



REFORMED

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.

—Exodus 32:15–24

The Broken Covenant

Moses came down from the mountain with the two stone tables of the law in his hand. Behind him the mount burned with the consuming fire of Jehovah. Beside him Joshua now walked again, having waited the forty days and forty nights while Moses was in the mount. Before him, as yet unseen, the people so rioted in their idolatry that their shouts reached Moses' and Joshua's ears. "There is war in the camp," said Joshua. "There is singing in the camp," said Moses.

When Moses came in sight of the camp, he saw the golden image. He saw the dancing. His anger waxed hot. He took hold of the two tablets with both hands and smashed them onto the rocky ground at the base of the mount so that they broke before Israel's eyes. Moses took hold of the calf that they had made, burned it in the fire, ground it to powder, scattered it upon the water, and made Israel drink it. Moses confronted Aaron with reproach and a rebuke for bringing such great sin upon Israel. Aaron blamed the people and the

fire, reporting that the golden calf sprang out of the fire when he threw the people's gold into it. Meanwhile, Jehovah's devouring fire burned atop Sinai. Meanwhile, many Israelites continued to dance and play below Sinai.

What was happening? This: Israel had broken God's covenant. That was the main message conveyed by Moses' breaking the two tables of God's law. Those were the two tables of the testimony (Ex. 32:15). Those were the two tables of the covenant (Deut. 9:15). When Moses cast the tables from his hand so that they broke, it was a sign from God that Israel had broken God's covenant.

What does it mean that Israel had broken God's covenant? It does not mean that Israel had annulled the covenant or annihilated the covenant or abrogated the covenant. It does not mean that God's covenant with elect Israel ceased. If that were the meaning, then the covenant had depended on Israel all along. If that were the meaning, then the covenant was conditional all along. If that were the

meaning, then there could be no covenant and no salvation. But the covenant is a covenant of grace and depends from beginning to end on the covenant God alone. Even now, it was not annulled for God's elect people, as Israel would see.

Rather, to break God's covenant means to disobey God's covenant law. The two tables of the covenant represented Israel's grateful obedience in God's covenant of grace. Israel's part was not to make God's covenant. Israel's part was not even to preserve or maintain God's covenant. Rather, Israel's part was to keep God's covenant, which means to obey God's covenant. That is, Israel was to obey the law of God with care, with diligence, with zeal, with single-minded devotion. As the soldier keeps his post carefully and alertly, so the covenant people are to keep God's covenant decalogue watchfully and mindfully. The Israelites had not obeyed the covenant law of love. They had hated Jehovah in image worship and hated their neighbor in fornication. They had broken God's law! They had broken God's covenant! And you? And I?

There is only one hope for such covenant-breakers: Jehovah's covenant-keeper, our Lord Jesus Christ. For God laid our sins upon him and visited him with the stripes that we deserved.

Thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. (Ps. 89:38–39)

And God has done this for our sakes. For in Jesus Christ, the seed of David, God's covenant stands eternally fast with us, his people.

My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah. (Ps. 89:34–37)

—AL



You are cordially invited to:

Two free Public Lectures

First Lecture:

GOD'S EVERLASTING COVENANT OF GRACE

God said to Noah, "I establish my covenant with you" (Gen. 9:9). God said to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). God said about Isaac, "My covenant will I establish with Isaac" (Gen. 17:21). God speaks about his "covenant with Jacob" (Lev. 26:42). The Bible calls the New Testament "a new covenant" (Heb. 8:13). The covenant must be very important, since God so often speaks of it. But what is God's covenant, and what does it mean for God's people?

God's covenant is the relationship of friendship that he establishes with his people in Jesus Christ. The truth of God's covenant is good news for us who are sinful and lonely and unsatisfied here on this earth. For the truth of the covenant means that God, in Jesus Christ, graciously makes his people his own children and dwells with us in blessed fellowship forever. How wonderful is God's covenant!

We cordially invite you to join us for a public lecture explaining and rejoicing in God's everlasting covenant of grace.

Second Lecture:

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ADAM

God's covenant with Adam is a much-discussed but little-understood truth of God's everlasting covenant of grace with his people in Christ. Was God's covenant with Adam a covenant of works? Or was it a covenant of grace? Or was it something else? Was God's covenant with Adam a covenant under the law? Or was it a covenant of promise? Could Adam merit with God? Can Christ? The questions multiply and many answers are proposed, and confusion sets in. But what is the truth of God's covenant with Adam?

We cordially invite you to join us for a public lecture in which we seek to bring the clarity of the gospel to bear on the truth of God's covenant with Adam.

Speaker: Rev Andrew Lanning
Date: 20 June 2026 (Saturday)
Time: 10 a.m.

Speaker: Rev Andrew Lanning
Date: 27 June 2026 (Saturday)
Time: 10 a.m.

Programme: Each lecture will be followed by Q&A, fellowship and refreshments.

Venue: 51 Cuppage Road, #03-03, S(229469). Room: **Valor**.

Directions: **Somerset MRT station**, Exit D; and it is behind The Centrepoint.

Buses to **Concorde Hotel**: 7, 14, 16, 65, 77, 106, 111, 174, 175, 190, 972. Walk to Koek Road, keep left through to the end (total distance, approx. 330m).

Organisers: Remnant Reformed Church (USA), with Remnant Reformed Fellowship of Singapore.

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Article CLXV: The Seven Churches of Asia: The Church That Lost Its First Love (continued)

An entirely different conception they had of the church than the one that is often prevalent in our time. The church today, in as far as she has not entirely been modernized and utilized for social purposes in the world, is often considered to be purely a “Heilsaanstalt,”¹ an institution to save souls! For that purpose men and women are gathered into the church from the streets of our cities, regardless of their faith and walk, and received into the communion of saints. If only they are inside the four walls of the church once, if only they first have “joined the church,” they can be influenced and actually converted! And the result is the degradation and degeneration of the church of Christ. The church of Christ gradually is controlled by “evil men”! Discipline is not exercised. Excommunication is regarded unchristian, the church is delivered into the hands of the world, the body of Christ is not to be discerned any more.

But this was not the case in Ephesus. They could not bear evil men. Whether they were men of influence and importance, leaders of the church perhaps, like the false apostles, or whether they were of less importance and lower rank, they would not tolerate them in their midst unless they repented. And notice that the Lord commends and praises them for this. He wills that discipline shall be exercised and that the keys of the kingdom shall not grow rusty because they are forever stored away in some forgotten locket of the church. Ephesus was also faithful in discipline. In short, we would almost draw the conclusion that in this first letter the portraiture of an ideal congregation were held before our vision!

II. And yet, if this would be our final conclusion, how sadly disappointed we would be! There was something lacking in the congregation of Ephesus that was sufficient to cause its total debasement and downfall; something was gnawing at the very root of its life powerful enough to cause its death. And this something is indicated in the words of rebuke that are addressed to the church: “But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love.” Not infrequently the attempt has been made to elucidate this spiritual lack in the congregation of Ephesus by comparing the church to the individual child of God.

Perhaps we are able to speak from experience of that cooling down of our first enthusiasm shortly after our first conversion, especially if that conversion has been a rather sudden translation from darkness into light. At the period of our coming to light, we were filled with the love of Jesus and all enthused about the work in the kingdom. It seemed, as it were, as if nothing would be too difficult for us to perform, as if no sacrifice would be considered too great for the altar of our love. We were willing to devote ourselves with all our possessions to the work of the Lord. We spoke of him at every opportunity, we utilized every occasion to testify of his name, of his grace and mercy. In a word, in the first consciousness of our salvation we were filled with fervent love and enthusiasm for the cause of Jesus Christ. But soon this was changed. Our first love was on the decline, our ardent enthusiasm cooled down, and it seemed to us as if we were filled with the Spirit no more as in former days. And we are sadly disappointed with our own condition!

¹ English translation: “sanatorium.”

With this condition, occurring rather frequently among children of God, the loss of the first love in the congregation of Ephesus is often compared. And yet, it is our conviction that this comparison is but partially justifiable. We should never forget that in this cooling down of our so-called first love which we experience as individual believers, there is always something that is perfectly normal. That “first love” was, perhaps, largely a matter of our feeling and emotion rather than of the will. In our high state of spiritual ecstasy and joy we, perhaps, lost sight of our inward condition, forgot the fact that there is after all but a small beginning of true obedience in our hearts, imagined that we could henceforth walk our path without being enticed by sin. But reality is far different. Reality is that we are still far from perfection, that our all is in Christ, that outside of him we still lie in the midst of death. And when after our first enthusiasm is quieted and the heat of our first excitement is reduced to a more normal temperature, we begin to examine our heart in the light of Scripture, we find that the power of sin is still a rather formidable cohabitant in our heart with the principle of new life.

This is not always a sign that our love is really on the wane. On the contrary, this moderation of our first passionate ardor may very well be accompanied by a deepening and strengthening of our love. “Philein” is gradually replaced by “agapain,” from the heat of our emotion our love is transplanted into the depth of our will. And in as far as this condition of the child of God is normal, it cannot be compared to the loss of first love in the church of Ephesus, for the simple reason that the latter was a cause for rebuke. Besides, notice the important difference. Our text according to the original does not point to a loss of the first glow of a new enthusiasm, but to the abandoning of real love, rooted in faith.

And this principle of real love the individual can never lose. If that were the case, there would be no perseverance of the saints. And, therefore, we must not have before us the picture of the individual child of God, but retain that of the congregation in general. What is impossible in the case of individual believers is possible for an entire church. The falling away of the former is impossible; in reality

he cannot lose his love. The gradual apostasy of individual congregations, however, is very well conceivable. The history of the church in Ephesus may be our warning illustration!

How, then, must we conceive of the condition of the church in Ephesus? At first it had been a congregation characterized by a real and healthy love of Christ, by a love rooted in faith. With a view to the congregation as such, this implied that all, or at least the vast majority, of the church possessed this love, were really grafted into Christ by a true faith. Jesus, of course, had known the church in former years; he had known her in the days of her first love. And he speaks of it; he reminds her of those former days. Practically every individual member of the church had been a living member of Christ’s body, a fruit-bearing branch. There had been a time that most every member could not merely discuss the truth of the gospel objectively, but also speak of his own personal relation to that truth. But this condition had changed. That real and true love was on the decline, had partially, perhaps largely, disappeared, was scarcely met with any more in the church.

Mark now, it is not of the individual believer that the Lord is here speaking, but of the congregation at large. And, therefore, the impression must not be that this true love, rooted in faith in Jesus, had disappeared from the hearts it at first set aglow, as if there were a falling away from grace. No, but the history of the congregation had been such that gradually it had left its first love. The old members of the church that had lived at the time of Paul’s ministry had passed away, for many years had elapsed since that time. Outwardly the congregation had grown. It had received new members from without and had enjoyed a natural growth in membership from within. It had continued to emphasize the necessity of knowledge; it had not grown weary to labor in the work of the Lord. It had faithfully educated its children and the youth of the congregation, so that there was an abundance of knowledge of the Scriptures; and it had tested those that called themselves apostles but were not. But it had gradually forgotten to emphasize the necessity of true spiritual knowledge, of experimental

Christianity, of the true love that is rooted in faith. On the basis of an almost scientific examination and a manifestation of willingness to labor and toil in the kingdom of God, one was admitted to the full communion of the church. Whether there was true spiritual life, whether there was a spiritual knowledge of Christ Jesus, whether religion was a genuine matter of the heart, a living plant having its root in faith, was a forgotten question never asked. And the result was that gradually the condition in the church had changed. Instead of counting a large number that could testify of a living faith and true love, there were but very few, and these mostly among the more aged members of the church, that knew anything about their personal relation to the Savior. Instead of being characterized by that attractive feature of its first love, there was a certain coldness and deadness about the atmosphere in the church that was chilling and repulsive. In a word, the condition in the church had become such that at the moment the letter is addressed to her, Jesus could truly rebuke her in the words: "I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love."

If you ask how, then, it was possible that with such an inward spiritual deadness the church could still cling so faithfully and tenaciously to the truth and abound in the work of the Lord, the answer

is not difficult. In the first place, I take it, at this moment the first love had not entirely disappeared from the church of Ephesus. Had this been the case the congregation would have been dead and the candlestick removed from its place. There were still some true spiritual children of God, and these, no doubt, served as an impetus to the rest of the congregation. But aside from this fact, it should not be forgotten that it is possible, indeed, for a church to live on tradition for some time. What I mean can be made clear, perhaps, no better than by the illustration of a boat in midsea. Suppose the boat is running at a speed of twenty miles an hour and the engine is working up sufficient power to keep the boat arunning at that velocity. But suppose, now, that the engine is of a sudden changed from twenty to five miles an hour. What will be the result? Will the boat listen at the very moment the engine is slowed down; will it of a sudden reduce its speed from twenty miles to five? Of course not. It will continue to run at its old speed for a few minutes, and only gradually will its swiftness be diminished, till its velocity is again in harmony with the speed of the engine. Even if the engine would suddenly stop, the boat would continue its course for some time.

(To be continued)

