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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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And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

—Exodus 19:7–9

Jehovah's Covenant Constitution

The solemn setting was the camp of Israel in the wilderness before Mount Sinai. The occasion was Moses' return from the mount after receiving Jehovah's word to his people. Moses called for the elders of Israel and laid before their faces all the words which Jehovah had commanded him. Those words were these: "keep my covenant" and "obey my voice indeed" (Ex. 19:5).

Upon hearing Jehovah's commandment, the children of Israel answered, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). The children of Israel were united in their purpose to obey God: "all the people answered together." The children of Israel were committed to obeying every law: "all that the LORD hath spoken." The children of Israel were sincere regarding their duty: "we will do." Israel's response was a kind of formal constitution. It was an official declaration of the people through their elders. Their response even has the ring of a constitution to it. Their "We will do" was their "We the people."

But there was a problem with Israel's response. It failed to reckon with their guilt and their depravity. The children of Israel said nothing of their need for Jehovah's pardon of such infamous sinners as themselves. They said nothing of their need for Jehovah's grace and Spirit to give them obedience. They spoke only of themselves: "We will do." In so speaking they set Jehovah on one side and themselves on the other. Their constitution made Jehovah one party who

would command and themselves another party who would obey. "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do."

Jehovah revealed the sin of Israel's response when Moses returned Israel's words to him. In the thick cloud of lightning and thunder and consuming fire, Jehovah would reveal his holiness and every man's unworthiness to live in his presence. In his speech to Moses, Jehovah would reveal that Moses, type of Jesus Christ, was worthy to stand before him. "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever" (Ex. 19:9). By this Jehovah would teach the people that they could live before him only through faith in Jesus Christ. This is an entirely different principle than works: "we will do." It is the principle of faith: "that the people may... believe thee for ever."

There is a covenant constitution. But the covenant constitution is not redeemed man's willing obedience. Rather, the covenant constitution is Jehovah's gracious promise. The essence of God's promise is Jesus Christ, who is received by faith and not by working. Whereas the people spoke of "we," Jehovah spoke of "I." Whereas the people spoke of "do," Jehovah spoke of "believe." Whereas the people spoke of their work, Jehovah spoke of his words. The covenant is unconditional and unilateral, both of which mean that Jehovah alone establishes, maintains, and perfects his covenant. In Jehovah's covenant

constitution there are not two parties but one, and he makes his people his party in Christ. There is not God's doing and man's doing for the covenant but only God's. Jehovah's covenant constitution is grace.

And our obedience? Not a covenant constitution but a covenant confession of gratitude for Jehovah's covenant of grace.

—AL

EDITORIAL

The OPC and the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel

This editorial asks the question, does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) hold the doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel?

Admittedly, the question is a strange one. The OPC is famous in Reformed circles for its doctrine of the well-meant offer. The OPC is one of two Reformed denominations in North America that had a major controversy over the well-meant offer.¹ The result of the controversy in the OPC was a document that affirms the well-meant offer, which document the General Assembly of the OPC sent to its member congregations for diligent study. The result of that controversy in the OPC was also the cruel harassment of those ministers and members who opposed the well-meant offer, which harassment finally drove those members out of the OPC. The OPC's controversy over the well-meant offer was public, spectacular, bitter, and ecclesiastically violent. Church papers of the day carried news and analysis of the controversy as it was unfolding. The controversy established the well-meant offer as the doctrinal position of the denomination and left no doubt about whether a condemnation of the well-meant offer would be tolerated in the OPC. Today the well-meant offer is openly preached from Orthodox Presbyterian pulpits. Nowhere in the OPC is there public opposition to the doctrine of the well-meant offer. Nowhere in the OPC is there any damnation of the well-meant offer of the gospel as another gospel that is opposed to

the true gospel. And certainly nowhere among the Orthodox Presbyterian ministry is there any accusing of fellow Orthodox Presbyterian ministers for removing the church from God to the Arminianism of the well-meant offer. The answer to the question whether the OPC holds the well-meant offer of the gospel is as plain as it could possibly be for any denomination on the face of the earth today: yes, the OPC holds the well-meant offer of the gospel!

Nevertheless, there is a narrative afoot that the OPC does not hold the doctrine of the well-meant offer. The narrative emphasizes the word *official*—the OPC does not hold the doctrine of the well-meant offer as its *official* position. The narrative emphasizes the word *local*—there are certain *local* Orthodox Presbyterian congregations that do not hold the well-meant offer. The narrative emphasizes the word *individual*—an *individual* believer can be a member of the OPC without believing, confessing, or tolerating the well-meant offer of the gospel. The narrative is advanced by those who personally do not agree with the well-meant offer but who nevertheless want to be members of an Orthodox Presbyterian church. These members are willing to call the well-meant offer Arminian. These members are willing to maintain their own private opposition to the well-meant offer. Yet these members desire to join themselves to a denomination that flies the banner of the well-meant offer. When these members are accused that, by joining the OPC, they have joined themselves to

¹ The other denomination is the Christian Reformed Church.

the Arminianism of the well-meant offer, they defend themselves against that accusation by claiming that the OPC does not hold to the well-meant offer.

Thus the question of this editorial, does the OPC hold the well-meant offer of the gospel?

This editorial is intended as an alarm to those members from the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) who are busy joining the OPC but who maintain a personal opposition to the well-meant offer of the gospel. Those members perhaps see the OPC as a haven from the doctrinal battles of recent years in the PRC and RPC. Those members have been through ecclesiastical war, and they carry its scars. They are ready for rest!

But beware! The rest that you seek cannot be found in the OPC. The OPC is committed to an Arminian doctrine of preaching. The OPC unabashedly teaches this Arminianism, preaches this Arminianism, disciples its members in this Arminianism, and inculcates this Arminianism into its members' hearts. A person who has emerged from recent doctrinal strife in the PRC and RPC might find the illusion of rest and refuge in the OPC. He might breathe a sigh of relief that the din of battle is no longer in his ears. But the rest that the OPC gives is Arminian rest, and therefore it cannot be true rest. God will not allow the Arminian rest of the OPC to be true rest for those who flee there. The Arminian offer of the OPC makes Jesus' entering the heart conditional: for Jesus to come into a man's heart, that man must open up his heart. The sensitive believer knows that he can never truly open up—and open up enough—for Jesus to come in. That believer will not—cannot—have rest! The Arminian offer of the OPC also makes Jesus' desire to enter to be universal: God desires the salvation of everyone who hears the gospel. But many whom God desires to save are not saved, and therefore God's desire is not sovereign and efficacious. What is sovereign and efficacious then? What is it that accomplishes that which God himself cannot accomplish?

It must be the will and work of man to open his heart to God. But the sensitive believer knows that he cannot do God's work in God's place. That believer will not—cannot—have rest! The Arminianism of the well-meant offer corrodes the soul. The Arminianism of the well-meant offer robs the believer of his comfort. And if the Arminianism of the well-meant offer becomes the faith of a man that he believes and practices and defends, the Arminianism of the well-meant offer robs that man of his salvation too. A man who knows that the well-meant offer is Arminian might live under the illusion of rest for a while in the OPC, but he enslaves himself and his family under the worst kind of bondage: the endless toil and grief of Arminianism. To those men and women who are busy fleeing to the OPC for rest, be warned: there is no rest—there can be no rest—God will give no rest—in the Arminian offer of the OPC!

This editorial is also a plea for those members who are seeking some kind of refuge in the OPC to be honest about the OPC and the well-meant offer of the gospel. Be honest with yourselves; be honest with your fellow men; and be honest with God. Do not be deceived! Do not deceive yourselves! Do not pretend that the OPC's doctrine of the well-meant offer is the gospel. And do not pretend that one can be a member of an Orthodox Presbyterian church without the Orthodox Presbyterian Arminianism of the well-meant offer. Rather, acknowledge candidly and frankly that the OPC maintains and teaches Arminianism. Acknowledge candidly and frankly that church membership in the OPC means submitting to Arminianism. Honesty demands that one say this when he joins the OPC: "This church tolerates and teaches Arminianism, and I am now subjecting myself and my family to this church's Arminianism."

In order for one to make such a candid acknowledgment, one must know whether the OPC actually maintains the well-meant offer of the gospel. Thus the question of this editorial: Does the OPC maintain the well-meant offer of the gospel?

The Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel

What is the well-meant offer of the gospel, sometimes called the *free offer of the gospel* or the *general offer of the gospel*?

The doctrine of the well-meant offer is that God, through the preaching of the gospel, makes a well-meaning, conditional offer of salvation and blessing to all who hear the preaching of the gospel. The well-meant offer of the gospel is characterized by four main points.

First, God's well-meant offer of salvation is an *offer*. That is, God truly makes salvation available to all who hear the gospel. God truly extends salvation to all, for each one to take or to refuse. The concept of an *offer* is sharply distinguished from the truth of God's sovereign *bestowal* of salvation. In the well-meant offer, God does not confer or grant or bestow salvation as his first work in saving a man; God only offers salvation, with the actual bestowal of salvation contingent upon a man's acceptance of the offer.

Second, God's offer of salvation is *universal*. That is, God's offer of salvation is not particular for the elect alone, but God makes his offer of salvation both to the elect and to the reprobate alike. The concept of a *universal offer* is sharply distinguished from the truth of God's *universal proclamation* of the gospel. The truth is that God causes the gospel to be preached and published and proclaimed in the hearing of all, elect and reprobate alike. The truth is also that God calls every person who hears the gospel to repent of his sins and to believe in Jesus Christ. Sometimes the word *offer* has been used to refer to this presentation and call of the gospel. But the well-meant offer teaches more than a universality of *proclamation* and a universality of *call*. The well-meant offer teaches a universality of *availability*. The well-meant offer teaches that God makes a real offer of salvation to everyone personally who hears, head for head, elect and reprobate alike, and that this offer makes salvation really and truly available to everyone who hears, head for head, elect and reprobate alike.

Third, God's offer of salvation is *well-meant*. That is, God's offer of salvation to a sinner proceeds from something positive in God's heart toward that sinner. God's offer of salvation to any particular sinner—including the reprobate—is not an ill-meant offer that is meant to do that sinner harm; rather, God's offer of salvation to any particular sinner—including the reprobate—is a well-meant offer that is meant to do that sinner good. Among proponents of the well-meant offer, there might sometimes be a friendly debate about whether God actually *desires* that the reprobate be saved. But among proponents of the well-meant offer, there is no debate that God's well-meant offer to all sinners proceeds from a well-meaning heart toward all sinners.

Fourth, God offers salvation to all *conditionally*. The condition might be described as faith or as repentance or as opening one's heart to Jesus or as accepting Jesus. But however the condition is described, a man must fulfill the condition of accepting God's well-meant offer before the offered salvation can take effect for that man. The concept of a *condition* in the well-meant offer is sharply distinguished from the truth that God's elect are characterized by certain marks: believing in Jesus, repenting of sin, and obeying God. Sometimes the word *condition* has been used, although improperly, to refer to the fact that God's elect have certain marks. But in the doctrine of the well-meant offer of salvation, the condition functions as a real condition, with the offered salvation contingent upon the sinner's fulfilling the condition.

Evaluation of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel

The well-meant offer of the gospel is an accursed Arminianism. The well-meant offer of the gospel makes God's salvation depend upon the hearer's fulfilling of a condition. The hearer is probably not told that this is what is happening. The minister probably refrains from saying, "What God offers depends upon what you do." The minister probably speaks much of God's grace and God's power and God's provision.

The minister might even emphasize salvation by grace alone, apart from the will and work of man. The minister might even make sure to say often, “Justification by faith alone without works.” Nevertheless, when a minister makes a well-meant offer of the gospel in his sermon, that offer makes God’s salvation depend upon man’s work. On his part God, through the minister, offers salvation and all its blessings to the people who hear the well-meant offer. On the people’s part they must respond to God’s offer properly in order to obtain the offered blessing—whether that proper response is opening up their hearts to God or being sincere in their desire to receive what God offers or performing some other mental and spiritual activity of believing, repenting, or obeying. In the well-meant offer of the gospel, God makes a conditional offer to all who hear that depends for its reception upon the response of the hearer.

Because the well-meant offer makes salvation depend upon the response of the hearer, the well-meant offer of the gospel is actually a denial of the gospel. The well-meant offer of the gospel takes the good news of the gospel—salvation by the sovereign grace of God without the will and work of the sinner—and turns it into the bad news of the law—salvation by a sufficient response of the sinner. Although a minister who makes the well-meant offer may say, “Grace alone” one hundred times in his sermon, the well-meant offer erases all one hundred graces. Although a minister who makes the well-meant offer may speak of Jesus Christ at length, the well-meant offer leaves the hearer with no Jesus Christ whatsoever. Although a minister who makes the well-meant offer may include all manner of sound Reformed doctrine in his sermon—justification by faith alone, the sovereignty of God, TULIP, election and reprobation—the well-meant offer of the gospel empties all his Reformed words of their meaning and leaves the congregation with nothing but empty slogans.

The essential error of the well-meant offer of the gospel is that it suspends man’s salvation

upon man’s will. In the well-meant offer, salvation is of him that willeth. But according to scripture, salvation “is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). In the well-meant offer, righteousness comes by the law, as the hearer fulfills the condition laid upon him. But according to scripture, “if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

Because the well-meant offer of the gospel is really a denial of the gospel, the well-meant offer of the gospel leaves the hearers unsaved. The church member who truly believes the well-meant offer of the gospel is not saved but damned. The church member who acts on the well-meant offer of the gospel is not forgiven his sins but remains in his sin. The church member who truly trusts in the operation that the well-meant offer of the gospel sets forth does not receive the grace of God but frustrates the grace of God (let the reader understand—see Gal. 2:21).

The Call of the Gospel

What is the truth over against the lie of the well-meant offer of the gospel? The truth is the doctrine of the *call of the gospel*, which can be briefly sketched from scripture and the confessions as follows.

The call of the gospel is “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). This call of the gospel includes the promise “that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life” (Canons 2.5). This promise is the essence of the call of the gospel and the power by which men are saved. This call of the gospel includes “the command to repent and believe” (Canons 2.5). This call of the gospel is found throughout the Old Testament (Isa. 55:1–3, for example) and the New Testament (Acts 2:38–39 and James 4:8, for example).

The call of the gospel is proclaimed widely and promiscuously. The church does not first attempt the impossible task of discerning the elect from the reprobate in order to call only the

elect. Rather, the church proclaims the gospel and its call to all and sundry. The church proclaims the gospel and its call to everyone head for head. The church proclaims the gospel and its call to the elect and the reprobate alike. “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). “Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel” (Canons 2.5).

The call of the gospel is a serious, urgent call and command, by which God seriously calls everyone who hears to repent of his sins and to believe in Jesus Christ. The seriousness of the call does not mean that God intends or wills the salvation of all who hear the call, but it does mean that it is the duty of everyone who hears to repent and believe. Men who hear the call of the gospel but do not repent are guilty for their disobedience to the solemn call of the gospel. “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” (Rom. 10:16). “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). “The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not this gospel. But such as receive it, and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith, are by him delivered from the wrath of God and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them” (Canons 1.4).

Although the call of the gospel is promiscuous, the promise of the gospel is particular. God’s purpose with the call of the gospel is not to save all men, nor is God’s purpose to offer salvation to all men. Rather, God’s purpose is to save the elect and to harden the reprobate. “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (II Cor. 2:15–16).

The promise of salvation is not for all. The promise of salvation is particular for those who “repent and believe” (Canons 2.5), who “labour and are heavy laden” (Matt. 11:28), who “hearken,” who “incline [their] ear,” who “come” (Isa. 55:1–3). The promise is only for him who “thirsteth,” for him who “hath no money” (Isa. 55:1–3), and for “whosoever will” (Rev. 22:17). The descriptions of hearkening, inclining, thirsting, and the like do not denote conditions to receive the promise. Rather, all those descriptions denote the spiritual fruits that God gives to his elect people. The promise is for those who hear because only the elect hear, God giving them their hearing. The promise is for those who come because only the elect come, God giving them their coming. The elect are marked by their God-given spiritual fruits: thirsting and hearing and coming. Therefore, the promise is particular and for the elect alone.

The call of the gospel is gracious and effectual for the elect, working in their hearts a true faith in Jesus Christ by the operation of the Holy Ghost. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (10:17). “But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God, given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own” (Canons 2.7). “What therefore neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament” (Canons 3–4.6). “Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 65).

The call of the gospel also has an effect on the reprobate, not to save them but to harden them in their sin and rebellion against God. This hardening by the gospel was God's eternal purpose with them, according to his decree of reprobation. "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). "That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, *For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (Acts 15:18). *Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will* (Eph. 1:11). According to which decree he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while he leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the word of God, which, though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation" (Canons 1.6).

The faith that the Holy Ghost works by the call of the gospel in the heart of the elect is the believer's union with Christ and is the believer's holy activity of knowing God and trusting in him. The believer's activity of faith is in no sense a work but is the opposite of working and is the believer's receiving from God all of the blessings that Christ has purchased for him. Faith is the believer's coming to Christ, believing on Christ, and abiding in Christ, all of which coming, believing, and abiding in Christ is the gift of God to the believer and all of which coming, believing, and abiding in Christ is produced in the believer by God (John 6:35; 15:4; Canons 3–4.14). "Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No, only those who are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits, by a true faith.

What is true faith? True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 20–21).

God's drawing the believer to himself by the call of the gospel is God's fellowship with the believer, also in the believer's experience. The believer hears God and believes in him because God has already drawn nigh to the believer by his word and Spirit. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:6–7).

The Clark-Van Til Controversy

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church established its position on the well-meant offer of the gospel through a denomination-wide battle in the 1940s. The two main contenders in the battle were Gordon H. Clark, on the one hand, and Cornelius Van Til, on the other hand. Clark and Van Til were both prominent theologians in the OPC. Van Til was a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, which J. Gresham Machen had founded in 1929. J. Gresham Machen went on to establish the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936, and Gordon H. Clark helped him establish it. The controversy between the prominent theologians Clark and Van Til was bound to be a matter of public fascination. In fact, Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches looked in on the controversy with great interest. Hoeksema wrote a series of articles in the *Standard Bearer* analyzing the controversy as it unfolded, which articles

were later published by The Trinity Foundation as a book entitled *The Clark–Van Til Controversy*.

Gordon Clark maintained that, in the preaching of the gospel, God does not make a sincere offer of salvation to the reprobate, even though the gospel is certainly preached to the reprobate as well as to the elect. Cornelius Van Til, on the other hand, maintained that God desires the salvation of the reprobate who hear the gospel and that God makes a sincere offer of salvation to the reprobate as well as to the elect. The history of the conflict is sketched by John W. Robbins in his foreword to the 2005 reprint of Hoeksema’s *The Clark–Van Til Controversy*.

In 1944 the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church ordained Dr. Gordon Haddon Clark to the ministry of that church. Dr. Clark had been ordained a ruling elder in the Presbyterian church in the 1920s—the church of John Witherspoon, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield—and, despite his youth, had been in the forefront of the battle then raging against liberalism and modernism. His father was a Presbyterian minister, and his father’s father before him.

After earning his Ph.D. in ancient philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania in 1929, and while still teaching at the University, Dr. Clark worked with J. Gresham Machen in organizing the Presbyterian Church of America, later known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Dr. Clark, in fact, nominated Machen for moderator of the PCA (OPC) at the convening of its first General Assembly in June 1936.

Though Dr. Clark’s academic, theological, and ecclesiastical credentials were impeccable, he had never attended seminary. By 1944 Dr. Clark’s lack of seminary attendance was a stumblingblock to some in the OPC. This lacuna in Dr. Clark’s schooling—but not in his education—became an issue in the acrimonious

debate that followed, for most of those who sought to depose Dr. Clark from the ministry—through administrative, not judicial, action, please note—were instructors at Westminster Theological Seminary. Dr. Clark’s ordination to the ministry represented a threat to their monopoly on the ministry; they were the gatekeepers, and they perceived Dr. Clark as a dangerous interloper.

The effort, first to prevent his ordination (in 1943) and, that failing, to defrock Dr. Clark raised some serious doctrinal issues, as well as some ugly ecclesiastical politics. It is those doctrinal issues that are the principal concern of these editorials. The Clark–Van Til controversy involved four major issues and several minor ones. The four major doctrinal differences between those who opposed Dr. Clark—the Complainants—and Dr. Clark himself concerned (1) the meaning of the “incomprehensibility” of God; (2) the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility; (3) the doctrine of reprobation versus the “sincere offer” of salvation to the reprobate; and (4) the relationship of the intellect to the will and emotions.²

After Gordon H. Clark was ordained as a minister in the OPC in 1944, Cornelius Van Til and his fellow complainants wrote *The Text of a Complaint* against Clark in an attempt to expel him from his office of minister. The complainants focused on Clark’s ordination exam, which had taken place before the presbytery of Philadelphia. The complainants wrote about Clark’s doctrine,

In the course of Dr. Clark’s examination it became abundantly clear that his rationalism keeps him from doing justice to the precious teaching of Scripture that in the Gospel God sincerely offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect, and that he has no

² Herman Hoeksema, *The Clark–Van Til Controversy*, 2nd ed. (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2005), 7–8.

pleasure in any one's rejecting this offer but, contrariwise, would have all who hear accept it and be saved."³

In response to the complainants, Gordon H. Clark wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Answer*. In it Clark defended himself against the charge of rationalism and defended his denial of the well-meant offer. Herman Hoeksema summarized the doctrinal distinction between Clark and the complainants as follows.

Let us try to define the difference between the complainants and Dr. Clark as sharply as we can.

The difference is not that the complainants insist that the Gospel must be preached to all men promiscuously, while Dr. Clark claims that it must be preached only to the elect. This would be quite impossible, seeing that no preacher is able to single out the elect and separate them from the reprobate in this world. They are agreed that the Gospel must be preached to all men.

Nor is the difference that the complainants openly deny the doctrine of reprobation, while Dr. Clark professes to believe this truth. We read in the *Complaint*: "He believes—as do we all—the doctrine of reprobation" (13).

Again, the difference does not consist in that the complainants characterize the Gospel as an "offer" of Christ or as salvation, while Dr. Clark objects to that term. If the term "offer" is understood in the sense in which it occurs in the confessions, and in which also Calvin uses it (*offere*, from *obfero*, meaning *to present*), there can be no objection to that term, though, to prevent misunderstanding, it would be better to employ the words *to present*, and *presentation*.

Again, even though Dr. Clark objects to the word "sincere" in the sense in

which the complainants use that term, afraid to leave the impression that he preaches Arminianism, even this does not touch the real point of difference between them. That God is sincere in the preaching of the Gospel no one would dare to deny. As the complaints rightly ask: "Would it not be blasphemy to deny this?" (13)

But the difference between them does concern the *contents* of the Gospel that must be preached promiscuously to all men.

It is really not a question *to whom* one must preach, or *how* he must preach, but *what* he must preach.

According to the complainants, the preacher is called to proclaim to all his hearers *that God sincerely seeks the salvation of them all*. If this is not their meaning when they write: "in the gospel God sincerely offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect," their words have no meaning at all.

According to Dr. Clark, however, the preacher proclaims to all his hearers promiscuously *that God sincerely seeks the salvation of all the elect*. The elect may be variously named in the preaching: those who repent, they that believe in Christ, that hunger for the bread of life, that thirst for the water of life, that seek, knock, ask, that come to Christ, etc. etc. But they are always the elect.⁴

The OPC General Assembly of 1948

The controversy between Clark and Van Til came to a head at the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1948. At that broadest assembly of the OPC, a denominationally-appointed committee presented a document entitled "Report of the Committee on the Free Offer of the Gospel." In the document

³ Quoted in Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*, 14.

⁴ Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*, 46–48.

the committee identified the issue in the denomination's controversy: "It would appear that the real point in dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God *desires* the salvation of all men."⁵

The committee concluded that God, when he sends the gospel, does indeed desire the salvation of all men who hear it.

The full and free offer of the gospel is a grace bestowed upon all. Such grace is necessarily a manifestation of love or lovingkindness in the heart of God. And this lovingkindness is revealed to be of a character or kind that is correspondent with the grace bestowed. The grace offered is nothing less than salvation in its richness and fulness. The love or lovingkindness that lies back of that offer is not anything less; it is the will to that salvation. In other words, it is Christ in all the glory of his person and in all the perfection of his finished work whom God offers in the gospel. The loving and benevolent will that is the source of that offer and that grounds its veracity and reality is the will to the possession of Christ and the enjoyment of the salvation that resides in him.

A minority report from the committee in 1948 disagreed with the idea that God desires the salvation of the reprobate when he offers salvation to all men. Nevertheless, the minority report was in full agreement with the majority that God offers salvation universally and conditionally to all men, with the condition being that man repent of his sins.

To say absolutely, God desires the repentance and salvation of the reprobate is to go beyond the mode of expression. To say God desires the salvation of the penitent sinner, God desires that if any sinner repent, he be saved, is to give expression to the meaning of the Ezekiel and similar passages as understood by

Rutherford. The gospel offer, in other words, is conditional or hypothetical and as such it is universal.

The result of the committee's report was the General Assembly's acceptance of the well-meant offer of the gospel with all its Arminian conditionalism. It is not too strong to say that the OPC through its General Assembly *accepted* the well-meant offer and its Arminian conditionalism as the doctrinal position of the denomination. Although some might object that the OPC's General Assembly never *adopted* the committee report and thus never *officially* adopted the well-meant offer, that objection is only a quibble about words. The fact is that the OPC—through its own unique method of handling doctrinal controversy—accepted the well-meant offer as the denominational position.

It is true that the OPC maintains its own peculiar practice in dealing with doctrinal controversy. The practice of the OPC is to produce reports that deal with the theological issue but to refrain from making those reports constitutional documents for the denomination. The OPC explains its approach as follows:

General Assembly reports are thoughtful and weighty treatises on important matters but they are not constitutional documents. Only the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Public Worship of God of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church express the church's official understanding of what the Word of God teaches.

Nevertheless, the General Assembly reports are meant to instruct the denomination in the doctrinal matter at hand. While the reports do not rise to the level of a "constitutional document," it is disingenuous to argue that the reports do not express the doctrinal position of the OPC. Indeed, the action of the General Assembly of the OPC in 1948 indicates that the General Assembly intended the report to instruct the denomination.

⁵ "Report of the Committee on the Free Offer of the Gospel," https://opc.org/GA/free_offer.html. Subsequent quotations from this meeting of the General Assembly are also found at this website.

If the General Assembly had found the report to promote a doctrinal position with which it disagreed, it would have condemned the report or commissioned a new report or buried the report or done something to discredit it. But instead, the General Assembly sent the report to the churches for their study.

It was moved and carried that the report of the Committee and the minority report on the “Free Offer of the Gospel” be sent down to the presbyteries and sessions for earnest study.

The action of the Orthodox Presbyterian minister Edmund P. Clowney also indicates that the report established a certain doctrinal position for the General Assembly and for the denomination. Clowney sought to distance himself from the report, which distance would only be necessary if the report reflected a doctrinal position for the churches.

Mr. Clowney requested that it be noted in the minutes that he had not supported the majority report on the “Free Offer of the Gospel.”

The OPC’s peculiar approach to doctrinal controversy and denominational reports is unsatisfactory and confusing. By avoiding the appearance of ruling on doctrinal matters, the denomination leads the impressionable to believe that the denomination has no official position or even that the denomination would support certain members in their opposition to the church’s doctrinal position. But when the denomination at the same time produces and distributes reports that take a certain doctrinal position, the denomination teaches and encourages that doctrinal position for the churches. The denomination ends up with the appearance of a non-position but with the reality of a position.

However, ignoring the OPC’s peculiar approach to its doctrinal reports, the one thing that the 1948 General Assembly of the OPC established is that God does indeed make a well-meant, universal, and conditional offer of salvation to all men, elect and reprobate alike. And while the

denomination might have debated whether it could properly be said that God *desires* the salvation of the reprobate, all were at least agreed that God *conditionally offers* salvation to the reprobate as well as to the elect.

The Expulsion of the Opponents

The Fifteenth General Assembly of the OPC in 1948 took a stand in favor of the well-meant offer of the gospel. But the General Assembly also allowed Gordon H. Clark to remain a minister in good standing in the denomination, in spite of his determined opposition to the well-meant offer. The General Assembly even scolded the complainants against Clark for their behavior. The OPC would soon find out that it was impossible to have it both ways. The truth and the lie cannot tolerate each other. Either the well-meant offer would stand in the OPC, and its opponents would have to go; or the well-meant offer would have to go from the OPC, and its opponents would stand. Having committed itself to the well-meant offer, the OPC would eventually drive out the opponents of the well-meant offer. Once again, John W. Robbins tells the tale.

The controversy, sadly, did not end there [with the General Assembly’s refusal to depose Gordon H. Clark], simply because the Complainants would not let it end. As soon as Dr. Clark had been vindicated, some among the Complainants announced their intention to harass one of Dr. Clark’s principal defenders in the controversy, minister and missionary Dr. Floyd Hamilton. At this point, those who for years had endured the slings and arrows of outrageous theologians called it quits. Realizing that the Westminster Seminary faction would never pursue the peace or purity of the church, even after its highest court had spoken, many of those who had defended Dr. Clark left the OPC. The OPC has never recovered from that loss, and indeed, Christianity in America suffered a serious blow.⁶

⁶ Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*, 9.

The Well-Meant Offer in Grace Fellowship Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The well-meant offer that the OPC accepted in the 1940s is alive and well in the OPC today. A recent example can be found in a sermon on Revelation 3:14–22 preached by Rev. Michael Schout on January 7, 2024, in Grace Fellowship Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Zeeland, Michigan.

But listen to [Jesus'] heart. Listen to his heart this morning as he bids you and me to open up our hearts to him. Verse 20 says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and eat with him, and he with me.” To dine with someone is not only to enjoy a meal but fellowship. That’s what Jesus is saying. If you open your heart to his love, he will live inside you forever by his Spirit. He will commune with you. The joy of being his will return...

That’s the promise [Rev. 3:21] for anyone who comes today recognizing who and what you really are: nothing but a blind and desperate beggar. And when we come to him like that and when we keep coming to him like that, one day, for those who conquer and endure patiently, you will sit with Jesus on his throne and be given reign and authority and rule...

Do we realize what Christ is offering us? Despite the fact that time and time again we’ve deliberately moved away from him, he does not move away from us. He’s moved toward us in this text. Think about that: he’s moved toward you this morning. And he already moved towards us two thousand years ago, when he died on a cross for our sins. And now he comes to us again at his table to have supper with us. Isn’t that awesome? Let’s live for him.

Let’s pray.

Lord, change my heart and our hearts. Show us why we’re here, who we are. And keep us from self-deception, Lord; it’s real. And thank you for loving us enough this morning to come right at us with your word, with both severity and tenderness. Lord, you’re so good, and thank you for that. Thank you for your great humility but also your great exaltation. And may we not only open a portion of our hearts to you but open all things so that you will have your rightful place on the throne of our hearts as King of kings and Lord of lords. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.⁷

The above preaching of the well-meant offer of the gospel is especially striking because Reverend Schout and Grace Fellowship Orthodox Presbyterian Church have a name for being soundly Reformed. Sermons in Grace Fellowship regularly mention “election” and “justification by faith alone” and “not by works” and “grace.” Disaffected members of the PRC and the RPC who were reared on God’s sovereignty inevitably check out Grace Fellowship at least once. But when it comes to the gospel, Reverend Schout and Grace Fellowship practice the well-meant offer of the gospel, with all the Arminianism that attends it.

In the OPC—even in the most Reformed OPC—Jesus stands at the door of a man’s heart knocking and waiting for man to let him in. “But listen to [Jesus'] heart. Listen to his heart this morning as he bids you and me to open up our hearts to him. Verse 20 says, ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’”

In the OPC—even in the most Reformed OPC—covenant fellowship and covenant joy with God are conditional, with the condition being that man open his heart to God’s Spirit. “To dine with someone is not only to enjoy a meal but fellowship. That’s what Jesus is saying. If you open your heart to his love, he will live inside you forever by his Spirit. He will commune with you. The joy of being his will return.”

⁷ Michael Schout, “To the Church in Laodicea,” sermon preached on January 7, 2024, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/solo/gracefellowshipopc/sermons/18241841241083/>. The portions of the sermon quoted in this article start a little after the 24-minute mark.

In the OPC—even in the most Reformed OPC—the condition to obtain the promise must be fulfilled by man again and again and again. “That’s the promise for anyone who comes today recognizing who and what you really are: nothing but a blind and desperate beggar. And when we come to him like that and when we keep coming to him like that, one day, for those who conquer and endure patiently, you will sit with Jesus on his throne and be given reign and authority and rule.”

In the OPC—even in the most Reformed OPC—the condition must be fulfilled perfectly and fully before God’s promise can take effect. “And may we not only open a portion of our hearts to you but open all things so that you will have your rightful place on the throne of our hearts as King of kings and Lord of lords.”

And in the OPC—even in the most Reformed OPC—lest anyone miss that it is indeed the well-meant offer of the gospel that is being preached, the minister helpfully announces it as the offer. “Do we realize what Christ is offering us?” When an Orthodox Presbyterian minister in an Orthodox Presbyterian church with a sizeable ex-PR and ex-RP audience announces his preaching as “what Christ is offering us,” he is unmistakably announcing his doctrine to be the OPC’s well-meant offer of the gospel, and he is inextricably connecting his sermon to the OPC’s report that approved the universal, conditional, well-meant offer of the gospel.

Does the OPC Hold the Well-Meant Offer?

So does the OPC hold the well-meant offer of the gospel?

Yes, of course. Of course! The Arminianism and conditionalism of the well-meant offer of the gospel are alive and well in the OPC today. How could it be any different? The OPC decided for the well-meant offer long ago. The OPC expelled the opponents of the well-meant offer long ago. In the battle over the well-meant offer, the OPC’s leaders called the well-meant offer “the precious

teaching of Scripture.”⁸ The OPC does not merely tolerate the well-meant offer in embarrassed silence; the OPC loves the well-meant offer and trumpets it. For several generations now, the well-meant offer has been “precious” to the OPC. Did anyone expect that the OPC would suddenly become shy about its well-meant offer now that some ex-PRs and ex-RPs have decided that they are Orthodox Presbyterian?

Let those who advance the narrative that the OPC does not hold the well-meant offer not deceive themselves or their fellow men any longer. Rather, let them acknowledge openly and frankly that their church holds to and boldly teaches the well-meant offer. And let those stop deceiving themselves who advance the narrative that they can maintain a personal opposition to the well-meant offer while belonging to a church where the well-meant offer is precious. Rather, let them acknowledge to themselves and before the face of God that they and their children are now subject to instruction in the well-meant offer until it is inculcated into their hearts and becomes precious to them too. And if these members claim that they still repudiate the well-meant offer with their mouths, then let them repudiate the well-meant offer with their church membership as well by leaving the OPC and forming or joining a church where the sovereign God of the gospel is acknowledged. Let them repent of their vain imaginings that a well-meant offer opponent can live in a well-meant offer church.

Let those who have an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. Jesus does indeed stand at the door and knock.⁹ But the door at which he stands is not the door of the heart, waiting for a man to open his heart before the Lord may come in. Rather, Jesus stands at the door of the false church, which false church harbors the Arminianism of the well-meant offer. From outside that false church Jesus calls to his elect people—whom he loves!—that they come out, with the promise that he will not

⁸ Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*, 14.

⁹ For a fuller exegesis of this call and its application to members of a false church, see Andrew Lanning, “Jesus at the Door,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 45 (February 17, 2024): 5–10.

forsake them and that in fact he shall sup with them.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that

overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Rev. 3:20–22)

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

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

We were to show that the Reformed confession concerning the all-comprehensive nature of the counsel of God is in harmony with the Word of God.

In general it might be considered sufficient to refer to such passages as Eph. 1:10, 11. There we read: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of time he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him: in whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” In this passage the author mentions “all things” twice. First he informs us that God hath purposed in himself to gather together in one all things, something which plainly indicates that the Almighty controls all things without exception by His providence. In the second place he states that God worketh all things, and to this he adds: “after the counsel of his own will.” There is no indication in the text or in the context that anything may be excluded from this all-comprehensive statement. God worketh all things without exception, and that according to the counsel of his own will. And, therefore, even a general passage like this already plainly asserts that the counsel of God is all-comprehensive.

Yet it will be necessary to refer to specific passages of Scripture. The confession of the all-comprehensive decree of the Almighty implies too that even the actions of men and angels, of free moral agents, are predetermined and that the freedom of these moral agents is not absolute but limited by this counsel after which God works all things. There is but one who is absolutely free and sovereign, namely God. And the creature, even though he is morally free, a freely determining subject of his own actions, who is never allowed and never able to rid himself of his sense of responsibility in regard to all he does, yet is limited by the counsel of God and can never do anything than execute that counsel. It is at this point that the confession that the counsel of God is all-comprehensive meets with its chief difficulty, and at the same time with most bitter and persistent opposition. It is argued that such a confession destroys all true moral freedom, and does away with all sense of responsibility. It is a dangerous doctrine, we are told. It is a doctrine that is principally fatalistic, deterministic in character, that makes of man a passive tool in the hand of some irresistible power. It is a doctrine that tends to kill all sense of duty and with it all initiative to action. And, therefore, the majority of men do not accept this doctrine whatever. Perhaps the difficulty would not be felt so keenly,

were it not for the fact of sin in the world. This world is undeniably not a perfect world. There is much imperfection, there is much suffering, a good deal of evil, and above all, there is a load of sin and guilt. If the statement that God's counsel is all-comprehensive is maintained, the conclusion seems inevitable that God Himself is the author of sin. He willed it. He predetermined all nations, even of the sinners and the devils. And the free moral agents are nothing but victims in the power of an Almighty God! In short we come face to face with the question of the Theodicy, the question whether God is justified in the face of an evil world. It is for that reason that reference to a general passage of the Word of God does not satisfy. What we must have is a statement plainly indicating that also the actions of the free moral creature are predetermined, and that even those actions that are sinful are not excluded from the counsel of God. For if you ask us whether those actions that are sinful and are placed at the door of men's own responsibility are not excluded from the counsel of the Almighty, we answer most resolutely: No, God holily and without becoming the Author of sin also predetermined them from all eternity.

Of course we do not as yet discuss the question of determinism. Yet we may even now call your attention to the fact that the question of men's freedom and responsibility is not a practical one at all. True, the accusation is frequently brought against us that we deprive man of his moral freedom, and that our doctrine kills all sense of accountability. It is said that this doctrine is dangerous and gives occasion to the sinner to cast his guilt upon God with the statement: If I am a sinner, my sin is predetermined and I am not to blame! But fact is that in practical life this never occurs. There never was a sinner yet and there never will be a sinner who spoke thus and was honest. There never was a sinner who succeeded to his own satisfaction to cast the blame on the Holy One. Whatever a person may philosophize, and in whatever delusion he may live for a while, never will he succeed to rid himself of the clean sense that he is the responsible agent of his own actions. Why this is impossible we hope to see later. We now merely state the fact as such. Never

has the strictest maintenance of the doctrine of God's counsel had the result that man lost his sense of accountability before God. But however this may be, we maintain most strongly that the counsel of God is all-comprehensive and that even the actions of the free moral agents are not excluded from it.

This might be considered a matter of course. The actions of man constitute the most important creaturely element in the history of the world. They are, of course, intimately related to the final outcome, to the consummation of all history. If these free moral actions are beyond God's control, if they have no place in God's counsel, there is no counsel of God in the true sense of the word. Then not God, but man determines what shall become of the world, and the entire fate of the world rests in the hands of man. No one can tell what this free agent will do next. Even foreknowledge becomes practically impossible. For even the statement that God foreknew all that man and all that every individual would do establishes a fixed course in God's mind and destroys this much boasted freedom. If, therefore, the actions of man are excluded from the counsel of God, we must deny the very idea of the counsel itself. We must leave the future of the world in the power of man. We must leave it to his free will whether the kingdom God would like to see established will ever come. Man is the actor, God is the looker-on. Man determines, God does all He can, but for the rest He must leave His world in the hand and to the will of man and the devil! Man really is the God of this world, and by creating such a free agent God delivered the fate of His creation and of the glory of His name to man! In short, God may exhort and persuade, but to control this mighty creature Man lies beyond His power! Because of this very absurdity, which nevertheless is the only alternative, I said it might be considered a matter of course that the counsel of God comprehends also the free actions of man.

But we must turn to Scripture.

And, then, we call your attention to that unique passage: Acts 2:23, where we read the remarkable words: "Him being delivered by the

determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” It is Peter talking here. It was not so very long ago that Peter had rebelled against this very truth he now so boldly confesses. When the Lord had revealed to His disciples that He would have to go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the chief priests and scribes, Peter had rebuked the Lord, and enthusiastically contradicted such statement. No more than the other disciples did he understand the divine necessity of the suffering of the Messiah. But here on Pentecost, preaching under the enlightening influence of the Spirit that had been poured out, he boldly testifies: Jesus was delivered according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God!

Notice that the text makes mention of a fact that constitutes at the same time the most heinous sin ever committed and the most exalted manifestation of divine love ever revealed.

Such is the crucifixion!

On the part of the human agents that committed the crime, Judas, the leaders of the Jews, the nation of Israel, Pilate, the “wicked hands,” it was the most terrible sin. Here was the Holy One. He that knew no sin. The Son of God. Immanuel. He that had come to save. The manifestation of the Father. And His own people persecute Him, have Him condemned, maltreat Him, nail Him to the accursed tree. Surely, in their shedding of this Man’s blood the people of Israel fulfill the measure of their iniquity and add the inevitable conclusion to their history of persecuting the prophets of Jehovah! The most horrible crime they here commit, and sin reveals itself as sin indeed, when it rises in sinful rebellion against the Holy One of Israel!

Yet, on the part of God it is the revelation of sublimest love. After all, it was God who gave the sacrifice of Golgotha! “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. “But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” It was God who made Him that knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God

in Him,” II Cor. 5:21. It was after all not these raging enemies, though theirs is the guilt, that played the highest part in the crucifixion of our Lord. No, “it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He hath put Him to grief,” Is. 53:10. And all this took place according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God! Yet, it was predetermined in God’s counsel that the Lord should suffer. And who would have the absurd courage to maintain that every detail of this terrible scene was not predetermined? Who would dare to maintain that God merely foresaw without any predetermination that Judas would betray the Christ, that the Sanhedrin would condemn Him, that Pilate would deliver Him, that the soldiers would nail Him to the accursed tree? Who, in other words, would make this central scene of salvation dependent upon the will of man ultimately? No, the Son of man went as it was determined, exactly in that manner, though woe is unto the man that betrayed him, Luke 22:22. It was all predetermined. That Judas should betray Him, that the Jewish counsel should condemn Him, that Pilate should deliver Him, that the soldiers should nail Him to the tree of suffering and shame, — absolutely all was determined. He was delivered according to the determinate counsel of God!

Or if you are not satisfied that this is the significance of these words of Peter, listen, then, to the prayer of the disciples at Jerusalem sent to the throne of grace after Peter and John have been released from prison: “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Acts 4:27, 28.

The heathen raged, indeed! Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and Israel together raged against the Anointed of God in furious hatred. In their hatred they committed the most horrible sin ever committed. Without excuse are they.

And yet, in all their raging and furious rebellion they simply executed what had been determined by God’s counsel from before the foundation of the world!

—Grand Rapids, Mich.