works by making man his own savior. Who is your savior? Who saves you from your sin? Who delivers you? Because, remember, he who saves is he who is God. If God saves, then God is God. But if man saves, then man is God. That is the great conceit of mankind: we save ourselves.

Man is endlessly creative in coming up with ways to make himself his own savior. Man will teach that his works are meritorious. That is the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church: meritorious works, so that God gives you some grace—he starts the whole process; he'll give you the mass; he'll give you some grace in that

sacrament, as they call the mass—and then with that little bit of grace that he gives you, you can do some good works. And God sees those good works, and those good works merit with him, so that God gives some more grace for those good works. And with that grace you do even more good works yet and keep meriting and meriting with God. That is simply *man saves man*. How do you climb the ladder of grace? How do you get more with God? By what you do! And if man is the savior, then man is God. It is just Cain's doctrine from early on. It is just the doctrine of the Tower of Babel.

Or Arminianism teaches that it is man's will by which man saves himself. Roman Catholicism: by man's work and his merit. Arminianism: by man's will. Here is Arminianism: God wants to save everybody. He really hopes everybody is saved. But God can't do it without your help. And so God is going to make it possible for you to be saved; and now all that you have to do is, by an exercise of your free will, accept what God is offering to you. And by that exercise of your free will, now you are saved. What is that? That is just *man saves himself*. God might do a lot of it. He might send Christ to the cross. He might make it all possible. But at the critical moment when it is time for that salvation to come to you, to come into your possession, it comes by an exercise of your free will, so that Arminianism is nothing but that old idolatry that man is equal with God. It is the same idolatry as Roman Catholicism, the same idolatry as Cain. Man is God, and man by his power is God and is equal with Jehovah God.

Or there is the teaching of the well-meant offer of the gospel. The well-meant offer, or the free offer, of the gospel teaches that God comes to man with an offer. God offers to man salvation, if only man will accept it. Now, sometimes the well-meant offer of the gospel doesn't talk about the free will, in an attempt to distinguish itself from Arminianism. But it is the same thing: God offers it, and he hopes you take it. He hopes everyone who hears takes it because God really wants to save every single person.

But now, God makes that offer to everyone—everyone who hears the gospel, at least—and what happens between the man who does not accept that offer and the man who does? Well, the man who does accept that offer distinguishes himself by what he does from the man who does not accept the offer, so that now it is not God’s sovereign power that comes to a dead man like me and rescues me from my sin and filth and pollution by a work of his sovereign grace; now it is me. Now it is my distinguishing myself from the man who is not saved.

Or the doctrine is taught that man saves himself in his own experience. And this is all around us today: that man in his experience does something, so that by his doing that thing, he gets the experience of salvation. We all experience salvation. We experience God. We experience the wonder of God’s salvation of his people. We have what the Bible calls an “inner man.” We have an inner life. We have an outer life too: the life of the body. We can see the members of the body. I have hands; I have a head; I have feet. We also have an inner man: the life of the soul. The inner man has members like the outer man does: the members of mind and reason and will. And in that inner man we feel. We experience. In that inner man there is turmoil. In that inner man there is peace. In that inner man there is assurance. And the teaching that makes man his savior says, “God does provides salvation objectively; but now, in our inner man, in our subjective experience, there is something that we have to do in order to obtain forgiveness of sins, the assurance of forgiveness of sins, peace with God, comfort with God, the experience of fellowship.” And just keep the list going—in anything that you experience in the inner man, there is something you must do first, behind which stand all these gifts of Jehovah God.

That is the same as Arminianism, and it is the same as Roman Catholicism, because at the key point when you are going to get your salvation and your experience, you have to do something in order to obtain something.

All of these are simply doctrines that man saves himself; man contributes to his salvation; and, therefore, man is God. And all this deceit is very clever, very crafty, because often this deceit will work this way: by saying to you who reject that kind of theology, “Are you against good works? Are you against repenting? You teach that there is no need to repent! You teach that there is no need to do good works!” That is not our doctrine at all. That is not the truth of the Reformed faith, that we don’t need to repent or to do good works. The Reformed faith says, “Repent. Repent of your sin.” It says, “Do good works. Obey. Love God. Love the neighbor.” The Reformed faith says all of those things. But here is the key to those things: the Reformed faith says, “Repent, and love God, and love the neighbor, and obey, and do good works *not—* *not—* unto salvation, unto your experience, unto your blessing, unto your peace. Don’t do these things *unto* but *because of*.” And that is a world of difference. That is the difference between night and day; it is the difference between heaven and hell. God comes to us, who are helpless, and he saves sinners through Jesus Christ. And God, then, because of that salvation, says to us, “Now, live in gratitude to me in a life of repenting and a life of obeying.”

### The Enduring Truth

Over against all of the persistent and deceitful lie stands the enduring truth that God saves sinners: that God alone saves sinners and that God alone saves sinners through Jesus Christ alone.

How can we detect the difference between that truth and that lie? The lie will always use the language of the truth. It will speak of grace. It will cloak itself in the words of the Reformed faith. How do we detect the difference between the truth and the lie? We do so this way, according to the word of God, which is always consistent: the consistent teaching from beginning to end is that God is God. God is God—not man. And God saves sinners—not man. That is the consistent teaching of scripture. And the true doctrine of salvation will reflect this consistency. When someone teaches, “God saves sinners,” but then

says, “But now you have to do something to enjoy that salvation,” that doctrine is inconsistent. What is the doctrine of the word of God, according to Isaiah 44, which we read, for example? There is no other God! “Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any” (Isa. 44:8). The doctrine that God is God and God saves sinners runs right through the scriptures.

That is comfort for the child of God. That is glorious, glorious comfort. God saves a sinner like me! I can’t save myself! I can’t even begin to deliver myself! If it is up to me in the slightest, I am lost forever! But God comes to a wretch—a

filthy, corrupt, dead man—like me, and he saves me! He does so through his only begotten Son, through Jesus Christ. I can live the rest of my life in joy in that gospel. I can go to heaven and live forever in the praise of God and in the joy of that gospel. This is the great comfort of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so let us end where we began, by returning to that simple statement that we made at the beginning. What is the truth of the sovereign God of salvation? It is this: God saves sinners, and he does so alone.

—AL

## HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

April 14, 1921

(pp. 229–31)

**Our Doctrine** by Rev. H. Hoeksema

### Article CXIV: Dr. Janssen’s Notes (continued)

**D**r. Janssen claims that I am doing him an injustice when I claim that according to his view the chief source of theological joy is the search rather than the possession of the truth.

Let the notes speak for themselves. Here the whole passage follows:

“By science we mean in general a discipline that has for its aim the discovery of truth.

“Science searches for **truth**. That makes every science fascinating. Bearing this in mind we can understand how it is that many sciences which have no charm for us have great charms for other individuals. Man longs to find truth.

“Science **searches** for truth. This is characteristic of every science. With truth for their goal, and spurred on by the element of search, seemingly dry sciences become very interesting to some people.

“The final goal has not yet been reached. In every science there is still truth that must be obtained. Even in higher mathematics the objects of science have not been entirely realized. New discoveries are still being made even here.

“**The demands of science are therefore never satisfied when truths are merely presented as facts. Then the element of search is lacking. The mere presentation of facts would not be in a true sense a science. The element of search in the sciences gives them the character that we may call philosophical in the most original sense of that word.** Search for the truth means attachment to it and love for it. ‘Philo sophia,’ ‘wijsbegeerte.’<sup>1</sup> In this general sense the theologian is a philosopher in the highest sense of the word. (In this paragraph we underscored.)

“In most sciences it is this search for the truth that keeps them alive. Take the study of Sanskrit or the higher branches of mathematics

<sup>1</sup> English translation: “philosophy.”



with complicated equations. What is the use of studying that? Or take the Homeric dialect. What good does the study of that do?

“But that is not the point. The study of these things involves a search and it is this element of search that keeps these sciences alive. The element of search is found there just as well as in the supremest science—theology. The data in itself may be worthless, but for the one who has secured the data it is not worthless, for he has secured for himself the satisfaction of attaining the aim of his search.

“Search is attractive even in ordinary life where science is not involved. Take fishing. It is not so much the fish as the element of trying to get the fish that makes it attractive. So also hunting.”

Here is the passage to which I referred when I claimed that according to the professor the chief source of theological joy is the element of search.

It is this statement of mine, based on these notes, which the professor pleases to call a falsification of his notes.

He feels himself that the statement that the chief joy of a theologian is the search for the truth cannot bear the light of publicity. But now the professor denies that he taught this.

Now, let us bear in mind that there is only one kind of notes. The public might receive the impression that there are different versions of the notes of Prof. Janssen. This is not the case. All the students have the notes which I am quoting. Another and different copy of the notes there is not.

Let us see what the professor teaches in the passage quoted.

Science searches for truth. That makes every science fascinating. Man longs to find truth. It is not the possession of the truth, therefore, which is the object of science. No, the element of search is the chief source of fascination. The fact that all the truth has not yet been found is what makes every science so fascinating.

That this is not a wrong reading or falsification of the professor's notes is evident from all that follows. The professor says that the demands of science are never satisfied when truths are merely presented as facts. And that for the simple reason that the element of search is lacking then. A mere presentation of facts would not be in the true sense a science. It is always that element of search, of discovery, of finding that makes a science real. Otherwise there would be no interest in some sciences. It is the element of search that keeps the sciences alive. And theology is a live science because of the presence of this element of search.

That I am not misinterpreting the professor's meaning is plain above all from the illustration he employs. “Take fishing,” the professor says. “In fishing it is not so much the fish as the element of trying to get the fish that makes it attractive. And the same is true of hunting.” It is not the game, but the element of trying to get it that makes hunting attractive. And these illustrations must serve to shed light on the professor's conception of science, also of theology. It is a search after truth, just as fishing is a search after fish, and just as hunting is a search after game. If you would bring the fisherman a nice basket of fish he would not appreciate it. And if you would make the hunter a present of a nice cut of well prepared venison, he would not care for it. He wants to have the satisfaction of searching for it, of trying to get it in his own strength and by his own ingenuity. Now, what is true of the fisherman and the hunter in ordinary life is true of the theologian in his search for the truth. If you come to him with dry facts, he does not care. If you bring the truth to him all ready-made and revealed, he does not call that science. Only then does he acknowledge anything to be scientific if it has been obtained through man's own search.

Thus I understand the notes. And that not because I cannot read, or understand correctly what the professor says in these notes. But simply because the notes themselves teach this beyond a shadow of doubt.

And I maintain that this standpoint is not the standpoint of faith, but of unbelieving science.



It seems to me also Dr. Janssen must know that it is exactly this standpoint of search as the chief element of attraction in science which Dr. A. Kuyper condemned so strongly and uncompromisingly in his Scholastic II. In that little book the Netherland theologian employs the very same illustrations of fishing and hunting to make clear the standpoint that must never be accepted among us.

Search for truth! Man longs to find the truth! We are seekers after truth! Yes, it sounds so beautiful, so scientific, so noble, so true. It so easily inspires the young hearts and minds when you tell them that a mere presentation of facts is not science, and that they must become seekers after truth.

But it is a dangerous, a fundamentally wrong standpoint the moment it is applied to the Word of God.

The nobility of the people of God is not that they are seekers after truth, but that they begin by saying that they possess the truth. They have the revelation of their God. It is for them, whether they are simple laymen, or professors or doctors of theology, an axiom of faith that the Word of God is the infallible objective truth, concerning which faith is immediately certain through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Christian does not search here to discover the truth. He does not first of all throw Scripture away in order to experience the joy of finding it again along the way of scientific research. For if he does he will never find it back. Our theological or scientific search never gives us the Word of God. That search begins by having the Word of God. It does not begin by doubting the fact of inspiration. But it is a priori, before all things

certain that Scripture as a whole is the infallible Word of God from Genesis to Revelation. On this basis it is also a fact that stands established before any search on the Christian's part, yea, even though he could never scientifically defend his position, that all views that are not based on the fundamental truth that Scripture is the Word of God, that take a position over against that Word, are erroneous and condemned. It does after all not depend upon his search to determine that such theories of Scripture as that of the Wellhausen school are absolutely wrong. Neither does he offer to stand on the same general standpoint of scientific search with them. There is, from the very start, a radical, a fundamental difference of standpoint between the rationalist and the Christian. And that fundamental difference is this: the Christian stands always on the basis of faith; the rationalist refuses to take that position.

But does not Dr. Janssen agree with us here? Does he, perhaps, mean that we must in all our search first of all assume that fundamental position of faith, and then search the Scriptures?

No, he does not. He maintains that when we begin our search with regard to the Word of God nothing may be certain. We may have no foregone conclusions. We may have no prepossessions. We must be unbiased. Only then we can judge Scripture fairly.

This is what Dr. Janssen makes plain when he speaks about the method that must be followed in theological search.

But with regard to this I will quote and explain next week.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

#### NOTE OF THE PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

As announced last week, the debate between Rev. Hoeksema and Prof. Janssen will be closed next week.

The "interference" that Prof. Janssen speaks of in the article below was no injustice. The editor-in-chief was compelled to omit the article because he was pressed for room. Otherwise the articles of Prof. Janssen have appeared in The Banner as soon as they were handed in. That Prof. Janssen is not finished with the articles, as he claims, is no fault of the Publication Committee.

## The Erroneous Views and Unwarranted Criticisms of Rev. H. Hoeksema (continued)

**T**he article below, as the contents will show, was written before I had any knowledge that the Publication Committee would put an end to the controversy. The article was presented at the Banner office amply in time to have appeared in last week's issue. Through interference, the justice of which I fail to see, the article did not appear. The situation now is such that I do not care to contribute anything further for The Banner. This article, too, would have been withdrawn by me were it not that absolute silence on my part might be misinterpreted by the readers. The article, as will be seen, forms the transition to a new topic. Several more were in preparation and surprises were in store to show Rev. Hoeksema's Anabaptistic views, his denial of common grace, in their bearing on his criticism of the "professor's dictations."

First of all a word in reply to Rev. Hoeksema's interruptions (Banner March 31). The point we are on just now is the truthfulness of what Rev. Hoeksema writes. We have been looking into his statements as given in The Banner of Jan. 27. He calls them "facts gathered from the notes of the students." These "facts" I have started to compare with the so-called "notes." (It may be well to remind the readers that I have before me and am using the same "notes of the students" that Rev. Hoeksema is using.) But on examination these "facts" of Rev. Hoeksema are not there in the "notes." How is this to be explained? What has Rev. Hoeksema done with these notes? In one of the cases we examined he has in some places inserted expressions and has in other places added statements of his own, and the material thus gained, the notes thus changed and enlarged, he presents to the Banner readers. For example, Rev. Hoeksema wrote (Banner Jan. 27) as follows: "The incident of Rebekah's inquiring of the Lord at the time she was pregnant of Esau and Jacob is explained as follows: Rebekah turns to a sanctuary in Canaan. The functionary (the priest) at the sanctuary gives

her an oracle. The oracle is: 'The elder shall serve the younger.' The oracle may also mean, 'the younger shall serve the elder,' as the object of the sentence may be the subject. Thus the functionary at the sanctuary is always safe." In this passage, as we saw, Rev. Hoeksema inserts the phrase "in Canaan" (he also inserts "the priest") and adds, "Thus the functionary is always safe." As to the last clause, with the insinuating words "always safe," we showed that the very opposite is to be found in the "notes." By this and similar procedure of Rev. Hoeksema we were led to write (Banner March 24) as follows: "The readers will realize we have at present two versions of the professor's teachings, two sets of notes. The notes of the students and [what may now be called] the notes of Rev. H. Hoeksema. The notes of the students are not complete or perfect. They do not claim to be complete or perfect. But when compared with Rev. Hoeksema's notes or rather 'facts' (for so he calls his statements) how does the matter stand? This question, it will be realized, has almost become superfluous. The answer is no longer doubtful. Rev. Hoeksema's 'facts' are full of falsifications and false testimony."

This comment of mine, together with the literal quotations which I gave from the students' notes to show the falsity of Rev. Hoeksema's statements, apparently makes Rev. Hoeksema feel uneasy. He begins to interrupt at great length and makes haste to also give literal quotations from the "notes of the students." (In the case of the Rebekah incident Rev. Hoeksema, however, quotes only a **part** of the notes. On that **same page** of the students' notes there is a great deal more. On that page occurs the quotation that "the official agent [Rev. Hoeksema tells the readers he is a 'priest,' but the notes do not say he is a priest] gives the woman an oracle from Jehovah." There, too, is found the quotation that "Rebekah goes to a sanctuary [or "sacred spot," another expression for sanctuary in the notes on the same page] to elicit a divine utterance."

There, too, we read that Rebekah “tells Jacob about the oracle,” and that “they had prophecy in their favor, but ‘liepen God vooruit.’”<sup>2</sup> These passages in the notes refute Rev. Hoeksema’s statement: “Thus the functionary at the sanctuary is **always safe**” (compare above). But Rev. Hoeksema for some reason or other has refrained from quoting these passages. Very well and good that Rev. Hoeksema now at this late stage starts to give literal quotations after I have begun to quote literally from the notes to show up to the readers the false testimony contained in his statements of Banner, Jan. 27. These latter statements, however, Rev. Hoeksema must remember, remain there and cannot be effaced. **These statements** I am looking into. It is **these statements** that are turning out to be false. The amazing thing throughout it all is, however, that though I am showing by literal quotations from the notes that what Rev. Hoeksema writes is not true, that he presents false testimony—the amazing thing is that he persists in saying that it is “all true.” Well, we know by this time how we are to take his expressions “facts” and “all true.” The Anabaptistic doctrine that Rev. Hoeksema has been presenting to the readers of The Banner is, of course, “all true.” Otherwise he would not have given it. That doctrine is of the nature of “facts!” When he told the readers what the Publication Committee had written me, it was also “all true.” That there is no common grace and that common grace is not taught in our confessional writings is “all true!” We should no longer allow ourselves to become disturbed by Rev. Hoeksema’s “facts” and “truths.”

Rev. Hoeksema’s lengthy interruption of March 31 contains also another element that should not escape our attention. Rev. Hoeksema starts to ask questions, numerous questions on the “notes.” For example, he asks, “What does the professor mean when he says, ‘If these narrations go back so far?’” In other words, Rev. Hoeksema does **not understand** the notes of the students, the notes from which he has gathered

his “facts” and “truths,” the notes on which he founds his attacks, the notes which he claims he **understands**. A very instructive phenomenon. A highly interesting thing to see Rev. Hoeksema asking questions and betraying his ignorance and uncertainty as to what the notes mean. Some instruction might put Rev. Hoeksema on the right track. But does Rev. Hoeksema want me to give him lessons in Old Testament history in the pages of The Banner? Does he want me to do so at **this** juncture, when I am engaged in exposing the unsoundness of his “facts”? When I am on the point of taking up another weighty investigation in regard to his criticism of the dictations? Rev. Hoeksema—this is the point I made in my very first article in The Banner, and repeat here—should have been over to see me about the notes before taking any other step, before he had the right to take any other step. (I do not say this because I feel that I could have satisfied Rev. Hoeksema. I entertained no hopes as to that. His general views are, it is clear, too fundamentally unreformed for that. But it would have been the only justifiable course for Rev. Hoeksema to pursue.) Of that opportunity he did not avail himself. Does he now want to make good his mistake? Here and in other places in his interruption Rev. Hoeksema, to use a Dutch expression, “praat zichzelf vast.”<sup>3</sup>

Enough has been said in regard to Rev. Hoeksema’s statements, enough evidence furnished for the falsity of his statements, so that we can now proceed to the discussion of another point. There is one matter that interests us all, viz., the connection between Rev. Hoeksema’s denial of common grace and his criticism of the “professor’s dictations.” When Rev. Hoeksema began his attacks in The Banner, it became clear to me, more so than ever before, that there was something fundamentally wrong with his theology. Rev. Hoeksema’s views of Old Testament history, of revelation, I discovered, were not what could properly be called Reformed, but were influenced by Anabaptistic errors. For that

<sup>2</sup> English translation: “walked ahead of God.”

<sup>3</sup> English translation: “talks himself stuck.”

reason it seemed to me necessary to first of all make a fairly thorough examination of Rev. Hoeksema's doctrine. That examination has been made, and we all know what the outcome has been, what results, what findings, the examination has yielded us. Rev. Hoeksema, regarded for a time by many as one of the pillars of the Reformed faith, having formerly to a considerable extent the confidence of the church, has turned out to be deplorably Anabaptistic, unreformed. Not in minor matters, but in things most fundamental. Not in **one** doctrine, so that other Reformed doctrines remained intact, but the whole of his theology is affected by his

errors. As we saw, the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God, which we all hold to be the "wortelovertuiging"<sup>4</sup> of the Reformed faith, is no longer secure when common grace is denied. "Algemeene openbaring,"<sup>5</sup> a fundamental conception in Reformed faith, can no longer be upheld if common grace is denied. For in "algemeene openbaring" God's common grace operates so extensively, so powerfully. It is no wonder that our best Reformed authorities realize that "aan het loochenen of het eeren van het stuk der gemeene gratie metterdaad het gezonde karakter onzer Gereformeerde belijdenis hangt."<sup>6</sup>

—R. Janssen



<sup>4</sup> English translation: "root belief."

<sup>5</sup> English translation: "general revelation."

<sup>6</sup> English translation: "the sound character of our Reformed confession actually depends on whether we deny or honor the doctrine of common grace."