



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 27

OCTOBER 11, 2025

*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*

CONTENTS

-
- 3 MEDITATION
The Veil
-
- 4 FROM THE EDITOR
-
- 5 THE ALCOVE
–*Sola Gratia...et Una Gratia*
–A Closer Look at Selected Passages
-
- 15 REFORMATION DAY LECTURE
-
- 16 NOTES ON HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S *BANNER* ARTICLES
-
- 19 HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S *BANNER* ARTICLES
Article 131: The New King and His Kingdom: The Children of the Promise
(continued)
-



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

See reformedpavilion.com for all contact and subscription information.

And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: and thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang up the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony: and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy. And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place. And thou shalt set the table without the vail, and the candlestick over against the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south: and thou shalt put the table on the north side. And thou shalt make an hanging for the door of the tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework. And thou shalt make for the hanging five pillars of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, and their hooks shall be of gold: and thou shalt cast five sockets of brass for them.

—Exodus 26:31–37 (See also 36:35–38)

The Veil

How rich with significance was the great veil of the tabernacle! Shall we look upon it for a brief while? We shall behold the gospel of our salvation.

The veil would be made of the same fine twined linen in the same vibrant blue, purple, and scarlet colors as the main curtains of the tabernacle. But whereas the main curtains of the tabernacle would be its walls and roof, the veil of the tabernacle would serve as an inner door into the most holy place. Four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold would mark the boundary between the main room of the tabernacle—the holy place—and the innermost room of the tabernacle—the most holy place. The large and expansive veil would hang by golden hooks upon the four pillars as the door from the main room into the inmost room. “And the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy” (Ex. 26:33).

The significance of the veil is of great comfort to God’s people. For the veil testified that there is a way into God’s presence for God’s people. On one side of the veil was the holy place. The people of Israel lived in that room, as pictured by the table of shewbread with its twelve loaves; the

people prayed in that room, as pictured by the altar of incense; the people were refreshed in that room by the constant supply of the Holy Ghost, as pictured by the golden candlestick. On the other side of the veil was the most holy place. God lived and reigned in that room, as pictured by the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat. On one side, the people; on the other side, God; and the veil was the way to God.

How wonderful that there was a way! The people were but men, but God is God. The people were fallen and sinful, but God is holy. The people were creatures of the dust, but God is exalted above the heavens. How could man ever come before God? But there stood the veil as the constant testimony that there is a way for man to come before God.

Oh, yes, it is true that in the Old Testament no one was allowed to go through the veil into the most holy place except the high priest once a year with blood. But that is because the Old Testament was the day of shadows and types, and the Holy Ghost must teach the people that the veil was only a picture of the true way into God’s presence, which way was not yet revealed. “The way into the holiest of all was not yet made

manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing” (Heb. 9:8).

And now behold the fulfillment of the great veil of the tabernacle: the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. “By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12). “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (v. 24). Dying upon the cross, he tore the old veil in two because the days of shadows were finished. “And, behold, the veil of

the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matt. 27:51). And because Christ has entered into God’s throne room through his own sacrifice, we also may enter through him by faith. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh...” (Heb. 10:19–20).

Is this not lovely and comforting? It is the gospel of the veil: there is a way to God! It is the gospel of Jesus’ flesh and blood: Jesus is the way to God for sinners!

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome one and welcome all to another issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. Ours is a small but happy corner of the Lord’s kingdom, as he gives us his truth to know and confess together.

In this issue we focus on the truth of particular grace. That is, the recipients of God’s grace are not all men but only the elect in Christ. And therein lies our salvation. The occasion for our focus on particular grace in this issue is a curious appeal to Ezekiel 33:11 in Herman Hoeksema’s *Banner* article this week. That text would become a favorite for the proponents of common grace in Hoeksema’s day, and it is still their favorite in our day. In this issue of *Reformed Pavilion*, then, let us examine Ezekiel 33:11 in particular and the doctrine of common grace in general.

The main article for our study this week is Herman Hoeksema’s *Banner* article. The undersigned has also written a few notes on the *Banner* article as a companion piece. The other two articles for our examination this week were

written by the undersigned in 2014 in response to the promotion of common grace in Singapore. First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore invited Rev. Maurice Roberts of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) to speak in Singapore about God’s grace. Among other things, Reverend Roberts proclaimed that God has a common grace for all men and that he sincerely desires that all men be saved. As part of his proof for common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel, Reverend Roberts appealed to Ezekiel 33:11. The undersigned had opportunity to write about Reverend Roberts’ speech in *Salt Shakers*, the magazine of the youth of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. Because those articles deal with Ezekiel 33:11 in particular and common grace in general, they are republished here in full, without editing.

May the Lord bless us with the knowledge of his truth and give us the comfort that he is pleased sovereignly to save us poor sinners in the blood of Jesus Christ.

—AL



Sola Gratia...et Una Gratia¹

Sola gratia! Grace alone!

Sola gratia is one of the well-known Latin “five solas” of the Reformation: *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, *sola Scriptura*, *solus Deo gloria*. The “five solas” summarise the Reformation’s answer to the Roman Catholic Church, which tried to exalt man to a position alongside God. Over against the Roman Catholic teaching that salvation depends partly upon God’s work and partly upon man’s work, the reformers taught that man is justified by faith alone (*sola fide*), because of grace alone (*sola gratia*), on the basis of the work of Christ alone (*solus Christus*). Over against the Roman Catholic teaching that the pope’s word was of equal authority with God’s Word, the reformers taught the authority of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). The entire Roman Catholic system robbed God of His glory by giving it to man, whereas the reformers taught that all glory in salvation and revelation belongs to God alone (*solus Deo gloria*).

To this day, *sola gratia* is a dear and beloved doctrine in Reformed churches. This particular “sola” teaches a foundational truth about salvation, namely, that our salvation does not depend in any way upon our worth or works, but upon the sovereign grace of God alone. *Sola gratia* echoes the truth of Ephesians 2:8, 9. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” If salvation depended upon us, we would perish. Because our salvation depends upon God, we are saved indeed. Thanks be to God that we are saved by grace, and by grace alone! *Sola gratia*! Grace alone!

However, some Reformed teachers and churches today are undermining the glorious

gospel of *sola gratia* by their promotion of the theory of common grace. These teachers claim that there are two kinds of divine grace: a particular saving grace of God for His elect people alone, and a non-saving common grace of God for all people. This theory of two graces was recently promoted in Singapore by Rev. Maurice Roberts, a retired minister in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). Speaking for the 2014 Reformation Day Conference of First Evangelical Reformed Church, which had as its theme *Sola Gratia*, Rev. Roberts taught that God demonstrates His favour toward humanity in two ways: by a common grace for all and a saving grace for His people. The promotional material for the speech promised that Rev. Roberts would “elucidate upon God’s common and saving grace . . .” The speech went beyond this promise, as Rev. Roberts not only elucidated the theory of common grace, but promoted and advocated it as biblical truth.

When Rev. Maurice Roberts, a respected and influential Reformed minister, promotes common grace in Singapore, at the invitation of a Reformed church in Singapore, he gets the attention of Reformed people in Singapore—readers of *Salt Shakers* included. Therefore we are compelled to examine Rev. Roberts’ teaching by asking three questions: What is the theory of common grace? What is the error of common grace? And what are the consequences of common grace?

1. What is the theory of common grace?

Common grace is a theory about God’s attitude toward all people. It claims that God has a gracious attitude of kindness, compassion, pity, and favour for all men without exception. According to this theory, God’s favour is not limited to His elect people in Christ, but extends

¹ This article, written by Andrew Lanning, was originally published in *Salt Shakers* no. 29 (November 2014): 3–6.

to all men, including the reprobate. The name of the theory is helpfully descriptive: *common grace*. The “grace” of *common grace* describes God’s attitude as one of grace, favour, kindness, and compassion. The “common” of *common grace* describes this divine favour as extending to all men in common. According to Rev. Roberts:

There is . . . a general goodness of God, what you might call a universal kindness of God. Listen to what Jesus says about God: ‘He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.’ He is referring to His heavenly Father, and He says God is kind, merciful to those who never become Christians, who never listen to the gospel, who never read the Bible, who never go to church. God is kind even to these.

God displays this common grace to all men, so the theory goes, through the many good gifts that He bestows upon them. Not only the elect, but also the reprobate receive many necessary things and many pleasant things from God. According to the theory of common grace, bestowal of such wonderfully good gifts must imply that God also has a positive attitude of grace and favour for all who receive these gifts. According to Rev. Roberts, continuing from the quotation above:

Now let’s be clear what Jesus meant. He meant that God is so kind that in this life He gives to the wicked many favours which express His goodness and His pity to fallen sinners. What sort of things do I mean? I mean, He gives them food and drink and health and good weather and homes and good government and happiness, etc. You dear people don’t need me to tell you, as I visited your beloved island of Singapore, what a wonderful community you have. How safe it is, and how much protection you have, and how many services you have of many kinds, and benefits of many kinds. You don’t need to be hungry in Singapore – plenty of places to eat, yes. Well, that’s a favour from God, and that favour is enjoyed

by people who never ever go to church, never ever read the Bible. And Jesus puts it like this: God is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.

Common providence?

Upon reading this description of common grace, some may wonder whether Rev. Roberts is simply teaching a variation of the Reformed doctrine of providence. There may even be some who know that common grace is a false doctrine, and yet are sympathetic to what Rev. Roberts says, who attempt to excuse his theory of common grace by claiming it is merely a theory of common providence.

The term “providence” refers to God’s sovereign control over all things. Herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things are distributed to men by God according to His own sovereign will and by His own sovereign direction. Usually, the Reformed faith simply refers to God’s sovereign control as “providence”. Perhaps it would be legitimate to refer to God’s providence as “common providence”, because God exercises sovereign control over the elect and the reprobate alike. The elect man and his reprobate neighbour receive the same common providence of rain and sunshine on their crops. They enjoy the protection of the same police force. Their children catch the same flu, and see the same doctor and take the same medicine for relief. God sovereignly distributes to the elect man and to the reprobate man alike.

Such a doctrine of providence, and even “common providence,” is biblical and confessional. It is the doctrine of Matthew 5:45. “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” It is the doctrine of Article 13 of the Belgic Confession. “We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them

according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment...”

However, Rev. Roberts’ theory of common grace is emphatically not a theory of common providence. The Reformed doctrine of providence teaches that God governs both the elect and the reprobate, but it does not teach that God has the same *gracious attitude* toward the elect and reprobate as he governs them. The Reformed doctrine of providence speaks of God’s particular favour for the elect, believing saints of God. For example, Article 13 of the Belgic Confession: “This doctrine [of providence] affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father. . . .” In this article, although God sovereignly distributes to all men in His providence, His favour is only for “us,” that is, the elect children of our heavenly Father.

The Reformed doctrine of providence teaches God’s universal government, but His particular grace. Rev. Roberts’ theory of common grace teaches God’s universal government, and God’s universal grace. Rev. Roberts’ theory is not merely one of common providence, but common grace.

God’s wish to save all men

Rev. Roberts intensifies his theory of common grace by claiming that God also desires to save all men. God’s common grace, so the teaching goes, is not merely a kindness in God’s heart that gives men nice earthly gifts, but a loving-kindness that wishes to give all men the heavenly gift of salvation from sin and eternal life. God’s saving grace will only save the elect in the end. But, according to Rev. Roberts, God’s common grace makes Him desire the salvation of the elect and the reprobate alike. Quoting Rev. Roberts again:

But here’s the wonderful thing: so kind and generous is God that He expresses to sinners His wish, His desire, that they should all be saved.

Now that’s amazing.

I’m going to quote to you now. Listen to the words in Ezekiel 33: “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.” Now God is saying that to people who hate Him, and who never come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God is saying, I have no pleasure in your death, sinners. My wish is that you turn, sinners, from your wicked way.

Rev. Roberts repeatedly uses the term “sinners” in the quotation above. The sinners he is talking about are not elect sinners, predestined to salvation, but reprobate sinners, predestined to hell. They are the sinners “who hate [God], and who never come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” To these reprobate sinners, Rev. Roberts says, “God... expresses... His wish, His desire, that they should all be saved.”

2. What is the error of common grace?

Rev. Roberts’ theory of common grace is that God has a gracious attitude of kindness and mercy in His heart for all men, including the reprobate; that God distributes earthly gifts to all men in His gracious favour for them; and that God graciously wishes that all men would be saved.

Rev. Roberts’ theory of common grace is false doctrine.

It is false doctrine because it is unbiblical. The Bible teaches that God’s grace is particular. That is, the objects of God’s grace in Scripture are never all men without exception, but always His elect people alone. From the first reference to grace in Genesis 6:8 to the last reference in Revelation 22:21, God’s grace is for the elect. Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Genesis 6:8), as did Moses (Exodus 33:17). God was gracious to His church in the Old Testament (Exodus 33:16), as He is to His church in the New (Romans 16:24). Grace is for the beloved of God, called to be saints (Romans 1:7), for them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, that call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (I Corinthians 1:2, 3),

for the faithful in Christ Jesus, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:1, 2, 4), for all the saints in Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:1, 2), for the saints and faithful brethren in Christ (Colossians 1:1, 2), for the church which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:1), for the dearly beloved (Philemon 1, 3), for the elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (1 Peter 1:2), for them that have obtained like precious faith with the apostles through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1, 2), for the elect lady and her children (2 John 1, 3), and for the servants of Jesus Christ who receive His revelation (Revelation 1:1 with 22:21).

What makes the particularity of God's grace stark and clear is that the Bible always describes God's attitude towards the reprobate as an attitude of wrath, never as an attitude of favour. Always, from eternity to eternity, God curses the wicked. Indeed, His curse permeates their entire earthly life, for His curse is in their house (Proverbs 3:33). He bestows many wonderful gifts upon the ungodly, not because He is gracious to them, but to make their path slippery as they slide into destruction and desolation (Psalm 73). He hates the reprobate Esau (Romans 9:13) and Esau's children, the reprobate nation of Edom (Malachi 1:1-5). He appoints the disobedient to wrath, and makes them stumble in this life upon the Rock of offence (1 Peter 2:7, 8). He before of old ordained men to condemnation, and in this life pronounces woe upon them (Jude 4, 11).

In Rev. Roberts' theory, God's grace is common. In the Bible, God's grace is strictly particular.

The Bible teaches only particular grace, and knows nothing of a common grace, for this profound reason: God's grace is in Jesus Christ. That is, God's attitude of favour is never displayed apart from Christ, but is always grace in Christ. After all, God's attitude of gracious favour is not an attitude first of all for us, His people, but an attitude of gracious favour for

Christ Jesus. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Therefore, for us, God's grace is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1). God graciously chose us in Christ in the decree of election (Romans 11:5, Ephesians 1:4). We are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24). God's grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21). The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor; that we, through His poverty, might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). In the ages to come, God will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7). Therefore, God declares to His people in Christ, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (2 Thessalonians 3:18).

Because God's grace is in Christ, it always irresistibly and infallibly saves. Grace in Christ does not merely bestow earthly treasures, but heavenly treasures. Grace in Christ does not merely wish to save, but actually saves (Ephesians 2:8, 9), justifies (Romans 3:24), gives eternal life (Romans 5:21), sustains through infirmities (2 Corinthians 12:9), makes accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6), redeems in Christ's blood and forgives sins (Ephesians 1:7), quickens (Ephesians 2:5), calls with a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9), and helps in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

In Rev. Roberts' theory, God has a grace that does not save. In the Bible, God's grace always saves.

3. What are the consequences of common grace?

Churches and teachers that tolerate and promote common grace open themselves up to serious consequences. The worst consequence is that they make a mockery of God. The god of common grace is divided against himself. He cannot make up his mind whether he loves certain people or not, whether he should save them or not. In his eternal decree of reprobation, he

righteously hates them and wills their destruction, while in his common grace, he at the same time mercifully wishes their salvation. How perplexed the god of common grace must be as he holds both love and hatred, both blessing and curse in his heart for all of the reprobate! Not even the pagans teach that their idol gods are this confused, but the god of common grace remains impossibly bewildered. Such a god is unstable and confused; such a god is to be pitied. However, the true God of the Bible, the God of particular grace, is not divided against Himself. He is not confused about His attitude toward men. In time and eternity, He graciously blesses His chosen people in Christ; in time and eternity, He righteously curses the reprobate. With perfect consistency, He loves His own; with perfect consistency, He hates the impenitent wicked. Teachers of common grace mock the true God when they assign to Jehovah the fictional attitude of common grace.

Another, related consequence of common grace is that its proponents not only mock God, but they also mock His grace. In the theory of common grace, God's grace is utterly impotent. In common grace, God supposedly wishes and desires the salvation of all men, but that same grace is unable actually to accomplish the salvation of all men. People continue to "hate Him" and "never come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," even though God expresses to them "His wish, His desire, that they should all be saved." God's so-called common grace fails to accomplish what it desires. It is powerless, impotent, useless grace. Fallen man should tell the god of common grace to keep his grace to himself, thereby sparing both god and man the frustration of such impotence. However, the true grace of God is sovereign, powerful, and irresistible. God's grace always accomplishes what it desires, infallibly saving those whom God desires to save. The "I" in the Reformed acronym TULIP does not stand for "impotent grace" but "irresistible grace". Reformed teachers and Reformed churches who know the irresistible grace of TULIP have no business

tolerating, much less teaching, impotent common grace.

Another devastating consequence of common grace is that it opens God's people to doubt whether God is truly good to them. Especially, the child of God who suffers in this life is taught by common grace to question God's goodness to him. After all, if nice earthly things are the evidence of God's favour, then lack of these things must be the evidence of God's anger. This common grace thinking was exactly the sin of Asaph in Psalm 73. He noted with great envy that the wicked prosper (vs. 3) while he was plagued (vs. 14). At first, Asaph approached this problem from a common grace theology, assuming that God's gracious goodness was demonstrated in earthly things. Therefore, his first conclusion was that it was vain to be a child of God, because the wicked received all the evidences of God's grace. "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (vss. 12-14). So spiritually paralyzing were these doubts that they almost drove Asaph to abandon the faith. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (vss. 2, 3). These are the awful doubts that common grace theology can create in God's people. How can Reformed teachers and churches entertain, much less promote, such a theology?

God removed Asaph's doubt by bringing him finally to understand that God's attitude toward people is not demonstrated through the provision of earthly things. Rather, God always despises the impenitent ungodly (vs. 20) and is always graciously good to his people (vs. 1). The gifts that God gives in this life to the ungodly only hasten their plunge into destruction (vs. 18, 19), while the sorrows that He sends to His people are used to draw them nearer to Him (vs. 26). God rescued Asaph from devastating spiritual doubt by taking away Asaph's common grace

theology and giving him instead a particular grace theology. Likewise, it is incumbent upon all Reformed teachers and churches today to teach and defend God's particular grace, and to repudiate the soul-destroying error of common grace.

Una Gratia

The theory of common grace is false doctrine, with serious consequences. But it is popular false doctrine.

It has able, influential proponents, including Rev. Maurice Roberts. It has many adherents, including large Reformed denominations throughout the nations. It finds sympathy almost wherever it goes in the Reformed world. Indeed, the false doctrine of common grace has now been tolerated in Singapore, as Rev. Roberts openly promoted his theory at the invitation of a local Reformed church. The false doctrine of common grace is popular, and spreading.

Therefore, Reformed believers in Singapore, now more than ever, must stand for the biblical truth of God's saving, particular grace. Standing for the truth of God's saving grace will mean vigorously repudiating the theory of common grace as an intolerable false doctrine.

Perhaps Reformed believers in Singapore could even advance the cause of the true doctrine

of God's particular grace by coining a new term: *una gratia*.

The Latin *sola gratia* means "grace alone." The Latin *una gratia* means "one grace." Just as *sola gratia* expresses the biblical truth that we are saved by grace alone, so *una gratia* expresses the biblical truth that such saving grace is the only kind of grace there is. There are not two kinds of grace of God, one saving and particular, the other non-saving and common. God's grace is only saving and particular: one grace, *una gratia*. Just as *sola gratia* is a helpful, memorable way to distinguish the Reformed faith from all theories of works-righteousness, so *una gratia* could be a helpful, memorable way to distinguish the Reformed faith from the theory of common grace. *Sola gratia* is a rallying cry for all lovers of the gospel of grace; *una gratia* could be a rallying cry for all lovers of sovereign, particular grace. *Sola gratia! et (and) Una gratia!*

Regardless of whether Reformed believers use this phrase or not, let us maintain the truth that this phrase represents. We are saved by grace alone, and such saving grace is the only grace there is. By this truth, God is honoured and glorified as the sovereign, gracious God, who mercifully and infallibly saves His own people in Jesus Christ.

Sola gratia! et Una gratia! Soli Deo Gloria!

A Closer Look at Selected Passages¹

In the course of his speech on God's grace, Rev. Roberts referred to four passages of Scripture as proof for his theory of common grace: Luke 6:35, Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9, and Luke 13:34. Contrary to Rev. Roberts' interpretation, none of these passages teach common grace. In fact, all of them teach sovereign, particular grace. Let us take a closer look at these verses to see this.

What about Luke 6:35?

"But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:35, 36).

Rev. Roberts' explanation of the passage: "There is... a general goodness of God, what you

¹ This article, written by Andrew Lanning, was originally published in *Salt Shakers* no. 29 (November 2014): 6–9.

might call a universal kindness of God. Listen to what Jesus says about God: 'He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.' He is referring to his heavenly Father, and he says God is kind, merciful to those who never become Christians, who never listen to the gospel, who never read the Bible, who never go to church. God is kind even to these. Now let's be clear what Jesus meant. He meant that God is so kind that in this life he gives to the wicked many favours which express his goodness and his pity to fallen sinners. What sort of things do I mean? I mean, he gives them food and drink and health and good weather and homes and good government and happiness, etc."

Rev. Roberts interprets the "unthankful" and the "evil" to be the reprobate, "those who never become Christians." But if that is the proper interpretation, then Luke 6:35 does not merely teach a common, universal grace, but a common, universal salvation. That is because the word "kind" in Luke 6:35 does not merely refer to a non-saving positive attitude of God – a common grace; rather it refers to a redeeming favour of God – a saving grace. The word "kind" in Luke 6:35 is the Greek word *chreestos*, which is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to God's saving grace. For example, in Romans 2:4, this kindness is God's saving goodness that leads to repentance: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness (*chreestos*) of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Even in Luke 6:35, the immediately following verse makes clear that God's kindness is His mercy: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36). In Luke 6:35, God's kindness is His saving grace. Therefore, if the "unthankful" and "evil" are the reprobate, as Rev. Roberts says, then the passage teaches universal saving grace. If Rev. Roberts' interpretation is correct, then the passage proves far more than he intended.

However, let us assume for a moment that Rev. Roberts' interpretation is correct. Let us assume that the "unthankful" and the "evil" are all men, including the reprobate. And let us

assume that God's "kindness" is merely a common grace kindness, a mere non-saving mildness. Let us now see what the text supposedly teaches: "God is so kind that in this life He gives to the wicked many favours which express His goodness and His pity to fallen sinners. What sort of things do I mean? I mean, He gives them food and drink and health and good weather and homes and good government and happiness, etc." But what about the fallen sinners who are sick, who are injured, who are abused, who are bereaved, who are starving, who are poor, who are broken down under brutal regimes, who perish in typhoons and earthquakes, whose homes are broken, who are afraid? In Rev. Roberts' interpretation of Luke 6:35, there can be no such people, for God is kind to all. If Rev. Roberts' interpretation is correct, then the passage proves an absurdity.

The proper interpretation of Luke 6:35 is that the "unthankful" and the "evil" are God's elect people, described according to our sinful nature. God is kind to us with a saving love, even though there is nothing about us that is lovely. We are corrupt, depraved, and fallen; yet, God loved us from all eternity, sent Christ to die for us, and renewed us. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Even now, being born again, we are still often unthankful and still often commit evil; we still have with us the old man of sin. And yet, even now, God is kind to us, bringing us to repentance, strengthening our faith in Jesus Christ, and preparing a home for us in glory. Truly, God is kind to the unthankful and evil!

God's kindness toward us, who were his enemies by nature, is our motive to love our own enemies. Jesus' main point in this section of Luke 6 is the command, "Love your enemies" (Luke 6:27, 35). This command is not easy for us to follow, because our enemies are cruel to us. They hate us (Luke 6:27), curse us (28), spitefully use us (28), smite us (29), and steal from us (29). Such enemies do not deserve our love. But then again, we did not deserve God's love either.

His love is not given to those who deserve it, but to those who are by nature unthankful and evil enemies. The Almighty God loves his enemies; as children of the Highest, so must we also love our enemies.

There is one difference between God's love for his enemies and our love for our enemies: we are called to love all our enemies, while God only loves some of his enemies. God is only kind to the unthankful and evil who are His chosen people in Christ; we are called to love all our enemies without exception, including the reprobate. Why is this? First of all, because God alone knows who the elect and reprobate are, but we do not know. Knowing exactly whom He has chosen, God can be perfectly discriminating in His love. We, on the other hand, cannot discern how God has predestined different people. Who could have known that the thief on the cross, cruelly mocking Jesus as they both suffered, was elect? Who would have guessed that Paul, fierce persecutor of the church, was one of God's chosen people? We do not know, as God does, who are the elect and reprobate, and therefore we are called to love all of our enemies. Second, God is sometimes pleased to use our love for our enemies to call His chosen people out of darkness into his marvellous light. When men behold us doing good to those who hate us, blessing those that curse us, praying for those who spitefully use us, turning the other cheek, and giving to everyone who asks (Luke 6:27-30), they may be moved by such kindness to seek its source in God. As Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

God's kindness in Luke 6:35 is His kindness of saving grace. The unthankful and evil are His elect people, whom God in His kindness saves. Luke 6:35 does not teach common grace, but particular grace.

What about Ezekiel 33:11?

"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but

that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Rev. Roberts' explanation of the passage: "But here's the wonderful thing: so kind and generous is God that he expresses to sinners his wish, his desire, that they should all be saved. Now that's amazing. I'm going to quote to you now. Listen to the words in Ezekiel 33. 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.' Now God is saying that to people who hate Him and who never come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God is saying, 'I have no pleasure in your death, sinners. My wish is that you turn, sinners, from your wicked way. O, I press upon you, sinners, that you take seriously the claims of the gospel to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, my dear Son.' Now I find that amazing, because God says that to people who turn their back upon Him, and do not listen to Him, and ever despise what He has to say. And that surely is a sign of the loving-kindness of the Lord."

In Rev. Roberts' interpretation, the "wicked" in Ezekiel 33 are the reprobate, the "people who hate [God] and who never come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore, the reasoning goes, when God says that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, He is expressing "to sinners His wish, His desire, that they should all be saved."

However, the "wicked" in Ezekiel 33:11 are not the reprobate, but the elect. God has no pleasure in the eternal death of His chosen people, even though they were caught up for a time in the wickedness of the apostatising nation of Israel. God makes clear in this verse that He is not talking about all people, but only His chosen people, in two ways.

First, God specifically addresses His particular people: "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" God is not expressing His general attitude about all men throughout the earth. In fact, God is not even addressing all men throughout the earth in this passage. He is talking to, and about, the

“house of Israel.” The house of Israel was the Old Testament church. These are the people whose death holds no pleasure for God.

If God is talking about His church, why does He call them “wicked”? Because this prophecy was written after the culmination of Israel’s apostasy as a nation. Throughout much of the history of the kings, the nation had been desperately wicked, violating every commandment of God with increasing zeal. For her wickedness, what was left of the nation of Israel was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and the people of God now languished in captivity in Babylon. Nevertheless, God still had His chosen people, His elect remnant, among the captives. God came to them through the prophet Ezekiel with this call to repentance: “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways.” Even as God called them to repentance, He announced the good news of His grace—His particular grace—to them: “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”

Second, God emphasises the particularity of His grace by adding an important qualifier. God does not merely say, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” Rather, He qualifies it by saying, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; *but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*” God is not announcing a general love for all wicked people, but a love for turning wicked people. And who are the turning wicked people? God’s chosen people, who are brought to repent of their sins by the sovereign grace of God. When God turns them, they are turned indeed (Jeremiah 31:18).

Ezekiel 33 does not teach a universal grace of God that desires the salvation of all men, including the reprobate; it teaches a sovereign, particular grace that accomplishes the turning of his elect people in Christ.

What about 2 Peter 3:9?

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

Rev. Roberts made the claim that “so kind and generous is God that he expresses to sinners his wish, his desire, that they should all be saved.” After quoting Ezekiel 33:11, he then quoted a portion of this verse. “Listen to what Peter says in 2 Peter 3:9. ‘For God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.’ 2 Peter 3:9. We know very well from these words that God is a kind God, a merciful God, a piteous God.”

The “any” and the “all” of 2 Peter 3:9 are not any and all men whatsoever. These words refer very specifically to God’s chosen people alone. This would be obvious if Rev. Roberts had quoted the verse in its entirety, especially the phrase that “God is longsuffering to us-ward.” The passage is not teaching a general longsuffering of God, but a particular longsuffering – longsuffering to us. The “us” toward whom God is longsuffering is the people to whom Peter is writing: “them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). These are the believers, whom God does not merely wish to save, but actually saves. The proper reading of the verse would be this: God is not willing that any of us should perish, but that *all of us* should come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 does not teach a common grace desire of God to save all men, but a saving grace will of God to save all of us, His chosen people in Christ.

What about Luke 13:34?

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” (Luke 13:34).

Rev. Roberts’ explanation of the passage: “And if you want to see that [wish for all men’s salvation] illustrated in the life of Jesus, then watch what he does when he is preaching on one occasion outside Jerusalem, and the people

refuse to believe his message. Did Jesus say to them, ‘Oh pity you, you won’t listen to my message. Too bad, that’s your own fault.’ No, no, he wept over Jerusalem. The incarnate Son of God, he wept over sinners. ‘O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not.’ You see the kindness, the compassion, the pity, the favour which God the Son has for lost sinners.”

To understand this passage properly, it is important to quote it correctly. Jesus is not saying that He had often wanted to gather Jerusalem, and that Jerusalem refused to be gathered. Rev. Roberts’ mistaken quotation of the verse leaves that impression: “O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not.” Rather, Jesus is saying that he had often wanted to gather *Jerusalem’s children*, but Jerusalem opposed the gathering of her children. An accurate quotation makes this clear: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...; how often would I have gathered thy children together. . . and ye would not!”

The children of Jerusalem that Jesus desired to gather were all of His chosen people. However, “Jerusalem” opposed Jesus gathering her children. That is, the rulers of the city and the leaders of the Jews were constantly trying to undermine Jesus’ teaching. In fact, the Pharisees had just threatened Jesus with death if He did not leave Jerusalem immediately (Luke 13:31). In doing so, the leaders of the Jews

showed that they were of the same spiritual character as those in the Old Testament “which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee.”

In spite of the opposition of the leaders, Jesus would indeed gather all of His people, Jerusalem’s children, to Himself. According to Jesus’ own word in another place, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). Therefore, Jesus’ words are not a lament that His will had been frustrated, but an expression of anger over the leaders’ contrary will. As Jesus went on to say, the leaders’ house is left to them desolate (Luke 13:35).

Conclusion

The four passages that Rev. Roberts cited do not support his theory of common grace. Only with a superficial reading do they even appear to teach common grace, but a careful study shows that none of them have anything to do with a supposed common grace. In fact, all four passages actually work against Rev. Roberts’ theory of common grace, as all of them teach God’s saving, particular grace in Christ alone.

The theory of common grace is thoroughly unbiblical. Therefore, let us not give it a voice among us or tolerate it being taught among us. Rather, let us repudiate this false doctrine, and confess the only kind of grace there is: sovereign, particular, saving grace!

And let us do so to the praise of the glory of God’s grace!



REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

THE MATERIAL PRINCIPLE OF THE REFORMATION

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2025 | 7:00PM

What was the great sixteenth-century Reformation of the church about?

Well, it was about a great many things.

- It was about popes and penance.
- It was about corruption and conscience.
- It was about monks and masses.
- It was about the truth and the lie, Christ and antichrist, righteousness and unrighteousness.
- And much more besides.

Yes, but what was the Reformation about? What was it essentially about? What was the heart and the kernel of the Reformation? What was the issue that lay at the root of all that was said and done in the great Reformation of the church? What, in short, was the Reformation about?

Ah, therein lies the gospel. For the Reformation was about justification by faith alone.

We call the doctrine of justification by faith alone the material principle of the Reformation. That is, justification was the doctrine, the essence, the heart, the kernel, the issue—the material—of the entire Reformation.

And what marvelous material is justification by faith alone! For it is the gospel of our salvation in Jesus Christ alone.

This Reformation Day, we would be delighted if you would join us to hear about and rejoice in the wonderful gospel of justification by faith alone, the material principle of the Reformation.

HOST

**Remnant Reformed
Church**

SPEAKER

Rev. Andrew Lanning

FORMAT

**Lecture followed by
Q&A and refreshments**

VENUE

Pavilion Christian School, 9181 Kenowa Ave. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49534

lawgospel.com

NOTES ON HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

In the *Banner* article that is reprinted elsewhere in this issue, Herman Hoeksema continues his treatment of sovereign election and reprobation. He handles the sacred mystery of God's predestination from a thoroughly biblical and Reformed perspective, as one might expect. Hoeksema especially emphasizes the sovereignty of God in loving Jacob and hating Esau. God's eternal love of Jacob and hatred of Esau is the starting point for Jacob and Esau, as Hoeksema explains.

However, although Hoeksema's doctrine of God's sovereign election and reprobation is soundly Reformed, Hoeksema makes a curious appeal to Ezekiel 33:11: "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Hoeksema appeals to this verse to defend the Reformed faith against the Arminian slander that sovereign reprobation makes God a bloodthirsty monster who takes cruel pleasure in inflicting destruction upon the reprobate. Hoeksema correctly maintains that the Reformed have no such view of God. And Hoeksema correctly explains that God's decree of reprobation always stands in service of his decree of election. That is, reprobation is not an end in itself; reprobation serves the higher end of election. God is no bloodthirsty pagan deity but the sovereign God, who works all things according to his eternal purpose of salvation in Christ. Jacob have I loved, and—for Jacob's sake—Esau have I hated. However, Hoeksema uses Ezekiel 33:11 to demonstrate God's attitude toward the reprobate.

What makes Hoeksema's appeal to Ezekiel 33:11 curious is that the verse is not about the reprobate. If the verse were about the reprobate, it would mean that it is not God's good pleasure that the reprobate perish. Or, to state it positively, it would mean that God's good pleasure is that the reprobate be saved. Such a thing is impossible. God's counsel of reprobation is his good

pleasure. And God's counsel and pleasure are never thwarted. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). If Ezekiel 33:11 referred to the reprobate, then there would be some good pleasure of God that he fails to perform. If it is God's pleasure that the reprobate be saved, then God must be left forever frustrated that the reprobate actually perish. A frustrated God is not the God of the scriptures. The God of the scriptures does all his pleasure.

Ezekiel 33:11 would become a favorite verse of the leaders of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in their defense of the doctrine of common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel. They would apply this verse to the reprobate as proof that in predestination God wills the death of the reprobate, but in the preaching of the gospel God does not will the death of the reprobate. The day would come when they would cast this verse in Hoeksema's teeth for his denial of common grace and the well-meant offer.

The truth of the matter is that Ezekiel 33:11 does not apply to the reprobate but to the elect. The elect are wicked by nature, but God has no pleasure in their death. Rather, God's good pleasure concerning the elect wicked—which pleasure and counsel God also makes to stand—is that the elect turn from their wicked way and live.

How was it, then, that Hoeksema could appeal to Ezekiel 33:11 as applying to the reprobate? Remember that Hoeksema wrote this *Banner* article in September 1921. The great battle over common grace in the CRC was still incubating. Skirmishes had erupted, especially between Hoeksema and Prof. Ralph Janssen, but the battle had not yet been joined in earnest. The defenders of common grace were still stockpiling their rhetorical and theological ammunition and had not yet fired Ezekiel 33:11 at Hoeksema. And Hoeksema was still a minister in good standing and rising esteem within the CRC. It would

take just under three years yet for the CRC to adopt its three points of common grace at the Synod of 1924. And it would take just over three years yet for the CRC to depose and expel Hoeksema in December 1924. Not everything was clear yet in 1921, including the correct interpretation of Ezekiel 33:11.

However, though Hoeksema erred in 1921 regarding Ezekiel 33:11, God graciously gave Hoeksema the truth of Ezekiel 33:11 in the heat of the common grace controversy of 1924. Whereas in 1921 Hoeksema erroneously interpreted “the wicked” as the reprobate, by 1924 Hoeksema correctly interpreted “the wicked” as the elect. Hoeksema set forth his mature interpretation of the text in his 1934 book *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. A portion of that book was later reprinted in *Ready to Give an Answer*. Here is Hoeksema’s mature exposition of Ezekiel 33:11, which he set forth in question and answer form.

24. But do not Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11 teach that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel to the reprobate wicked?

This is surely the interpretation of the synod of 1924, as well as of Professor L. Berkhof in his booklet written in defense of the Three Points. But notice, with regard to these two texts, which are essentially the same in meaning:

- a. That in neither of these passages is there any offer of grace or salvation at all, as far as the form of the texts is concerned. In both passages we have a direct statement by the Lord, the God of Israel, that He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but therein that he turn and live. In the text from chapter 33 this statement stands in the form of an oath. It is, therefore, no offer, but a most emphatic divine assertion.
- b. That in both the texts it is the house of Israel that is addressed. The Lord, therefore, through His prophet does

not address the wicked in general, but the church, those who are called His people, those whom He chooses, but who have departed from the way of the covenant of the Lord. This certainly does not plead in favor of the interpretation that would apply this text to the reprobate wicked, or to elect and reprobate alike. It is His people whom the Lord assures of His forgiving mercy.

- c. This is corroborated by the context, especially of the text in chapter 33:11. There the assertion of forgiving grace by the Lord is an answer to the complaint of the people of God: “If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?” They were conscious of their sin. They felt that they were worthy of condemnation and death because of their transgressions. And they did not see a way out. They did not understand that the Lord is abundant in tender mercy and forgiving grace. They pined away in their sin, and they must surely die. To these people the Lord answers that there is abundant hope. For He hath no pleasure in the death of His people, even when they have departed from His ways. He will have mercy on them and forgive. Therefore, let them turn, and He will pardon, and they shall live.
- d. Finally, notice that the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked that turns and lives. Scripture elsewhere frequently testifies that the Lord does have a holy pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. For He hates all the workers of iniquity, and He shall laugh in their destruction and hold them in derision. But the Lord does have pleasure that the wicked turn from their evil way. And when they turn from their wicked way and

are wicked no more, He delights in their life, and gives it unto them abundantly by His grace.

From all these elements it ought to be very evident that the texts cannot be applied to the reprobate wicked; and, surely, that there is no general offer of grace in these passages from Ezekiel.¹

How good our covenant God is to his unworthy people. How merciful he is to reveal to us the truth of the scriptures and to give us understanding by his Spirit. Sinners may live! Because of God's good pleasure! And how refreshing it is that the church does not depend on any mere man. For even though God used men like Herman Hoeksema in the reformation of his church, it is plain that the church could not be built upon Herman Hoeksema, who was but a

man and who could err. How glad God's people are that God has established his church upon the cornerstone, Jesus Christ, who never erred and whose word is true.

May the Lord still today give us, as heirs of the reformation, the solid truth of his sovereign predestination for our comfort and for his glory.

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it. (Isa. 46:9–11)

—AL



¹ Herman Hoeksema and Herman Hanko, *Ready to Give an Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997), 87–88.

Article CXXXI: The New King and His Kingdom: The Children of the Promise (continued)

“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”—Rom. 9:13

The history of Jacob and Esau is so teeming with significance for our purpose that we cannot refrain from discussing it just a little more elaborately.

The passage in Rom. 9 runs from Vss. 10 to 13: “And not only this: but when Rebekah also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth), it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

And the passage to which the apostle refers in these words is found in Gen. 25:21–23: “And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her: and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”

Now, as we remarked above, the entire history of Jacob and Esau is so filled with significance with respect to our subject, that we wish to call your attention to its main lines just a little more elaborately than is done in these two passages.

Significant is that Jacob and Esau are twin brothers.

Significant is that before their birth the divine revelation concerning their character and future is given Rebekah.

Significant is that although Esau is not to receive the blessing, and although it is said of him that he was hated by God, yet he is the first-born.

Significant, too, is the fact that in the process of their being born, Jacob holds Esau's heel. A fact to which favorable reference is made in Hosea 12:3.

Significant is, further, that Esau as he grows up despises his birthright and becomes the fornicator, a fact to which the writer of Hebrews refers as a warning example in 12:16.

Significant, finally, that Jacob ultimately obtains the blessing not through an arm of flesh and his own intrigue, but from Jehovah through weeping and supplication, as explained in Hosea 12:4.

Now, we must remember the point of view from which we are discussing this history, namely, in the light of the question Paul is asking in Rom. 9:6: “Has the Word of God come to naught?” In those who were children of the covenant according to the flesh, descendants of Abraham, who were circumcised, and upon whom rested the promise given to Abraham evidently, but who fell away and in whom God had no pleasure, did the Word of God fail in them? And the answer which the apostle gives is: “No, for it is evident from all history, that even in the sphere of God's covenant, as it manifests itself in the world, God maintains the freedom of His elective purpose. Not all the children of the flesh were also children of the promise. This became

evident already in the singling out of Isaac, in whom Abraham's seed should be called. This also is clearly evident in the history of Jacob and Esau."

The example of Jacob and Esau is much more binding and forceful for the apostle's purpose than that of Isaac and Ishmael. The remark might be made that, although Ishmael was of the seed of Abraham, he was a son of the bondwoman and, therefore, naturally could hardly be expected to inherit with the son of the freewoman. Isaac and Ishmael were only half-brothers. But Jacob and Esau were sons of one mother. Rebekah was the mother of both. And what is more, they were twin brothers.

And what is to be clearly understood in this connection is the fact that they were twins according to God's counsel. God willed that Esau should be the twin brother of Jacob. That is the reason why they were twins. This entire history is not to be considered from the Arminian point of view. The Arminian would make the entire incident a matter of God's foreknowledge in the strict sense of prescience. The love of God toward Jacob and the hatred of Jehovah to Esau then becomes last. The whole matter is then to be presented as follows:

God knew beforehand that Rebekah was to be the mother of two sons.

God knew beforehand that Esau was to be the first-born of the twins.

God knew beforehand that Esau was to prove himself unworthy of the birthright blessing, and to become a fornicator.

Because God knew all this beforehand, he hated Esau. And because he also knew beforehand that Jacob would reveal himself as worthy of Esau's right and blessing, he loved Jacob.

This foreknowledge he revealed to Rebekah before the boys were born.

This view of God's foreknowledge seems very plausible and acceptable, and seems to do away with a very hard doctrine of election and reprobation. But in the meantime it substitutes a theory of the prescience of God which makes of

him little more than a divine clairvoyant who can see and know things in advance and foretells them.

No, we must have the Reformed and scriptural point of view. God's love of Jacob and hatred of Esau is not last but first. It is not the conclusion of the matter in the divine mind, but the point to start out from. It is not dependent upon any knowledge on the part of God of what the boys would be and do, but it is free and independent. This truth receives the emphasis in the text. That the elder should serve the younger was revealed to Rebekah before the twins were born or had done good or evil. And lest this might still be misunderstood and misinterpreted the Apostle Paul adds: "That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." There is a free election, first and sovereign and independent of the merits of the objects. There is also a free reprobation, sovereign and independent of the works of its objects. God loved Jacob and he hated Esau. And this fact stands first, not last.

Mark, this does not mean that God willed his election in the same sense as he willed his reprobation. It does not mean that God must be presented as a sort of cruel tyrant, a sort of bloody Nero, who rejoices and finds pleasure, who exults in the eternal damnation of his creatures. It does not mean at all that God is presented as a sort of wild animal that eagerly falls upon its prey to devour it. Those who maintain God's sovereign freedom in election and reprobation have often been accused of entertaining such a low and mean idea of God. And their conception was often with profound contempt presented in the phrase, "the horrible decrees." But the Reformed people have always cast such wicked slander far from them. No, it means nothing of the kind. But it does mean the maintenance of the truth of God's Word that our God is divinely free and sovereign in all his works. The Arminian view places history above God, makes the Creator dependent upon the creature. The Reformed view, which is the plain conception of Scripture, places God above all,

sovereignly in control, and lays all that is called creature at his feet. And, therefore, the Reformed conception does not imply that God willed his reprobation in the same sense as his election, as if he should find a sort of evil pleasure in the eternal misery of his creatures. On the contrary, he assures us: “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ez. 33:11). Neither does it imply that God is the cause of the wickedness of the reprobate and these are not responsible for their sin. The very contrary is true. God so works out his election and reprobation that man’s responsibility is not only maintained but even enhanced in the process.

And, therefore, the fact stands that God’s counsel in regard to his love of Jacob and his hatred of Esau is first and independent, not last and dependent upon the works of either.

Viewed in that light we obtain this result, that God with divine wisdom causes Esau and Jacob, the hated one and the loved one, the reprobate and the elect, to be born from the same mother, in the same birth. Ishmael and Isaac are only half brothers. Esau and Jacob are twin brothers. They stand in closest relationship from a natural point of view. Their rights and nature, from a natural point of view, were as nearly similar as possible. They were two children of Abraham, children of the covenant, born from the same mother in the same process of birth. On the same day they were circumcised.

Yet, the one was a child of the promise, the other merely of the flesh. And the purpose according to election stood and remained free, according to which it was said: “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.”

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

