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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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MEDITATION

And Moses went and returned to Jethro his father in law, and said unto him, Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which are in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace. And the LORD said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life. And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand. And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.

—Exodus 4:18–23

Behold the Father’s love. No, not merely the love of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, although Jethro also had a father’s love. When Moses sought Jethro’s blessing to leave Midian and return to Egypt, which would mean taking Jethro’s daughter Ziporah and Jethro’s two grandsons, Gershom and Eliezer, to Egypt as well, Jethro blessed Moses and told him to go in peace. Why? Because that priest of the most high God loved his daughter and her family and would gladly have them among Moses’ brethren, the Hebrews, the people of God. Oh yes, there was a father’s love in Jethro.

But behold the Father’s love.

The Father’s love is tender. God spoke of his people Israel in the warmest terms. God called Israel his son. God called Israel his firstborn. And God would call to the cruel Pharaoh, “Let my son go.” The terms *son* and *firstborn* and *my son* are terms of endearment. They are terms of fervent love. Behold the Father’s tender love: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1).

The Father’s love is sovereign. Oh, does God’s love burst with power and authority! Listen to God speak to Moses of the unfathomable magnitude of his love: “When thou goest to

return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.” God was speaking of his own reprobation of Pharaoh. Pharaoh could not let Israel go and would not let Israel go because God did not love Pharaoh but hated him. In his everlasting hatred of Pharaoh, God would harden Pharaoh’s heart. God’s sovereignty to love whom he will (Israel) and harden whom he will (Pharaoh) would stand as an eternal testimony of God’s sovereign election and reprobation. Behold the Father’s sovereign love: “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom. 9:17–18).

The Father’s love is faithful. God does not forget his word of love to his beloved but infallibly saves his beloved. The Lord said unto Moses in Midian, “Go, return into Egypt” in order that Moses might lead God’s beloved people out of Egypt. The language that God used with Moses—“For all the men are dead which sought thy life”—foreshadowed what God would say to Joseph many years later. Moses must go into Egypt

because the Father loved his Son, Jesus Christ, in the loins of the captive Hebrews. Moses must go into Egypt because the Father called his Son out of Egypt and called all of his people with him. Though the people of Israel long sat in darkness, God's love was faithful, and he brought them to see the great light. Behold the Father's faithful

love: "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life" (Matt. 2:20).

Behold the Father's love!

—AL

THE SCRIVENER

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

—Colossians 3:16

Colossians 3:16

We consider Colossians 3:16 this evening because of the prominence of that text in the formation of our congregation and in the controversy that arose within the Reformed Protestant Churches that led to the formation of Remnant Reformed Church.¹

As we consider this verse, we find that God is giving a very striking picture of his church. And as we consider that church, she is presented to our sight as a lovely bride. She is not beautiful in herself. In herself she is fallen in Adam. In herself she is rebellious and unfaithful. In herself she deserves to be cast out. By nature she is corrupt. But God has taken his church and has made her a beautiful woman. And the beauty of the church is expressed in the picture that Paul paints in the context of our text tonight, where he calls the church to put on, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another." That is a beautiful picture. Verse 14: "Above all these things put on charity"—put

on love. Verse 15: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." And you look at the church as she exists in the midst of this world, surrounded by the opposite of all of those things—surrounded by lies; surrounded by hatred; surrounded by all kinds of rebellion and idolatry, which the church herself is prone to by nature—and you find that God has made his church this beautiful creature, this beautiful woman, this beautiful bride.

And if we would look a little closer, we would see that the beauty of the church is not to be discovered in herself but that the beauty of the church is entirely due to her head. It is entirely due to her husband, to Jesus Christ, so that all of these things—this meekness, this forgiveness, this love—are Christ's, and the church has all of these things in Christ alone. That is a very beautiful picture of the church.

And that makes this whole matter of Colossians 3:16 a touching and precious truth for the church. There is much controversy that surrounds this verse. We have lived through many things that we have considered, rightly so, to be

¹ This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given July 26, 2023, for Remnant Reformed Church, which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrS-SCI9qfE>.

brutal. But this verse is a beautiful, beautiful verse; and the truth here is of great comfort for the church of Jesus Christ.

We can also notice about this verse that it is in the form of an exhortation. Paul is calling the church to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” In this chapter is a series of exhortations that Paul is giving the church. Verse 5, for example: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.” Verse 12: “Put on...bowels of mercies.” Verse 13: “Forbearing one another.” Verse 14: “Put on charity.” Verse 15: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.” And then verse 16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” And those exhortations will continue as well. In verse 17: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Then there is a tour of family life: wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants—all exhortations.

When we come to our exhortation in verse 16—“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”—we can see this as a central or foundational exhortation. That is, all of the other things—putting on charity, forbearing one another, wives being subservient to their husbands, husbands loving their wives—find their explanation in verse 16: the word of Christ dwelling in us richly in all wisdom. So we will have to look at that in this text tonight as well.

Let’s consider then for a little while this whole matter of letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom.

“Let the Word of Christ Dwell in You”

When we take a look at this verse, we find Paul saying something quite striking and unexpected. Paul says, “Let the *word* of Christ dwell in you richly,” when we might expect Paul simply to say, “Let *Christ* dwell in you richly.” We might expect that because throughout the book of Colossians, Paul has been emphasizing the real union between Jesus Christ and his church. Paul has emphasized that Christ is the head. Paul has

emphasized that we have received Christ by faith. Paul has emphasized that Christ is the ground in which the church is rooted and the foundation upon which the church is built. Throughout the book of Colossians, there is an emphasis on the church’s being *in Christ*, dwelling in Christ, being with him. You find that, for example, in chapter 1:18: “He is the head of the body, the church.” You find that again in chapter 2:6: “As ye have therefore *received* Christ Jesus the Lord”—and understand, you have received him by faith. Then chapter 2:7: “Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” Then verse 10: “Ye are complete *in him*, which is the head of all principality and power.” Verse 12: you have been “buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” Throughout this book there is an emphasis on the union of Jesus Christ and the church. We are one organism with him, one plant with him, one body with him. And that is also the immediate context of Colossians 3:16, when in verse 15 we read, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body.” Here is the body of the church, called unto the peace of God in that body. And the head of that body is the Lord Jesus Christ.

That union of the church with Christ is a glorious reality because the church has all her salvation and all things in her head. This is the glorious gospel of the text; it is the glorious gospel of the book, the glorious gospel of all of scripture: we are in Christ and have all of our salvation in him. We have his righteousness, for he perfectly atoned for our sins and perfectly obeyed the law of God, and all of his righteousness is counted as ours. We have his inheritance. When we go to heaven, we enter into Christ’s inheritance. We receive with him what God has given to him. We have all of his life. He being the head and us the body, all of his life flows to us by his Spirit, who is given to us. The church of Jesus Christ has all things in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That means that we partake of Christ. We partake of his root and fatness. We partake of his salvation and his blessing. We partake of his joy. We partake of all things that belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, for we are in him.

It is striking that Paul speaks of this whole matter of union with Christ and now in our text refers to the *word* of Christ. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Paul emphasizes the word of Christ here because Jesus Christ, in all his riches and fullness, is known by the word. The church knows the joy of Jesus Christ in the word of Christ. As the word of Christ’s atonement is proclaimed to the church, she has Christ’s joy. As the glory of God is proclaimed to the church in the scriptures and in the preaching of the gospel, she worships God with Christ. The church of Jesus Christ knows Christ by the word.

The word of Christ, then, refers to the holy scriptures and to the message of the scriptures, which is the holy gospel. Paul is saying to the church, “Let the gospel of Jesus Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”

When Paul speaks of the gospel as the message of the scriptures and says to the church, “Let that *dwell* in you richly,” Paul is saying, “You as the body of Christ, you as the assembly of the people of God, be filled up with that word. Be filled up with that gospel.” Imagine the church as a vessel—the whole church, the whole body together. Be filled up as a church with that word of Christ so that it overflows you and runs over from you. That is the idea of the word “richly” in verse 16. That means *fully*. There is another way to interpret that idea of dwelling fully, that it could be the individual heart—so you with your individual heart, me with my individual heart; let our individual hearts be filled up with Christ. There would be nothing doctrinally wrong with that explanation. But the context points to Paul’s exhortation being to the church as a body. In church as a body, be filled with Christ. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly and fully. That is evident from verse 15: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body”—there is

your assembly—“and be ye thankful.” Then Paul continues, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you [as a body] richly in all wisdom.”

Paul tells the church to be filled up with the word of God, with the gospel of Christ, in all wisdom. And what Paul is saying with the phrase “in all wisdom” is that this gospel of Christ is the fountain, the source, the power of all of your life unto God. The whole context of the verse is life unto God. Live your life unto God. Put on bowels of mercies unto God. Put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, unto God. You live your whole life unto God, to his glory.

We are used to speaking of living unto God as our thankful life or our life of gratitude, and that too is in the immediate context: “Be ye thankful.” Your whole life of gratitude is a life of thanksgiving unto God. Or we are used to speaking of our thankful life as the fruit of our salvation, the fruit of the gospel, and the fruit of faith—all the fruit that God gives to his people through Jesus Christ. It is that fruit, that thankful life, that Paul is speaking of when he says, “In all wisdom.” The church of Jesus Christ lives unto God, lives in gratitude, bears fruit unto him, by the power of the gospel. Let the gospel of Christ dwell in you richly, fill you up, in all wisdom. Knowing that gospel, you will put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies. You will forbear one another. You will put on charity. You will let the peace of God rule in your hearts. You wives will submit yourselves unto your husbands, and you husbands will love your wives. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.

The doctrinal way we are used to speaking about this is that the gospel is the power of your thankful life. The gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen gives you your gratitude as a child of God. That is the idea of that exhortation “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”

That means we can look at this picture, then, and see the church as a vessel filled up with Christ’s gospel; and that gospel overflows her. It overflows her in her life of gratitude and thanksgiving unto God. That is the picture here in the first part of the text.

“Teaching and Admonishing One Another in Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs”

Paul goes on to describe the means by which the word of Christ dwells fully and richly in the church. And here is another unexpected statement in the text. We might expect Paul to say something like this: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, listening to the preaching of the gospel” or “understanding the word that is proclaimed unto you.” Paul has talked about preaching in Colossians. Colossians 1:28: “whom we preach,” and that “whom” is Christ in verse 27. “Whom we preach”—and then if you look at the language of 1:28, it is very similar to the language of 3:16—“warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Paul has spoken about the preaching of the gospel, and certainly the preaching of the gospel is the chief means of grace in the church. By the preaching of the gospel the church is filled up with the word of Christ, filled up with the knowledge of Christ. By the preaching of the gospel, the church is given her fruit of gratitude.

But here in verse 16, Paul speaks of another ministry of the word. And that other ministry of the word is the ministry of the office of believer in singing. When Paul says, “Teaching and admonishing,” he is saying, “By teaching and by admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” That is, one means by which God teaches his church the gospel is the psalms. And when the members of the church sing the psalms, they in their office of believer are teaching the other members of the church. When we sing the psalms in church, you teach me, and I teach you. When we sing the psalms in church, you teach your neighbor next to you and before you and behind you. When we sing the psalms in church, we admonish one another, “admonishing” meaning that we call to one another’s minds the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Teach and admonish, and by teaching and by admonishing one another in your singing, the word of Christ dwells in the body of the church richly. The church is filled up with it.

This does not mean that the singing of the church is in competition with the preaching of the gospel or the preaching in competition with the singing. The preaching of the gospel is the chief means of grace. The sacraments also are a means of grace added to the gospel to teach God’s people his work. But now added to that is also the singing of the church.

The explanation for this is the office of believer that God has given to his people. Each believer is anointed with Jesus Christ; has the Spirit of Jesus Christ; and therefore is a prophet, priest, and king with Jesus Christ and under Jesus Christ. Every believer—whether in the special office of minister, elder, or deacon or whether a member of the church without special office—is a prophet, priest, and king with Jesus Christ. As prophets God gives us his word and Spirit that we might know all things that are freely given to us of God and that we might speak these things. And Paul says, “In your singing in the church, you are exercising that teaching office, that admonishing office.” Teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

This also indicates that the sphere of which Paul is speaking is the church in her worship. That has been challenged by many, not only in recent days but throughout the years. But the perfectly natural reading of this verse in its context is that the church is called unto something in the body (verse 15), and what she is called unto in the body is to teach and admonish one another. Where does the body teach and admonish one another in singing psalms? In the worship of the church. Paul calls the church to let the word of Christ dwell in her richly in all wisdom by teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The question, then, is, to what does Paul refer when he speaks of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? The identification of these songs has been almost hopelessly muddled in the church world. And that is not only in our own day by the Reformed Protestant Churches, but many through the years have attempted to confuse Paul’s

meaning here. The explanation for the muddying of the meaning is that Satan wages ceaseless warfare against psalmody in the church. And I don't even mean *exclusive* psalmody. Satan wages warfare on *all* psalmody. One psalm is too many for Satan. He has his eye on all the psalms. He wants to get rid of all the psalms. And the reason that he so dearly desires to rid the church of the psalms is because the psalms are the songs of Christ, and Satan hates Christ. This has been Satan's project through the years, and Satan can use many in the pursuit of that project. There may even be people of God who have been used unwittingly in the service of attacking the psalms. But whether they are the people of God or not, Satan is behind it; and Satan is behind it only as he serves, unwittingly and unwillingly, Jehovah God. Because this passage so clearly calls the church to sing the psalms, Satan has tried to muddy what "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" means. By the time you are finished listening to and reading all the explanations of that phrase, you go away saying, "Well, I hope somebody knows what that is, but I don't have any idea what that could be anymore."

Really, the identification of these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is very simple. All three of those words refer to the 150 psalms of David. The reason that Paul uses three terms—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs—to refer to the psalms is that the psalter in use in Paul's day used these three terms as titles above the various psalms. Some of the psalms were called *psalms*. Some of the psalms were called *hymns*. Some of the psalms were called *songs*. And some of the psalms were called by multiple titles.

You can see something of that in the book of psalms in the King James Version in the titles printed above various psalms. Psalm 66, for example: "To the chief Musician, A Song or Psalm." What is present in our English translation was even more obvious in the Septuagint Psalter that the people in Paul's day would have used. Paul, therefore, was not introducing into the church two entirely new classes of songs. That is the explanation given by many: *psalms*

refers to the 150 psalms (maybe, sometimes, most of the time, not always); *hymns* refers to other Christian songs that the church might write herself; and *spiritual songs* might refer to songs out of other places in the scripture than the psalms. But, whatever the case, there are two entirely new classes of songs that the church must sing: psalms like she always did but now also hymns and spiritual songs. And if you would ask, "Where are those hymns and spiritual songs, so that we know what songs the apostle has commanded us to sing?" you would look in vain in all of scripture for an answer. There is simply no other compilation of songs for the church to sing than the 150 psalms.

What Paul wrote in Colossians 3:16 would have been as clear as can be to those who read and heard this letter. They would know that Paul was talking about their psalter, just as if someone would write to you and say, "Sing Psalter number 53 and Psalter number 213 and all the rest of the Psalter numbers," you would know that means the psalms. Paul here is referring simply to the titles of the psalms in the psalter of the day.

Paul is saying, then, "Teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and you do that by singing." You sing these psalms; you sing these hymns; you sing these spiritual songs; and, singing these psalms, you teach and admonish one another. The singing of the psalms by the church is the members of the church in their office of believer, their office of prophet, priest, and king, teaching and admonishing each other.

The Power of the Psalms

That raises the question, how is it that singing the psalms fills the church as a body with the word of Christ? The power is not in the church's mere act of singing. Rather, the power is in the psalms that God has given to the church.

First, the psalms are Christ's songs. They are Christ's words and Christ's songs that he sings. Jesus Christ is the sweet psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1). All of the psalms are his songs.

We have seen that at some length in recent days, so we don't need to dwell on that too long now, other than to emphasize it. The psalms are Christ's songs. And the psalms are Christ's songs over against all the songs of man, which songs of man might even contain true doctrine. All the songs of man that man has written are not the songs of Christ. Those are the hymns, in our language today, of this man or of that man. But the psalms are the songs of Christ. He is the sweet psalmist of Israel.

Second, the psalms are the little Bible. The psalms encompass the entire word of God in one book. In the psalms you have Genesis 1, and in the psalms you have Revelation 22. In the psalms you have the whole book of Isaiah, and in the psalms you have all the epistles of Paul. In the psalms you have the entire Pentateuch of Moses, and in the psalms you have all the major and minor prophets. In the psalms you have the whole book of Proverbs, and in the psalms you have all the gospel accounts. The book of psalms contains the entire Bible. And it contains the entire Bible because God knew how to put the entire Bible in one songbook so that the church could sing the whole Bible as she sings the psalms. All the truths of scripture are there. In some cases they are there word for word. Different passages of scripture were taken by the sweet psalmist and incorporated word for word into the songs. In other cases it is the doctrine and the theme of Jesus Christ as the savior of his people, as the servant of God who suffered in his people's place, that you find in the psalms. When you sing the psalms, you are singing all of the scriptures. That is why when the church sings the psalms, the word of Christ dwells in the body of the church richly. By singing the psalms the members of the church teach one another all the truths of scripture.

Third, the psalms were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The sweet psalmist of Israel says so in II Samuel 23:2. "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." The Holy Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, gave the psalms not only as another book in the

Bible but as a songbook in the Bible, so that these are the Spirit's songs that he gave for the church to sing. The fact that these are the songs of the Spirit is indicated by the word *spiritual*. We usually take that as a modifier of the word *songs*—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. But it is possible to take that word as a modifier of the whole class: songs, hymns, and songs—*spiritual* in the sense that they came from the Spirit.

The church of Jesus Christ, then, singing the psalms, teaches and admonishes one another; and by that the word of Christ dwells in her richly.

That singing of the church is beautiful. And that word of Christ dwelling in the church by the singing of the psalms is beautiful. That is evident when the last clause of the verse speaks of "singing *with grace* in your hearts to the Lord." With grace. And "grace" there is given in the fullness of the meaning of *grace*. *Grace* means *beautiful, lovely*. We use that word *grace* in our English language yet today when we speak of a graceful movement. That is a beautiful movement. The singing of the church is beautiful and lovely. Why? Because it is the singing of Christ. Because the church is singing the songs of the head, the songs given by the Spirit. The beauty is the beauty of the head.

Grace also means *favor*. If something is beautiful, then people look upon that thing with favor. That is the idea of grace as well: God's favor. But in the case of God's favor, it is God's favor for the undeserving and for those who have forfeited his favor. When we read of "grace" here, we are reading of the undeserved favor of God to his people that has gathered them into a body; given them the word of Christ; made them prophets, priests, and kings; and given them the songs of the Lord Jesus Christ. "With grace" singing, so that when the church sings the psalms, her thought is never this: "What a good people we are. How faithful and obedient we are as the church of Jesus Christ," but the thought is this: "How gracious is our God to give unto us Christ and his songs."

“Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” That is, by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in our hearts, we sing not merely by going through the motions, but the word of Christ fills the church; and by the Spirit of Christ bringing that word to us, we are taught in our worship of the Lord.

Implications of the Text

One implication of this truth of Colossians 3:16 is that this call to sing psalms is not the tyranny of man or the law or will of man. The doctrine of exclusive psalmody has been charged by our treacherous sister with being the will of man. The reasoning went this way: there is no command in the Bible to sing only the psalms, and therefore when we were taught exclusive psalmody, that was the introduction of a law of man. And the introduction of that law of man, then, is conditionalism; it is legalism; and it is tyranny in the church.

That cannot be the case because the apostle Paul himself, the apostle of Christ, calls the church to sing psalms—and he doesn’t list anything else for the church to sing. His call in the text is not “Sing the word.” That is the principle that has been proposed out of Colossians 3:16. That is not there. That is an imposition on the text. There is no *sing the word* there. When it comes to the content of what we sing, it is psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. And *sing the word* doesn’t mean, as many assume, sing psalms, and sing the ten commandments, and sing the Lord’s prayer, and sing the song of Mary. *Sing the word*, by the admission of the Reformed Protestant Churches, means *sing any hymn, as long as it’s sound*. The principle of Colossians 3:16 is not *sing the word*; *sing man-made hymns*; it is *sing psalms*. Sing psalms.

Paul has a lot to say in Colossians about will worship. Paul warns about it again and again. In fact, that is the main point of the last half of chapter 2.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days...

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels...Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not)...which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. (vv. 16–22)

Paul warns against will worship. When Paul in almost the same breath goes on to say, “In the body of the church, teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” Paul is indicating that the doctrine of psalmody is not will worship. It is the opposite of will worship. It is the worship that God requires through his apostle.

The other side of that, and the second implication of this text, is that it is actually the doctrine of this text and of exclusive psalmody that protects the church from tyranny. When the church sings, she sings together. And if a man would come along and say, “I have a song that I’m going to require you to sing. This song is not from the songbook that God delivered to his church but was invented by a man. The man who composed this song was even a wicked man. But I think that it is a sound song or at least sound enough for us to sing. And because the consistory decided that we’re going to sing it, you had better sing it. And if any of you have your mouths shut while we’re singing it, then I’m going to berate you publicly”—that is tyranny. That is imposing on the church the will of man. That can never happen with the psalms. When you say Sunday in and Sunday out, “We are singing psalms today; we are only singing psalms today,” that is not tyranny for anyone in the church because those songs are the songs of Christ; they are the songs of God; they are the songs that God has given to his church to sing to him. So far from exclusive psalmody’s being the will of man that puts the church under tyranny, exclusive psalmody is protection from that tyranny.

The third implication of the doctrine of this text is exclusive psalmody. That is the implication because of how the regulative principle works. The regulative principle does not operate by telling you to do whatever is not forbidden. Rather, the regulative principle operates by telling you to worship God only as he has required. That is your gratitude. That is the fruit of obedience to render unto him by faith. When Paul says, “Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, teaching and admonishing one another,” then the regulative principle works this way: that is what you are to do. That is what you must do: sing psalms. And for anyone who says, “But the interpretation of ‘psalms and hymns and spiritual songs’ means many other songs too,” you must do that then. You must have one hymn and one other song for every psalm. That is how the regulative principle works. And to try to shove that all to the side and say, “Well, you can’t find in scripture the word *exclusive* or the words *only psalms*,” is to violate the regulative principle. The regulative principle is that God is sovereign

over worship. God knows what worship pleases him, and so God has given us all our worship, exactly as he wills, in the scriptures. And when it comes to what you sing, this is God’s will, which is not will worship or the will of man: teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

And the great, glad gospel for the church of Jesus Christ is that even in this matter of the regulative principle, the church is not *under* the law. The church is not *under* the regulative principle. She is not under exclusive psalmody as her way unto God. Jesus Christ was under exclusive psalmody. Jesus Christ was under the regulative principle. He was under the law—made of a woman, made under the law. And he obeyed the law perfectly, and all his obedience counts as yours, so that now your teaching and admonishing one another, your being filled up with the word of Christ, is not unto anything but is the glad life of obedience and gratitude to him.

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Article XVIII. Mankind's Relation to the Fallen King (continued) and Pseudo-Calvinism

A. MANKIND'S RELATION TO THE FALLEN KING

Adam was Servant-king under God over the world, and as such he stood in covenant-relation to his Creator, was friend of the Almighty, and at the same time enemy of satan the arch-enemy of the Holy One.

Such was our last conclusion.

Now it is not difficult to see, that if Adam sinned, if he broke the covenant, rebelled against his God and listened to the enemy of the Almighty, himself had fallen irretrievably into the power of sin and death, so that the former state and relation, the condition of sinlessness could never be regained. It was an impossibility for Adam to stretch forth his hand to the forbidden fruit and break the covenant with his God, in order then to live on holily again, sorry that the thing had happened and for the rest guarding himself against a repetition of sin. By that one disobedience man, the friend of God became His enemy, object of the wrath of God instead of enjoying His love, subject to the punishment of death, instead of heir of eternal life. By disobedience man became guilty, and, therefore, worthy, of death in all its significance. This death includes spiritual death. And spiritual death implies impotence with respect to the performance of spiritual good. The punishment of sin being death, including spiritual death, was, therefore, in the first place the incapability of doing any good and the proneness to all evil. No more than a man can commit suicide in the physical sense of the word, taste of death for a moment, in order then to live on again as if nothing had happened, no more could Adam

commit spiritual suicide, in order then to return to the way of obedience and enjoy the love of God. The guilty is doomed to be a sinner.

But there is still more.

Adam was no individual without any connection with the human race. He was in the first place the head of humanity. The covenant was not concluded with him only, but in him with the human race. He was its judicial head.

This must receive all the emphasis. For it is not because Adam was our father, neither because he is the very root of the organism of humanity, but in the first place and principally because he was our covenant-head, that we all sinned and are responsible for his guilt.

To gain a clear understanding of this idea, let us suppose that Adam had not immediately sinned. Suppose that he had not sinned till the organism of the human race had begun to develop, till Cain and Abel and some of their children had appeared. Suppose further that Adam would have sinned at this later period, and that he would have stretched out his hand to take of the forbidden fruit after these children and children's children had been born...

I know it, historically and practically this would be an impossibility. I know it, the fact that we are born from Adam, after he sinned and the fact that he is our covenant-head whose guilt is imputed to us are closely connected. They cannot be separated. The one presupposes the other, is realized thru the other. But for the purpose of obtaining some conception of the idea of imputation we can suppose this impossible condition

and order of things. Well, then, suppose by way of illustration that things had occurred in that order, and that Adam had first given birth to children and afterwards sinned. Even then, though the children in that case would have been born in the state of righteousness, the guilt of Adam as covenant-head would have been imputed to them, for the simple reason that their father was their covenant-head, stood in a judicial relationship to them, and that because of this judicial relationship they were responsible in him and for his sin. Not if Cain had first eaten of the fruit would the rest of humanity have been affected at all, not even his own immediate posterity. Cain was not the judicial head of his children, and, therefore, they were not responsible in him. But the unique relation between Adam and the human race lies exactly in his being our covenant-head. His sin was an original sin first of all judicially.

A faint illustration of this we may find in the relation between the citizens of a certain country and their government. If our president declares war against a foreign country as American citizens we are all in war. To say: "he declared war, let him fight it out too" would be foolishness. The president is the head of the nation, and whatever he does in his capacity of president he does for us, and we are responsible for what he does. If, because of the war he declares, the country should be loaded with debt for generations to come, the coming generations are simply born under that debt, and certainly are obliged to pay. Thus was the relation between Adam and his posterity. It was first of all a judicial relation. If Adam declared war against the Almighty he did not do so as an individual but as the head of the entire human race. If because of this war a tremendous load of debt is contracted, a debt we can never finish to pay, he does not stand responsible for the debt as an individual, but we are responsible with him and in him for the same debt. His guilt is imputed to us. We are reckoned in him. Had Adam obeyed to the end he would have obtained eternal life for himself and for the entire human race. His obedience would have been ours. But the same relation exists

with regard to his sin and disobedience. The guilt of his sin is imputed to us.

Of course, here the remark might be made, and indeed, often is made by sinful human judgment: But why did God create the human race under one head so that its justification or condemnation depended on a single human being? I have referred to this attitude before. The implication of the remark is really that after all we are not guilty of the sin of Adam, for the simple reason that God had no business to create us as He did. He might just as well have made us a mass of individuals, without any physical or judicial relation. In that case each individual would stand and fall his own master, responsible only for himself and for his own action. But in that case we would answer, that it was God's business in the most absolute sense of the word to create a humanity according to His own good pleasure. Cannot the potter make of the clay vessels according to his fancy? And does not in a far higher sense the Potter that maketh the clay and all have the right to create vessels in harmony with His eternal wisdom and justice? If the Word of God reveals to us that the human race was made a judicial and ethical whole, created under one head, shall we, finite and, besides, sinful creatures lift our voice in rebellion and claim that He had no right to do so? According to what standard of justice would you judge God? Is there an eternal principle of justice, higher than the Highest Sovereign? Is there an eternal principle of truth, higher than our God? Of course not! And, therefore, it is an awful sin to call the Almighty before the bar of human judgment and there accuse Him of injustice. And, therefore, bowing before the Sovereignty of God we confess that God had the perfect right to create a humanity that constituted a judicial whole as well as an organism. Bowing before that same sovereignty we accept that Adam was the covenant-head of the human race and that we are responsible in him. Bowing before the sovereignty of God we take upon ourselves the imputation of the guilt of our first father and confess that we have sinned in one, and because of the sin of that one are subject to condemnation and death.

B. PSEUDO-CALVINISM

You will remember, dear reader, that I called your attention some time ago to a false type of Calvinism that is being advocated occasionally among us, and at present makes an attempt at leadership among us thru the new publication that calls itself “The Christian Journal.” At the time I was wondering whether there were no others among us that were cognizant of the wrong direction in which this new paper would lead our church-people. From the paper itself one might receive the impression that the entire younger generation plus those among the older ones that had any thinking capacity at all were following its leadership; and that none but a few older men, mostly of the incurably Dutch type, plus a few extremists and stand-patists among the younger recognized the danger of the new movement. I was glad, however, to learn that the situation is not quite as hopeless as it would seem, and to notice that many of our best men, both among the ministers and among the people, from Grand Rapids, Chicago and the farther West have not failed to express their positive opposition.

When I started to write in the Banner it was not my purpose at all to introduce polemics and write in a negative way. Now I have changed my mind. I deem it my solemn duty to warn our people against this would-be Calvinism that would socialize the church and accomplish an alliance between us and the world.

Most of you are aware of the fact that I am not in favor of Pre-millennialism. My opposition to some of its fundamental principles I have made no secret. Yet, were I to choose between the latter and this would-be Calvinism as propagated by some of the regular contributors to the “Christian Journal,” I would not for a moment hesitate to choose in favor of Millennialism. The latter always has this important fact in its favor that it emphasized separation from the “world” (“world” here taken in its ethical sense: in the same sense in which Jesus employed the term when He said: “I pray not for the world”), while this Pseudo-Calvinism would lead us right

into the midst of it, ultimately would lead to the obliteration of the line of demarcation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, and result in complete amalgamation. Not for the love of controversy, therefore, (in fact, I wish we had no need of so much of it in our little church) neither because I deny that the gentlemen that advocate these views are honest in their convictions, but because of the tremendous seriousness of the thing I hereby declare war against the new movement of would-be Calvinism as advocated by some of the regular editors of the “Christian Journal.”

One of the chief dangers of the movement consists in this, that it presents itself disguised as real Calvinism. It looks like the genuine thing. It means to be a world and life view. It continually militates against an Anabaptistic separation of nature and grace, and proceeds from the principle that grace aims at the restoration of nature. It battles against the false and morbid conception as if our individualistic salvation in the narrower sense were the highest purpose of all religion. It would call upon the ministers of the Word to let the light of that Word shine, not only upon the narrow field of the salvation of the soul, but upon every sphere of life and the world, the home, society, the state, the church, education, wages, decent living, war and peace, etc.

That’s fine!

From the very start, however, one wonders that the gentlemen who make propaganda for these things assume an attitude over against our people and leaders as if all these things were entirely new to them, were recent innovations, still had to be introduced! I confess I do not understand this. Perhaps there are ministers among us that always emphasize individualistic salvation, and congregations that would faint if they were to listen to a sermon dealing with social problems, but I honestly confess that I never had the experience. From youth up, both in the Netherlands and in our country I have been accustomed to be instructed in the church regarding the relation of man and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, government and citizens,

in fact, regarding all the different problems that present themselves in the world. And, since I myself am in the ministry, my own congregation being witness, I preached the Word of God with regard to every sphere of life. Neither was there any astonishment shown on the part of the congregation.

There is nothing new in all this. In fact, I do not see, how any one can preach the Heidelberg Catechism faithfully without touching upon practically every subject under the sun. And the gentlemen of the “Journal” do not have to assume an air as if they for the first time, would instruct a backward lot of people and preachers as to the truly Reformed view. With regard to our people this is an insult, with regard to themselves it smacks of conceit.

But—and here is the danger—I am afraid that this would-be Calvinism is not satisfied to

have the Word of God shed its light into every sphere of life, and to have our people instructed accordingly. It is not satisfied to see that our people take a stand for their principles and struggle to apply them in the midst of the world. On the contrary, it would really have us mingle with the world, and under the pretext of exerting Calvinistic influence upon that world, it would have us adopt the principles and methods of the world and deny our own. Instead of being the light in the world, it would confess that the world is our light.

A clear illustration we may find of this fact in the attitude the “Journal” assumes with regard to our Christian School movement. To this I hope to point next time, the Lord willing.

—Holland, Mich.



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