



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 17

AUGUST 3, 2024

*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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When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, and that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt; then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, and her two sons; of which the name of the one was Gershom: for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land: and the name of the other was Eliezer; for the God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh: and Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God: and he said unto Moses, I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her. And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent.

—Exodus 18:1–7

Good News

In Midian Jethro heard good news.

What was the good news that Jethro heard?

He heard of all that God had done for Moses! He heard of all that God had done for Israel his people! He heard that Jehovah had brought Israel out of Egypt! He heard of the ten plagues. He heard of Pharaoh's hard heart. He heard of the passover. He heard of the unleavened bread and the blood of the lamb. He heard of Jehovah's pillar of cloud and fire. He heard of the children of Israel's going into the midst of the Red Sea upon dry ground. He heard of the drowning of the Egyptian host. All that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people! Good news!

How had Jethro heard? He heard from his daughter, Zipporah, and from his two grandsons, Gershom and Eliezer. These three were eyewitnesses of all that God had done for Moses, for they were Moses' family. They had not been absent from Moses from Egypt onward, as some think. Moses' family was a family of faith, as even the names of the children testify. As the people of Jehovah, they too were brought by God out of Egypt. They had seen with their own eyes what Jehovah had done for Moses, for they were his people Israel. They had seen the plagues in Egypt. They had followed Jehovah's pillar into the wilderness. They had been baptized unto Moses in the Red Sea. They had eaten the manna and

had drunk the water from the rock. Then, as the children of Israel had neared Mount Sinai, Moses had sent his wife and sons back to his father-in-law in Midian as a kindness to that godly man with a report of the good news.

When Jethro heard the good news, he had to see for himself. He came with his daughter and his grandsons unto Moses in the wilderness. He found Moses encamped by the mount of God and went into his tent, where Moses would tell Jethro again the good news of their deliverance from Egypt.

And for you and for me? In our land we have heard good news!

What is the good news that we have heard? We have heard of all that God has done for his people Israel, his church! We have heard of Jesus Christ, our passover lamb and our Red Sea and our manna. We have heard how Jehovah has brought his people out of the house of bondage in sin and death through the blood of his only begotten Son. We have heard of the heavenly Canaan flowing with milk and honey, to which Jehovah leads us through the wilderness of this life. We have heard good news—the gospel of the Lord.

Listen, and hear good news: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

August already!
And all the chores that August brings. The landscape is overgrown and needs thinning. The cucumbers are coming on like an army and need picking. That one downspout is still clogged and needs unclogging. The horseflies have appeared and need thwacking. And the summer projects that shone so promisingly in June's bright air now lie so listlessly in August's sticky, dwindling light.

August already!

But another issue of *Reformed Pavilion* is hot off the presses, and August's chores will keep for a little while yet. So kick a path through the zucchinis to your favorite spot next to the hydrangeas and read on. Oh, and keep a flip-flop handy—great for thwacking.

This issue is graced by a poem from Mrs. Connie Meyer. Her poem beautifully and truthfully answers the false charge that exclusive

psalmody is legalism. The entire poem is excellent, but the reader will undoubtedly discover especially profound lines that he will want to return to again and again. I thought about listing my favorites here, but I think I will keep them to myself so as not to spoil the joy of your own discovery as you read the poem.

In *From the Ramparts* Elder Dewey Engelsma begins a series of articles on trying the spirits. The article this week is a rich meal of instruction that contrasts the Spirit of truth with the spirit of the lie. The article lays the foundation for being able to discern between what is true and what is false, especially since every church claims to be led by the Spirit of God. Stay tuned in weeks to come for specific applications of trying the spirits.

With that, read on!

—AL



Psalms, Hymns, and Legalism or A Reply Concerning Exclusive Psalmody in Worship

The Galatians were foolish, bewitched and betrayed
By their own selfish fancy and pride.
But don't we just as much stand to bear the same blame
If we cast his own praises aside?

We're accused of making up rules that aren't there,
As if psalm singing bides our own laws.
"Only psalms may reverberate inside a church?"
Yes, the psalms he provides for that cause!

To sing anything else is to not be content.
It's to say that his psalms aren't enough.
And as well, it's rebellion against God's command.
When he says, "Worship me" — add no stuff!

Woe to those who refuse to acknowledge his will.
And still worse is the thought that God owes
His own presence to all who will just sing a psalm.
Cursed lie! Psalms are gifts he bestows!

Don't you know that to sing only psalms is our joy?
It's the great privilege of but few.
Don't you know gratitude is the real issue here?
And as thanks, then, this law is God's due.

For the legalist charge to be able to stick,
One must see singing psalms as a chore.
Yet the ones who accuse us perceive it as work.
As for us, psalms are thanks and no more.

Is it so hard to see that when God supplies songs
For his thanks and his praise, that's his will?
"Here's some songs if you like them, but sing what you want"?
Do we think "Sing the word!" fits the bill?

Don't we see what that does to his glorious name?
Do we know what the cross meant for him?
Only God sees his own name with all clarity
And can write praise that flows overbrim.

Thus no human exists who can possibly guess
The extent of all praise that is true.
And the agony borne by the Son for our sins—
No man fathoms that depth with a clue.

O, a hymn can express what a man feels inside.
It can even be clear on that score.
But the flames of the Lion's pure love, no man knows;
Only songs from his own heart will roar.

“Sing the word!” means you'd better get busy and find
All the songs in the Bible you can.
But for us, “Sing the word” has been done in the psalms.
All along that was God's worship plan.

Yet the false charge of legalist doctrine's not all
That pertains to the wickedness here.
To insist that we join in a man's written song
Was to strike a clear conscience with fear.

The offense of that action is worse than we know.
Let's recall what was said of millstones.
When the Romans put pork on the altar to burn,
That was not unlike forcing those tones.

Now I leave off with one of the favorite myths:
“How can singing the Lord's Prayer be sin?”
Well, of course, no wrong's done if that prayer has a tune,
But his psalms—it is simply not in.

The reality of that true prayer is contained
In the psalms, but the form Jesus taught
His disciples in Matthew and Luke for their sakes
So they'd understand how Psalms is wrought!

There is nothing amiss when the psalms he commands
For the use of exalting his name.
Would you argue that praise from his own songbook lacks?
If you do, that's to bring on him shame.

—Connie L. Meyer

Spirit-Led: An Introduction

Introduction

“My church is Spirit-led!”

“I am led by the Spirit!”

So goes the claim of every church and every churchgoer. Who would claim otherwise? Churches may differ on almost everything, but the one claim they all have in common is this: “We are led by the Holy Spirit.” As well they should, for as John Owen wrote, “Men do not adorn themselves with rags, or boast of what is under general and just contempt.”¹

But are they? Are all these churches indeed led by the Holy Spirit? What is a child of God to do with such a claim? Should it be taken at face value? Perhaps acknowledge that the Spirit is working in all, or at least most, churches but in varying degrees; so we could say the Spirit works in this church a lot but in that church only a little? Or was John Owen correct when he continued, “According to the value of things, so are they liable to abuse; and the more excellent any thing is, the more pernicious is the abuse of it”?² Are many churches and church members abusing the Holy Spirit when they claim that he works in their midst?

It will be the burden of this article to examine that claim. As part of that examination, we will seek to understand the work of the Spirit and the fruit that his work produces. The study will be limited in scope and will not attempt to be comprehensive, for two reasons. First, the man writing the article is not capable of such a study. Second, there is that which is beyond our “understanding and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Ghost are hidden and incomprehensible” (Belgic Confession 35). So, recognizing the limitations of the

author and the magnitude and magnificence of the subject, the depths of which man is not able to plumb, we will consider the work of the Spirit as God gives us to understand that work; and then we will apply that knowledge to the claim churches make to be led by the Spirit.

I will be focusing my examination specifically on two denominations of which I was recently a member, although the principles of the examination can and ought to be applied to other churches as well. Those two denominations are the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). It is my prayer that my analysis of the spirit that governs these denominations may be of use to others who struggle with the question of where to maintain their church membership.

What Does Spirit-Led Mean?

Let us begin by asking what it means when a church claims to be led by the Spirit. When a church claims to be Spirit-led, that church claims the Holy Spirit as its guide. That is, that church is telling others that the third person of the Trinity, he who is “true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son” (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 20), the “spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:2), is the Spirit by which it is being led. There is, after all, another spirit in the earth. That is the spirit of the devil or, as Ephesians has it, the spirit of the air. “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). Such a spirit is characterized by lies; temptations to evil; doubt;

¹ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2004), 47.

² Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power*, 47.

disobedience; violence and cruelty; sin; deceit and deception; the wisdom from below, which is earthly, sensual, and devilish; blindness; ignorance; craftiness; pride; and rebellion.³ Such churches, then, with their claims to be Spirit-led, are saying, negatively, that they are not led by the spirit of the air but are led by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. They confess that their walk and their confession are a “walk in the Spirit,” and therefore they do not “fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). The Spirit that governs them is the Spirit spoken of by Jesus in John 14:26: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” What these churches have learned and what they now teach have been given to them by the Holy Spirit. This is their claim.

The Problem

The problem we face is that every church claims to be Spirit-led. Churches that believe there are seven sacraments, churches that believe there are only two sacraments, and churches that ignore sacraments altogether all lay claim to the Spirit. Some churches ordain women, and other churches only ordain men; churches that believe in evolution, churches that believe in a six-day creation, and churches that allow both to be taught all claim to be Spirit-led. Some churches teach this thing about eschatology, and some churches teach that thing about eschatology; and the list could go on and on. Some views are not so divergent, such as whether communion is administered with a common cup or individual cups. Other views are opposed, such as whether God saves man or whether God and man save man. Yet all of them proclaim, “We are Spirit-led!”

But some churches are lying. It cannot be the case that all of these churches are being led by

the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit cannot lead one church to confess seven sacraments and another church to teach the permissibility of homosexuality and at the same time lead a different church to confess two sacraments and yet another church to condemn sodomy as a sin and an affront against God. Men are double-minded. The Holy Spirit is not. It is not provocative to say that some, even many, churches are lying when they claim to be followers of Christ and led by his Spirit. We read this in Jeremiah 5:2: “And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.” It was not the case that Jeremiah could say this because he was given to know by special revelation who was telling the truth and who was lying. He knew who were lying by their behavior. There was no man among them who sought after the truth (v. 1), and when they received correction, they did not grieve but made their faces “harder than a rock” and refused to return (v. 3). This is external behavior—fruit—that every man can and must identify. When Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, he was not using some hidden, secret gnosis that only he possessed. He condemned them because they had shown themselves to be murderers by killing the faithful ministers and “wise men” that God had sent to them. And then they showed themselves to be hypocrites by building up the tombs and garnishing the sepulchers of the men they and their fathers had killed.⁴ Jesus condemned them because their actions revealed their wickedness, despite the outward appearance of piety they maintained. John did the same in I John 4. After having commanded men to “try the spirits” (v. 1), he identified as liars some men who say they love God. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (v. 20).

³ See John 8:44, Matthew 4:1–3, I Peter 5:8, Ephesians 2:2, I John 3:8, Revelation 12:9, I Corinthians 3:19, James 3:15, II Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 2:8, Ephesians 4:14, and Isaiah 14:12–15.

⁴ To garnish the sepulcher of a prophet is like placing a sprig of flowers on the grave of someone you have just murdered. For one of the clearest examples of this that I have ever seen, and the appropriate response, see Andrew Lanning, “A Fine Tomb,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 36 (December 16, 2023): 5–8.

So what is a man to do when some churches are lying and others are not? This: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I John 4:1). When the call comes to the child of God to “try the spirits,” the command is to use discernment and not simply accept at face value the claim of every church to be Spirit-led. Specifically in I John 4:1, the criteria for trying the spirits is whether the spirit that has gone forth confesses that Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God. More broadly, the command is to discern truth from error; true doctrine from false; a godly walk from a dissolute walk; and the Holy Spirit from false, lying spirits. Understand that there are spirits, or teachings, that are not of God. There are lying spirits. We can see such a spirit in Revelation 16:13: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.” These do not proceed from God but are “the spirits of devils” (v. 14). These spirits are, according to the text, “unclean.” This is over against the Holy Spirit, who is pure and free from any impurity and whose work is to purify. “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8–9). John baptized with water, but Jesus came and baptized “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matt. 3:11), which fire burns away all impurity. David, having been rebuked by the prophet and having been turned by God from his sin and impurity, prayed that God would create in him a “clean heart” (Ps. 51:10), which heart God would indeed make clean by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Neither is this call given only to the ivory-tower theologians. The command is given to each believer, who is equipped for the work. He is equipped by the Spirit, by whom the believer knows all things (I John 2:20), and equipped with the word of God, which he searches to determine

whether the things he is taught are true (Acts 17:11). The test, the standard, that is used to try the spirits of churches is simple: the word of God.

False teachers are called false prophets and spirits, in allusion to the false prophets of old, who fathered their predictions on divine inspiration, but who were really actuated by the Devil himself, and sometimes effected ‘lying miracles’ (Matt. 24:24), by his power. Hence we are not directed to try their pretensions, by putting them on extraordinary works, for their confirmation, for these were not easily detected by the generality of Christians; but he gives us a blessed fixed rule, which will never fail: and that is, to try them by the doctrine that they teach. Let their doctrine be examined by the Scriptures, and if it be agreeable thereto, it may be safely received; but if it be contrary to Scripture, whatever authority is pretended, it must be instantly rejected.⁵

Two Spirits

There is the Holy Spirit, and there is the spirit of error. This is stated explicitly in I John 4:6: “Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” We can see an example of a lying spirit in the history relayed in I Kings 22. God asked the host of heaven that was gathered around him who would convince Ahab to go up and die at Ramoth-gilead (vv. 19–20). Some of the angels said one thing, and others said another thing, but finally one angel offered this: “I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.” God’s response was, “Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so” (v. 22).

Nothing has changed from the Old to the New Testament. After instructing the church in II Peter 1:20–21 about the nature of the word of God, Peter goes on in chapter 2 to make a direct connection between the false prophets in the Old Testament and the false teachers in the New

⁵ Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power*, 48–49.

Testament. “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies” (II Pet. 2:1). Just as there were four hundred prophets in I Kings who prophesied a lie, so there is a mighty company of false teachers in the New Testament who teach and tolerate the lie. This company does so in the face of the faithful prophet God raises up, who teaches the truth and rebukes the church for her coldness to the truth and her tolerance of false doctrine. Such it was for Micaiah, and such it is today. Faithful prophets are ever and always persecuted and fed the bread and water of affliction (I Kings 22:27).

The fact that there are two spirits is according to the decree of God. These spirits are at war because God has declared that they would be at war. “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This spiritual warfare manifested itself a mere seventeen verses later in the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. From that moment on, the Spirit of the seed of the woman, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, has waged war against the spirit of the seed of the serpent, the spirit of the devil. Although there is great warfare, the outcome of the battle is not in doubt. The evidence of the victory is the open tomb and Jesus seated at the right hand of God in heaven, having “ascended into heaven for this end, that he might appear as head of his church, by whom the Father governs all things” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 50). It was on the hill outside Jerusalem that the victory was won; that our sins were nailed to the cross; and that Jesus Christ “spoiled principalities and powers,” making “a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:14–15).

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

In stark relief to lying spirits is the Holy Spirit, who is the Holy Spirit of truth. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even

the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16–17)—not the lie, which is of the devil (8:44), but the truth, which is of God. Having been poured out onto his people, the Spirit leads them into the truth. As for the world and the false church, the Spirit will only reprove and judge them “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (16:8). How can you discern whether the spirit of the devil or the Spirit of God is present in a church or a man? Ask yourself, “Do they tolerate false doctrine? Do they turn a blind eye to lies? Do they tolerate lies from their leaders? Do they tolerate lies about God and his work of salvation?” If the answer is yes, then such a church cannot have the Holy Spirit in it, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9, 11; Gal. 4:6; I Pet. 1:11), and Christ hates the lie and cannot abide it for even a moment. What about the rule in the church? Is it according to the will of God or the will of man?

What does the Spirit do for his church? “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). That Spirit of truth will reveal the truth to his people; indeed, he is the anointing by which God’s people are taught all things (I John 2:20). It is this unction, this anointing, that is the confidence of the child of God.

On this unction depends the stability of all believers. It is said to abide in them, which respects their permanency and establishment in the truth against all seducers: nor will anything else be sufficient for this purpose. Temptations may come as a storm, which will quickly drive men from their greatest fleshly confidences. Hence oftentimes those who are forwardest to say, though all men should forsake the truth, yet will not they; are the forwardest upon trials so to do. Neither will men’s skill, or disputing abilities, secure them from being inveigled with fair pretences, or entangled with the cunning sleights of them who lie in wait to deceive. Nor will the best defences of flesh and blood, stand firmly unshaken against powerful allurements on the one

hand, and fierce persecutions on the other; but this unction the apostle assures believers will not fail, neither shall they fail because of it.⁶

Apart from this work of the Spirit, a man would never know anything of the truth. “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (I Cor. 2:10–12). What are the “them” of I Corinthians 2:10 that God has revealed unto us by his Spirit? “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (v. 7). What is that hidden mystery? Jesus Christ! The Holy Spirit does not speak of himself, but he speaks and testifies of Christ! The Holy Spirit of God “searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”; and what does the Holy Spirit find there and then reveal to his church? Jesus Christ! You find nothing less than Jesus Christ at the heart of God’s counsel—Jesus Christ the head of the covenant of everlasting and everflowing grace and love and mercy and peace. What joy! What comfort! What peace for the child of God!

The work of the Spirit is more than just placing a man under the pure preaching of the word, although the Spirit will do that as well.

It is not merely an external doctrinal teaching; but an internal, effectual operation of the Holy Ghost. He employs indeed the outward means of instruction by the word, and teaches nothing but what is revealed therein; but he gives us an ‘understanding, that we may know him that is true’ and ‘opens our eyes, that we may clearly and spiritually

see the wondrous things that are in the law.’ And there are no teachings like his. None so abiding, none so effectual. When spiritual things through this anointing are discovered in a spiritual manner, they take an immovable possession of the minds of men. As God will destroy every oppressing yoke because of the anointing of Christ (Isa. 10:27); so will he break every snare of seduction by the anointing of Christians. So it is promised, that under the gospel, wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of the times, (Isa. 33:6). Nothing will give stability in all seasons, but the wisdom and knowledge which are the effects of this teaching, when God gives us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (Eph. 1:17–18).⁷

This instruction is never done independently of the church, as if a child of God can stand aloof from the church and yet receive and be taught the truth. The church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15). To stand aloof from the church and to keep oneself from membership in a true church are to reveal a carnal spirit, the spirit of “natural man,” who “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2:14).

Further, the Holy Spirit will never teach anything contrary to the word of God. The Holy Spirit can never be separated from the word of God. John Calvin speaks of this in his *Institutes*:

What say these fanatics, swollen with pride, who consider this the one excellent illumination when, carelessly forsaking and bidding farewell to God’s Word, they, no less confidently than boldly, seize upon whatever they may have conceived while snoring? Certainly a far different sobriety befits the children of God, who just as they see themselves, without the Spirit of God, bereft of the whole light of

⁶ Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power*, 371.

⁷ Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power*, 371.

truth, so are not unaware that the Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers. For they know no other Spirit than him who dwelt and spoke in the apostles, and by whose oracles they are continually recalled to the hearing of the Word.⁸

That the Spirit and the truth are knit together, which reality is part of God's mercy to his people, is promised by God to his church in Isaiah 59:21: "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever." What comfort for the faithless, unbelieving, doubting, sinning child of God, who knows *himself* to be the one who, according to his flesh, gropes for the wall like the blind as if he had no eyes, who stumbles at noonday as if it were the darkest night, and who finds himself in desolate places as a dead man (v. 10). What a joy to know that God has promised in his covenant faithfulness never to separate the gift of his Spirit from his words that he bestows on his church, which words are nothing less than that "more sure word of prophecy" spoken of in II Peter 1:19.

The church that is led by the Holy Spirit will love and confess the truth and will condemn the lie. This alone exposes many churches as liars. They claim to be led by the Holy Spirit of truth; yet they tolerate the lie, which is of the devil. That not only tells us something about those churches, but it also tells us about the times in which we live. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (I Tim. 4:1).

The church led by the Spirit will also be identified by the fruit of the Spirit, which is

"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23). It is not a matter of choosing between two extremes: a church confessing the truth must be cruel and violent, while a church tolerant of error is loving and kind. The church of Christ knows nothing of that because the Spirit of Christ knows nothing of that. The Spirit-led church will hate the lie with every fiber of her being; will confess the truth with every ounce of her energy; and will manifest all the fruit mentioned in Galatians 5, including love, joy, peace, and gentleness. Why is that? Because the members have finally gotten it right or are good enough people, or they have labored hard enough to have finally achieved the zenith of a church, so that they confess the truth and manifest a love for God and the neighbor? Far from it. The church of Christ is made up of publicans, harlots, and sinners (see Matt. 9:10–13; I Cor. 6:9–11). But it is the church of Jesus Christ! "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:11). It is impossible that a church bought and cleansed by the blood of Christ does not manifest a love for the truth and a love for the neighbor. And that impossibility has nothing to do with the members but everything to do with Jesus Christ, who "loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). And why did he give himself for the church? So the members of Christ's church might continue in the cruelty and violence from which they were redeemed? Not at all! "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (vv. 26–27). Those who are Christ's "have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). Those who "live in the Spirit" will "also walk in the Spirit" (v. 25), although

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 96.

such a walk will only be a small beginning of new obedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 114). Being in Christ by the Spirit explains the “impossibility” of fruitlessness, found in the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 64, where we read that “it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”

The Holy Spirit, in his work of purifying his people, instills in them a deep conviction and abhorrence of their sin. How did the saints in the book of Acts react upon hearing that it was they who had taken Christ and by their wicked hands had crucified and slain the Messiah? Being worked in and upon by the Holy Spirit, they “were pricked in their heart” and asked the apostles what they needed to do (Acts 2:37).

This response is the fruit of faith, but it is not the only response to hearing a rebuke. Another response upon hearing a rebuke from the pulpit is to kill the man who rebuked you. That has happened twice recently, once in the PRC and once in the RPC. The only difference between the two is that the RPC has not yet learned refinement when it comes to dealing with a prophet who rebukes you. The PRC knows that there is no reason to bludgeon everyone in sight when a dirk under the fifth rib will do. The RPC will learn that over time. But the result is the same: a dead prophet who had rebuked them for their errors. As Ezekiel 16:44 says, “As is the mother, so is her daughter.”

The other response to hearing a rebuke is a response worked by the Holy Spirit. Having been exposed in his sin, the child of God cries out, “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens” (Ezra 9:6). The child of God, upon hearing the law and having the Spirit work in his heart to expose his sin, cries out, “Unclean! Unclean!” (see Lev. 13:45). The man or church in whom the Spirit of God does not work responds with self-righteousness, saying, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican” (Luke 18:11). In contrast, the tax collector, who is moved

by the Spirit, will not even raise his head to heaven but beats his chest, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (v. 13). It is the Holy Spirit who exposes sin and who then moves the child of God to look outside of himself for freedom and liberty from that sin, namely to Christ. In this the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus Christ, for he takes the things of Christ and reveals them unto those who belong to Christ (John 16:14), thereby freeing the child of God so he is free indeed (8:36).

Free from what? He is free from listening to the reproaches of his conscience, which strives to convince the child of God that he is not God’s but the devil’s. He is free from the guilt and crushing shame of his sin that attends the wickedness of his flesh. He is free to love and serve his neighbor and at the same time to reject the questions that continually creep in: “Are you doing this good enough?” or “What about the sinful desires that motivate you?” The child of God with the Holy Spirit working within him is free to respond to the otherwise crushing accusations of his conscience, “No, I have not done enough, and my motives are tainted with the grossest sin; but Christ has done enough, and his motives were always pure, and his righteousness is mine!” There is the true liberty that sets the child of God free!

It is the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of God’s people a love for God’s law. Having been saved by Christ alone apart from any work of his own, the child of God is filled with gratitude. He expresses that gratitude by loving God’s law and striving to keep that law. Not to earn or merit anything from a keeping of that law (God forbid!) but for the simple reason that it is God’s law! “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” is the confession of the psalmist and every child of God in whose heart the Holy Spirit has worked (Ps. 119:97). Hearing that it is the law of God to establish and use Christian schools or that God would have us sing psalms in worship, the child of God exclaims, “That is not grievous! That is the love of God, that we keep his commandments!” (see I John 5:3). It is the Holy Spirit who works in the heart of the child of God so the child of God can exclaim with David,

“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” and “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:8, 10).

What more can be said about the Holy Spirit? This, that as the Holy Spirit of God, he is not a Spirit of disorder but of order. In I Corinthians 14, Paul provides instruction on the proper use of spiritual gifts within the church, emphasizing the importance of the edification and understanding of the hearers (vv. 19, 26). It is in that context that he teaches the church something about God: that he is “not the author of confusion, but of peace” (v. 33). God is a God of order, clarity, wisdom, illumination, and understanding and not a God of confusion and disorder. On the other hand, the devil and his forces are spirits of deception and disorder. As the father of lies, the devil traffics in confusion (John 8:44); pretends to be something he isn’t, namely an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14); and deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9).

Much more could be said about the Holy Spirit. We have not even scratched the surface of what it is to know the Holy Ghost and all his work. But what God has given us to know of his Spirit we will now take and apply, according to the command of God.

Now What?

What do we do with all of the churches claiming to be led by the Spirit? We examine the fruit produced by these churches, understanding that the spirit in a church (or a man) will produce fruit, which fruit can be examined and tried. There, then, is the answer to how we can identify which spirit it is that works in the hearts of men and in churches. Just like a tree, men and churches produce fruit. “For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring

forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit” (Luke 6:43–44).

To examine that fruit, we do not apply our own standard, but we stand on the scriptures alone. It is not “How nice are the people?” or “How smiley and engaging is the pastor?” It is not “Will I have a safe life here so I don’t have to ever again be engaged in controversy and possibly suffer loss or, even worse, suffer hard looks from other nice Christians?” The standard is the word of God.

As part of this examination, we will identify churches that are lying when they say they are led by the Spirit. Such is my position regarding the Reformed Protestant Churches. I was a member of the RPC from January 2021 through May 2023. Again the Lord had to show me, a man slow of understanding, that God’s way is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known (Ps. 77:19). It was with shock and disbelief that several of God’s people removed our membership from those churches to join ourselves to another. That shock and disbelief are just now starting to wear off. They are wearing off because we are now able to see the RPC for what she is, so our cries of sorrow and disbelief are turned to cries of joy and thanksgiving as we now know we were plucked, contrary to the desire of our hearts, as brands from the fire (Zech. 3:2).

A necessary part of that examination will be to examine the ministries and work of their ministers: Reverends Bomers, Langerak, and Ophoff. Do their ministries testify to the work of the Holy Spirit or the work of another spirit? The Lord gives one of two types of ministers to a church: true prophets in his mercy and false prophets in his judgment.⁹ Some shepherds feed God’s people, as you can find described in Jeremiah 23:4. These pastors feed the congregation on Christ, so the congregation does not fear, neither is dismayed, and lacks nothing. And then

⁹ You could make further distinctions, such as men who are not shepherds but wolves who wear the covering of sheep (Matt. 7:15).

There are also hirelings, who are men who flee when danger approaches or men who simply like the life that being a pastor offers, so they never do anything that would endanger their ministry or their comfortable lives (see Ezek. 34:2–3; Mic. 3:11; John 10:12–13). However, each minister will ultimately fall into one of two categories: ministers who feed God’s people on the true doctrine of God’s word and do so to their own hurt, so that the more they love their flock, the less they are loved (II Cor. 12:15), or those who teach a lie or could tolerate a lie and whose life of ease will one day be used to condemn them (Ezek. 34:10).

there are ministers, described in Ezekiel 34, who scatter God's people. These are men who do not bind up the broken or bring again those who have been driven away or seek those who are lost, but rather, they rule the flock "with force and with cruelty" (v. 4). Studying the work of these three men, it becomes clear that the Reformed Protestant Churches have chosen the "brambles" to lead them (Judges 9:14).

We will also look at the work of the ecclesiastical assemblies of the RPC, including decisions made at the consistory level and those made at the classis level. Are the decisions principled? Or arbitrary? Do those assemblies give evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit or another spirit altogether?

In the time of the controversy in the RPC, there was no time for an exhaustive study of

the issues. It simply went too quickly from when sermons were preached to the time of suspensions and depositions. At the time it was sufficient to know that the word of God had been preached to the congregation—a word of mild rebuke—and the congregation had rejected it. By rejecting the pure gospel and by persecuting those who had rebuked her for her errors and idolatry, the RPC had taken on marks of the false church (Belgic Confession 29). From such a church one flees, not lingering even a moment.

But now, over time, what do we see when we consider the RPC? What do we do with their claim to be Spirit-led? Are they truly manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ?

Or are they lying?

—DE

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

April 1, 1920

(pp. 198–99)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article LXIX. The New King and His Kingdom (continued)

We now approach the discussion of another of the most important and most fundamental doctrines of our Reformed faith as based on the Word of our God.

We have reference to the doctrine of God's eternal counsel with respect to all things, particularly with regard to the establishment of His kingdom and the realization of His covenant.

We approach this subject in a very natural way.

Fact is, that the end of all things will be this, that God does realize His kingdom and His covenant, and that He does this not in the first man Adam but in the second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in that Lord Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God in the flesh, the second Person of the Holy

Trinity in human nature, that God will ultimately realize all things. Scripture tells us that in Him all things will be gathered again in one, all things even that are on earth and things that are in heaven. The end of all things, therefore, will be that this Christ will appear at the Head of creation, as the Head of the eternal covenant of grace and as the glorious King of His Kingdom.

This first of all. This truth is plain to all. God perfects the works of His hands in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that Lord Jesus Christ is personally the second Person in the Godhead.

Now we must remember that this end of all things is not reached by way of a certain accident. This is often the impression that we have. It is thru a sad accident that the situation became thus

that God was compelled for the salvation of His creation to send His Son Jesus Christ into the world. It is thru an accident that in the end, at the consummation of all things, the kingdom will be Christ's and all things gathered together in Him. That sad accident is sin. Sin is after all something that was not taken into consideration with the Lord our God. It was an element that entered in and that caused a change in God's intention. The intention of God was first to perfect all things in the First Man Adam. He was to grow and develop. He was to be perfected, and under him all things in heaven and on earth were to be united into one. But sin came. And sin caused a change in the plan of God. Sin really compelled God to do something else than He originally intended. Sin made God reconsider His former plan, and caused Him to look for another way in which He might save the world for Himself and reach the glory of His Name. And that other, that new, that second plan of God is to realize all things in Christ Jesus, His only begotten Son. God repairs His broken creation. His first plan failed. A second plan is adopted to patch up the works of His hands. And though it may be true that the repaired house of God's works will appear more beautiful than the original building could ever have been, the fact remains that ultimately the kingdom of God will be the result of repair work in the real sense of the word.

Now, this is exactly what we deny.

God is not compelled to patch up a broken world. He was never forced by any accident whatever, or by anything that was not implied in His counsel, to change His original plan. The present history of the world, the Incarnation, Golgotha's Atonement, and the Resurrection, the final Restoration of all things under Christ,—all these do not constitute a certain afterthought, a revision of the original plan of God with regard to all things, a revision necessitated by the entrance of sin into the world. On the contrary, they are the realization of the one, eternal, original counsel of our God, that never changes and is never resisted. It is His one and original counsel that His Son, the express image of His substance, God of God, should assume human flesh. It was His one and original plan that this Son of God in

human nature should assume the burden of our sin and our transgression and die the accursed death on the cross. It was His original plan that this Immanuel should rise on the third day, should be exalted at the right hand of the Father as our Mediator, and that in Him the people of God's choice should be perfected. It was the original plan that in this Christ the highest realization of the covenant between God and man should be manifested, and that in Him all things should be gathered again in one, both the things in heaven and the things on earth.

God makes no mistakes.

God is never thwarted.

All that occurs in the history of the world occurs with absolute necessity. Nothing is excluded from this necessity. Not with a necessity of fatalism, blind and dreadful. But with a divine necessity, the necessity of a Will, Almighty and All-wise, of the Will of Him who in Christ Jesus is our Father in heaven.

That necessity is God's counsel. And the doctrine of that counsel is the backbone and heart of our Reformed Faith. According to that counsel it is an eternal decree with God, an everlasting purpose, that He will reveal Himself in the highest sense of the word, and ultimately receive His highest glory from the creature, thru that same Son, Who within the Divine Family is God-revealed, the very expression of His glory. And, therefore, according to that same eternal purpose it is God's everlasting will that Jesus Christ, that Son come in the flesh, shall be the eternal King of the Kingdom of which we are now speaking; that He should be the eternal Head of that covenant according to which God is the friend of man and dwells with Him. The King of the Kingdom that is the object of our discussion is from all eternity ordained. And all that takes place in the history of the world, absolutely nothing excluded, must be subservient to that highest purpose of God's eternal counsel.

Such is the unadulterated Reformed view. Such, let me add immediately, is the basic conception of the Word of God. And upon that central doctrine of our Calvinistic faith, upon that basic

conception of Scripture, we must again lay all stress. With it our Reformed faith stands and falls. It is for the truly Reformed heart dearer than life.

Here you come to the profoundest of all questions: whether we shall leave God God. Here lies the most basic of all principles, whether we shall leave untouched and unmarred the Sovereignty of that God Who is the Object of our religion, of our worship and adoration. Here lies at the same time that principle of truth which assures us that in very fact the Word of God shall stand, shall be realized to the full, and that His eternal Kingdom shall surely come. No other God than He Who is absolutely sovereign and free in all His ways, Who is the Almighty and reigns forever, who stands with His everlasting counsel above all things, yea, above satan and sin and hell,—no other God than such an One can possibly be the Object of our fullest adoration, worship, faith, hope, love. For if the terrible truth must be accepted that some independent power called sin, once in the past, frustrated the original plan of our God, that power was greater than He. If, moreover, it is true that sin once in the past compelled our God to change His plan, if it is true that the devil forced God to abandon his original purpose, what guarantee have we that this will never occur again? What basis is there to believe absolutely that God shall realize His Kingdom, and that the plan of our God shall be frustrated nevermore? And, therefore, this highest, most exalted, and at the same time most profound of all truths must be strongly maintained. It must not be presented in a half-hearted, apologetic manner, but with emphatic boldness it must be proclaimed and taught. It is the strength of our Reformed Confession, of our Calvinistic faith.

But aside from this positive reason that the doctrine of the counsel of God is in itself of extreme importance and principally deals with nothing less than the question whether we shall leave the Most High God and Sovereign, there is also a negative reason why we should emphasize this doctrine. And this negative reason is the fact that the doctrine is not popular in our day. Not as if I should intend to maintain that it never was a favorite truth with the masses. It was, indeed,

with the deeper and greater souls, it was with those for whom the glory of the Most High was the most exalted, the only purpose of all things. It was with such men as St. Augustine and Calvin and Dr. A. Kuyper. But it never was popular with the masses. On the contrary, all Pelagians, Arminians and Socinians revolted against it, decried it as cruel and inhuman. They placed man on the foreground, made of man their starting-point and aim. And they forevermore harped on the freedom of that man as over against God. They accused the faithful confessors of God's irresistible counsel that they taught a dangerous doctrine, called it fatalism and determinism, and maintained that in this doctrine God was ultimately made the Author of sin. They could not harmonize the freedom of God with the freedom of man. They could not see the harmony between the absolute sovereignty of the Most High and the moral responsibility of the creature. And, rather than leave God sovereign, they sacrificed it, in order to maintain the freedom, the sovereignty of man! The latter it was and is, after all, who with his free, sovereign will determines what shall become of God's kingdom, what shall be the end of all things. And God is bound to accommodate Himself according to the whims and freaks of this free man! Thus the doctrine of God's counsel was always opposed. But there is, if we are not mistaken, special reason to urge that this doctrine be preached and taught, inculcated into our children in our own day.

Two things strongly characterize our age. The first is that man's power and sovereignty is persistently emphasized. It is not the question what God does, but what man does. If ever it is in our day that Man's sovereignty is maintained over against and at the expense of the sovereignty of God. Especially in our day we will have a battle to fight to maintain the specific doctrine of God's counsel. The second characteristic of our age is amalgamation of all things, especially of the church. Churches have lost their inward strength of truth and doctrine. Long the most fundamental doctrines of God's Word have been forgotten. And what is wanting in inward strength must be supplied by outward organization. The churches

must forget their doctrinal differences (as if they have not in fact forgotten them already, and that because they have forgotten all doctrine!), they must unite into one corporation or body, and together we must become strong in the work of the Lord! Also for this reason it is necessary

that we emphasize more strongly than ever the distinctive doctrines delivered unto us.

And one of the most distinctive is the doctrine of the counsel of God!

—Grand Rapids, Mich.



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