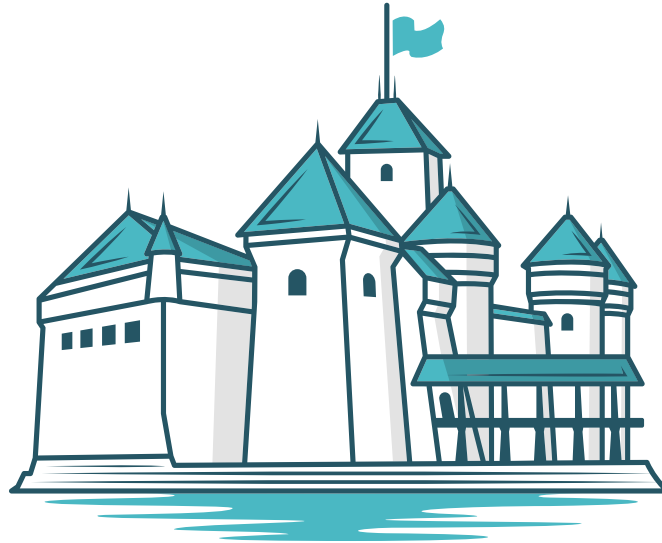




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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

—Exodus 33:12–17

Show Me Thy Way

Moses said unto Jehovah, “Show me thy way!” But what exactly did Moses want to see?

Moses wanted to see someone. Not something but someone. It might not sound like that because a way is not a person. A way is a thing. “Show me thy way” sounds like “Show me the path that I should walk on. Show me the steps that I should take.” Nevertheless, Moses wanted to see someone.

Consider how Moses began his question. “Thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me” (Ex. 33:12). This was a statement about someone. It was Moses’ declaration that God would send someone with him into the land of Canaan, but Moses did not know who it was. “Now,” said Moses, “show me thy way!” Moses wanted to see someone.

Consider how God answered Moses’ question. “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (Ex. 33:14). This was a statement about someone. It was God’s declaration that his own presence would go with Moses and Israel and give them rest in the promised land of Canaan. In response to Moses’ request, “Show me thy way,” God answered with himself: “My presence shall go with thee.”

Moses wanted to see someone. But then why did he not say so? Why did he say, “Show me thy way”? Ah, because Moses’ faith was sunk deep, deep into God! By faith Moses held the promise of God in his hands and beheld wonderful things in it! Here is what Moses perceived: God must send *someone* to be Israel’s way into Canaan! The way to Canaan was through someone, and someone was the way to Canaan! “Show me thy way” means “Show me thy Way.”

How could Moses know this? Here is how. Israel was stiff-necked and rebellious. The people were so stiff-necked that God would consume them if he were among them. And yet God did not consume them. He came to Moses in the tabernacle of the congregation and spoke with him face to face and said to him, “I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight” (Ex. 33:12). And God would bring Israel to himself in Canaan, for God had said to Moses, “Bring up this people” (v. 12). The only possible conclusion was that God himself would go with Moses and Israel in his mercy and grace and bring them to himself. There was no other way for stiff-necked Israel to come to God than that the gracious God himself bring them! When Moses said, “Show me thy way,” he meant, “I know that you are going with us!”

And indeed, God went with them by the angel of his presence. “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (Isa. 63:9).

And now let us see where Moses’ faith was anchored. Moses saw that someone was the way to Canaan and to God. And who is that someone? “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

Yes, Father, show me thy Way!

—AL

THE SCRIVENER

God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace

Introduction

The topic that we consider in our lecture this morning is “God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace.”¹ Every word in that topic is important, beginning with the word *covenant*. The word *covenant* is the main word. It is the essential topic that we consider this morning, the wonderful covenant of God. Also important in the words of the topic is the word *God’s*. It is *God’s* covenant of grace. The covenant does not belong to man. The covenant is not made by man, established by man, maintained by man, or enjoyed by man, by means of man’s work. But the covenant is *God’s* everlasting covenant of grace. It is a covenant of *grace*, continuing with the words of our topic, which means that it is an *unconditional* covenant. The only other kind of covenant there can be, if it is not a covenant of grace, is a conditional covenant. A conditional covenant denies the grace of the covenant. But we speak, according to the scriptures, of a covenant of grace. The covenant of God is also an *everlasting* covenant, which means that the elect of God cannot annul or abrogate or destroy that covenant. But God maintains his covenant sovereignly and powerfully, according to his eternal purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our topic, with all of the words of that topic being important for the doctrine, is “God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace.” This is a significant

topic. The doctrine of God’s covenant is a significant doctrine for the people of God. That is because the truth of the covenant is part of God’s glorious revelation of himself. In the truth of the covenant, we come face to face with the very being of God, in fact, with the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

That means that the doctrine of the covenant is a *theocentric* doctrine, a theological doctrine. Men today try to turn the covenant into an anthropocentric or anthropological doctrine; that is, they try to make the covenant conditioned on the works of man. But over against that corruption of the doctrine of the covenant, the truth of the doctrine of the covenant is theological and theocentric. As we develop the idea of the covenant in the lecture this morning, we do not begin with man, but we begin with God. The truth of the covenant flows out of the triune God.

The doctrine of the covenant is also important because it is properly *Christocentric*; that is, the doctrine of the covenant reveals Jesus Christ. Or, to say the same thing slightly differently, God reveals his covenant love as the triune, covenant God *through* the Lord Jesus Christ, so that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God’s covenant. That means that the truth of the covenant is for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the

¹ This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given June 20, 2026, in Singapore. The speech can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZ_7mCR61wc.

covenant does not give glory to you or to me. The truth of the covenant reveals that we are weak, we are sinful, we are nothing. The truth of the covenant reveals that God graciously, according to his eternal purpose in Christ, has taken us who are nothing and has made us his covenant sons and daughters and members of his covenant family. The truth of the covenant, as a Christocentric and Christological doctrine, honors the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is important that we understand the truth of the covenant because men today are doing with the covenant what men always do with the topics of the truth, the doctrines of the gospel: they take each topic and break it loose from the Reformed faith. This is done even in Reformed churches. In fact, this is done especially by Reformed leaders. Men take the topic of the covenant and break it loose from the Reformed faith.

What is the Reformed faith? What is the Reformed conception of things? The Reformed faith is the sovereignty of God. The Reformed faith teaches that God is God. The Reformed faith teaches that God is the one who saves by his sovereign power. And now, men come to the doctrine of the covenant, which teaches the sovereignty of God, and they break it loose from the doctrine of God's sovereignty, so that now the covenant, in some respect, depends not upon the sovereign God but upon the work or the will or the obedience of man.

Men constantly break doctrines loose from the truth of the sovereignty of God. Men do that with the call of the gospel. The Reformed faith is that God is sovereign in the call of the gospel. Men break the call of the gospel loose from God's sovereignty and make an Arminian well-meant offer of the gospel that contradicts the Reformed faith. You can go through all the doctrines of the Reformed faith and find men doing the same thing with them. And so it is with the doctrine of the covenant. Men break the doctrine of the covenant loose from the truth of God's sovereignty and introduce Arminianism into the doctrine of the covenant. So it is important for the members of Christ's church and those who bear the name Reformed to know the truth of the covenant of God—the *unconditional* covenant of God, the covenant of *grace* of our God,

God's *everlasting* covenant of grace—over against all of those Arminian attempts.

The truth of God's covenant is also important for the members of the church of Jesus Christ today because that truth is comforting. The doctrine of the covenant is that the eternal God—who is exalted above all, who dwells above the heavens, who cannot be contained by the heaven or the heaven of heavens—has been pleased to come down to us sinners and to all of his elect in Christ and to say to us, "You are mine. You belong to me. I am yours, and I belong to you. I am your God, and you are my people." That is marvelous grace. That is wonderful mercy that the Lord reveals in Jesus Christ. That makes the doctrine of the covenant comforting for the people of God—especially that the covenant is a covenant of grace and unconditional, so that no enemy, not even our sins, can remove us from the covenant love and fellowship of God that is in Jesus Christ.

So, for the glory of God and for the comfort of God's people, we consider the topic "God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace." Let us consider this topic in three main points. First, let us consider what God's covenant is. There we need to deal with the essence of the covenant, the fact that it is God's covenant of grace. Second, we will consider how God establishes his covenant. There we will see that God has established his covenant with us through the Lord Jesus Christ alone, so that Jesus Christ sits at the center of this covenant of God with us. Or, to use the language of the confessions, he is the head and mediator of God's covenant with us. Third, let us consider briefly one hundred years of learning about God's covenant. There we will take a broad overview of some major waypoints in the development of the covenant over the last hundred years, to bring us to where we are today, by God's grace.

What God's Covenant Is

It is good that we begin with a definition of God's covenant. We can define God's covenant this way: God's covenant of grace is his relationship of friendship and fellowship with his elect people in Jesus Christ, according to which he is our God and Father, and we are his people and children. In that

definition we come to the essence of God's covenant of grace. The essence, the kernel, the heart of God's covenant is *fellowship*. The heart of God's covenant is *friendship*. It is *family*.

That stands over against the popular idea about God's covenant, that the essence of God's covenant is a contract or an agreement or an arrangement between business partners, so that God on his part agrees that he will do a certain thing, and man on his part agrees that he will do another thing. And now, in this agreement between God and man, we supposedly have the essence of the covenant. That is *not* the essence of the covenant. The covenant of grace of God with his people in Christ is fellowship and friendship. It is a relationship. It is family.

That must be proved from scripture because these two conceptions of the covenant are opposite and irreconcilable. If one has a covenant that is a contract—an agreement between God and man—one has a conditional covenant. If one has a covenant between God and man that is fellowship and friendship in the Lord Jesus Christ, one *must* have an unconditional covenant. Those two conceptions of the covenant cannot be brought together, no matter how much men try to bring them together.

Let us prove, then, that the essence of the covenant is fellowship and friendship. We begin with Genesis 17:7, where God says, "I will establish my covenant *between* me and thee"—already in the word *between* we see that there is a relationship—"and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a *God unto thee*, and to thy seed after thee." There the word *between* is defined. It is not that there is a bargain between God and man, so that God will do his part, and man will do his part. But rather, *between* God and man means this: I bring us together as God and man. I make a covenant between us, in which I am your God and you are my people.

We call this language of Genesis 17:7 the covenant formula. The covenant formula of God is this: I am your God, and you are my people. That is not the language of a bargain. That is not the language of an agreement or a contract. That is the language of fellowship. It is the language of family. That is what

a husband says to his wife: "I am yours, and you are mine." That is what parents and children say to each other: "I am yours, and you are mine." That is what friends say to their friends: "I am yours, and you are mine." The covenant formula is the language of love. It is the language of fellowship. It is the language of family.

This covenant formula can be found at the beginning of the Bible, in the book of Genesis. It can be found at the end of the Bible as well, in Revelation 21, the second-to-last chapter of the scriptures. In Revelation 21:3 we read this: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." You hear again there the covenant formula: I will be their God, and they shall be my people. I am yours, and you are mine. That is the language of the covenant, which shows it to be a covenant of family, friendship, and fellowship.

We have that idea of the covenant as friendship also in the description throughout scripture of Abraham as God's friend. This time we'll begin in the New Testament and go to the Old. James 2:23: "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the *Friend of God*." This Abraham with whom God made his covenant was God's friend—not God's business partner, not God's colleague in bringing a contract to completion, but God's friend. That is the covenant. The same truth is taught in Isaiah 41:8: "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." That is the language of love. That is the warm language of the covenant of God.

We know that the covenant is essentially fellowship and friendship between God and his people also because of the outstanding symbol of the covenant in the Old Testament, which was the tabernacle. The book of Exodus records the deliverance of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. God brought them to Mount Sinai; and most of the last half of the book of Exodus is taken up with God's giving instruction to Moses about

the tabernacle, the people's building the tabernacle, and the tabernacle's being reared up. In Exodus 29:43–46 God explains the meaning of the tabernacle.

And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God.

God explains the meaning of the tabernacle by his covenant formula. The tabernacle symbolized God's dwelling with the children of Israel. "I will dwell among the children of Israel." The covenant was a house. It was the kind of house that the Israelites lived in in the Old Testament wilderness: a tabernacle house, a tent house. The tabernacle of God was God's house, just as all of the Israelites had their own tents, where their families dwelled in the wilderness. And God put his house, his tabernacle, in the midst of Israel as the testimony "I live with you the way a family member lives with his family. I dwell with you. I have my house in your midst. And you dwell with me. You may come into my house through the high priest and through blood. You may come into my house and have a place with me." Thus the tabernacle in the Old Testament was a symbol of God's covenant dwelling with his people.

That is also Revelation 21:3: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them."

And then, not to belabor the proof but to look at one more category of proof that the covenant is essentially friendship and fellowship, the great symbol throughout scripture of the covenant is marriage. God brings a man and woman together, and in that union of man and wife he expresses the truth of his covenant. We have that, for example, in Ezekiel 16:8, where God speaks of his covenant in terms of spreading his robe over his wife. "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread

my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine." There is the very tender language of a husband's spreading his robe over his wife, covering her, and making his covenant with her. That is the fellowship of the covenant.

Psalm 25:14 has a similar idea. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." The word *secret* there is a word that means *pillow*, so that the symbolism is that of a man lying with his head on the pillow next to his wife in their bed and her head lying on that pillow with him; and he is speaking to her and showing her his covenant, whispering to her the love that he has for her. That is the idea of God's covenant. It is a warm idea of covenant fellowship and friendship.

This view of the covenant as fellowship and friendship is very blessed. The relationship that God's people have with him is the warmth of family. It is not the coldness of the bargaining table. It is not the business transaction of the signing of a contract. But God's covenant with his people is the warmth of fellowship and friendship. The covenant can be likened not to the boardroom but to the family room. The covenant can be likened not to the business table but to the dinner table. God's covenant with his people is a relationship of friendship.

That covenant, then, illuminates our marriages. That covenant illuminates our family life. That covenant illuminates this fellowship in Singapore and the church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. That covenant illuminates our friendships in the Lord. The covenant illuminates all of that, so that our relationships with each other are not a matter of a business deal but a matter of family. We live with each other as fellow members of the family of God. These relationships are fellowship. They are warmth. When all of these relationships are set in the light of the covenant idea of God's fellowship, these relationships become especially lovely.

As we develop this first point, what God's covenant is, we have seen that the essence of God's covenant is fellowship. But now, as we continue

developing this first point, we must trace that fellowship to God himself. That fellowship does not begin between God and his people in Christ. When we speak of God's covenant, we do not even mean, first of all, that God is the one who establishes that covenant with us. That is true: God is the one who establishes it with us. But the truth of the covenant is that God has covenant fellowship with himself, even apart from the creature. God is a covenant God. He is a covenant God in his own being. He does not need the creature in order to have a covenant relationship. God triune is the covenant God. When we talk about God's everlasting covenant, we are speaking, first of all, about God in his own being.

The way to understand that covenant fellowship of God in his own being is in light of the truth of the Trinity. God is three persons united in one being. God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Father lives with the Son in the Spirit, and the Son lives with the Father in the Spirit. The Father and the Son are in a covenant relationship in the Spirit. That life of the Father and the Son is a warm life of fellowship and friendship. The names Father and Son, regarding the first and second persons, reveal that God is a family God. The name of the third person reveals the warmth and closeness of the relationship of the triune God to himself. For the Spirit is the breath. That is what the Holy Spirit is—a person, not like our breath, which is impersonal. The Holy Spirit is the breath of God, the personal breath of God, so that the Father breathes to his Son his breath in closest fellowship. And the Son breathes his breath to the Father. Father and Son in the Spirit live together in this blessed covenant fellowship.

The truth that God is a covenant God does not merely mean that there happens to be this covenant fellowship in God but that it could have been that there were no covenant fellowship in God. Rather, the fact that God is a covenant God means that his covenant life is essential to him. To put it somewhat boldly—and now, let the hearer understand—if God were not a covenant God, he would not be God. He could not be God. It is essential to him as God that he be a covenant God. How do we

know that? Because of who the persons are. It does not just happen that the first person is Father. It does not merely happen that the second person is Son and that the third person is Spirit. Those are God's names that express the truth about the first, second, and third persons. The first, second, and third persons live together in covenant fellowship. God from eternity to eternity enjoys covenant fellowship with God in God. That is the truth of the covenant.

The proof that God is a covenant God in himself, apart from any relationship to the creature, is that often in scripture, God is called the living God. In fact, you can find that every place where the scripture speaks about the oath. The lawful oath is taking the name of God upon one's lips as the one who will punish me if I speak wrongly or if I do not do what I swear I will do. And the oath formula in scripture is this: "as the Lord liveth." It is a way of saying that if I do not do what I am about to say, then God does not live; there is no such thing as the living God. It is a way of saying that I call the living God, who sees and who knows, to witness what I say. That oath formula uses the idea of the living God. And now, what is the concept of life in scripture? Life is not mere existence, but the concept of life in scripture is knowledge. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). This is life, to know God. And so God, as the living God, knows himself. The Father knows the Son in the Spirit, and the Son knows the Father in the Spirit. The living God is a covenant God, who dwells in his own blessed fellowship.

When you see that truth of the covenant in the Godhead, then you begin to discover the covenant everywhere in the scriptures, from beginning to end. You can find it in Genesis 1:26, where God speaks to himself. That is what a family does. That is what friends do. They speak. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost say to each other in intra-trinitarian conversation, "Let us make man in our image." There is the triune God, the living God, the covenant God. You find it in Proverbs 8:30. Jesus is wisdom in Proverbs 8, and he is speaking of God's creation of the world. There the Son says, "I was by

him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.” There is the warm life in the triune God of joy and rejoicing. In Matthew 3:17 we find that this covenant life of the triune God is revealed through Jesus Christ. At Jesus’ baptism a voice out of heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” That revelation of God regarding Jesus Christ takes us into the Trinity to show that the Father and the Son are pleased with one another. “This is my beloved Son.” We learn something about what God is like in himself from the revelation of himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. God is a covenant God, a God of eternal fellowship in himself.

There are two implications of this truth that the covenant begins with God and must be traced to God’s being. First, we learn that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a cold doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity is deep. It is hard for our minds to comprehend that God is one being and three persons. We understand that; we believe it because the scriptures say so; but it is a deep doctrine. So it can be tempting for God’s people to ignore that doctrine, to slight that doctrine, to not speak of the Trinity. And yet we find that the truth of the Trinity is covenantal, so that the meaning of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as the triune God is very warm. It is not something cold. It is not abstract. It is the truth of the holy family, that is, of the divine family—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The second implication of the truth that God’s covenant begins with himself is that this truth exposes a very popular error in Reformed doctrine today. That error is known as the *pactum salutis*. You hear in that Latin phrase the word *pact*. And the second word, *salutis*, means *salvation*. The *pactum salutis* is supposedly a pact that the first and the second persons made with one another to save the church. But from what we have seen of God’s covenant fellowship in himself, there is no such thing as the *pactum salutis*, the Father and the Son making a bargain together, sitting down at the contract table and making a pact to save the church. Rather, the covenant fellowship of God, from eternity to eternity the same, is that of friendship. It is that of family. It is that of the

Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost rejoicing before one another.

And so we see the wonderful truth of what God’s covenant is.

How God Establishes His Covenant

Let’s move now to the second point of our lecture today, to develop the idea of how God establishes his covenant. How God establishes his covenant can be summarized in one name: Jesus. Jesus is how God establishes his covenant.

In order to understand how God establishes his covenant with us, with his elect people, we must begin with God’s counsel. God, who is the triune God, who lives forever in perfect covenant fellowship with himself—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—had as his eternal good pleasure that he would reveal that covenant life to the creature. He did not have to do that. And now we are speaking foolishly, because we are talking about God’s eternal counsel and what he determined to do. But for the sake of our understanding, God did not have to reveal his covenant life to the creature. He didn’t need to do so for himself, you might say. Our fellowship with him does not add anything to him. We do not enhance his joy by being his covenant friends. From that point of view, God did not need to reveal his covenant life to anyone. God, from eternity to eternity, is the blessed God, the living God, knowing himself perfectly. But it was God’s good pleasure from all eternity that the fellowship that he had in himself be revealed to the creature. We call that will or good pleasure of God from all eternity his counsel, his decree. It was what he determined. It was what pleased him.

But now the question is, how is the creature going to have fellowship with God? God is infinite. We are finite. He is the creator. We are creatures. How can man have fellowship with God? At the heart of God’s good pleasure and eternal decree is Jesus Christ. This is how God establishes his covenant with his elect people: it is in Jesus Christ as the center of what he wills. In Jesus Christ this fellowship of God would be revealed.

And how would that fellowship be revealed? Not this way: that we all sit as spectators in a great

theater, and there God will show to us on the screen what his friendship is like; God will show on that screen the blessedness that he has as God; and then, at the end of the screening, we will all leave and say, “It was wonderful to learn how God lives and dwells with himself.” That is not how he would reveal his fellowship to his people. Rather, he would reveal his covenant fellowship with himself in Jesus Christ by taking the creature—through Jesus Christ—into God’s own friendship, so that the creature might be a friend of God. You and I, as the elect of God, might be the friends of God. It is not just that we know about that friendship, but we have it. We enjoy it. We are brought into it. The counsel of God was that his people be brought to him in Christ, who is God and man. And God from all eternity elected his people in Christ. The first explanation, then, of how God establishes his covenant with the creature is that Jesus is the center of God’s counsel. And you find that when the scriptures speak of election, they speak of our being chosen in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:4, for example: “according as he [God] hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Second, God establishes his covenant with his elect people in Jesus Christ through the incarnation. Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh. We read of that throughout scripture. John 1:14, for example: “the Word was made flesh.” What is the next word there? “*And dwelt among us.*” “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt.” We have encountered that word *dwelt* before. Dwelling is the tabernacle. God made the tabernacle his dwelling with his people. In fact, the Greek word in John 1:14 for *dwelt* is *tabernacle*. The Word was made flesh and tabernacled with us. Jesus himself is the covenant. He is God, and he is man, and he is God with us men, so that in Jesus Christ we men are united to Jehovah God.

That is the significance of his name Emmanuel. *Emmanuel* means *God with us*. That is a covenant name that explains the establishment of the covenant with us. God with us. And God being with us, we are with him and enjoy covenant fellowship with him through Jesus Christ.

The scriptures speak highly of this miracle, this central wonder, of the incarnation. The Godhead dwelled bodily (Col. 2:9). God was manifest in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16). The Word was made flesh (John 1:14). All of these truths from scripture teach us that Jesus Christ is God and man.

You see, then, how it is that you and I are taken into the friendship of God. It is not that God picks us up as creatures and makes us divine, making each of us another person in the Trinity. That is *not* the truth of it. In fact, there is a certain blasphemy, even, in that thought. God does not make us God. God alone is God. But God has come to us in Christ. God has united himself to our flesh in Christ. He is God with us, Emmanuel, in Jesus Christ. And now he takes us men and unites us to Jesus Christ by faith and by the Spirit, so that we are one organism with him. He is the head, and we are members of the body. And being one with Jesus Christ, we have everything that belongs to him. We have his righteousness. We have his life. We have his inheritance. And we have his fellowship with God. We belong to God. In the Lord Jesus Christ, the child of God knows God as his friend and lives as the son or daughter of God in his family.

The miracle of the incarnation, which is the central wonder of all scripture, is a covenant wonder. And indeed, the incarnation is the central miracle that is recorded in the whole Bible because every miracle in scripture is meant to teach this one thing: God does the impossible. God does for us what we could not do. God raises the dead. We cannot do that. God gives sight to the blind. We cannot do that. God divides the Red Sea. We cannot do that. Every miracle in scripture teaches that God does the impossible for the salvation of his people. And Jesus Christ is the central wonder, the meaning of all the other miracles, because God’s becoming flesh is the impossible thing. It is the thing that we could never accomplish, but God did and dwelled with us.

Third, God establishes his covenant with us in Christ through atonement. Here we come to a somewhat mysterious but very blessed passage of scripture, Genesis 15. There is revealed a wonderful thing about the covenant. When God establishes,

or makes, his covenant, that word *make* or *establish* in our English Bible translation is often the word *cut*. Now, that doesn't make immediate sense to our minds. God saying, "I will cut my covenant between me and thee." And so the translators rightly use the word *establish* or *make*. I will make my covenant. I will establish my covenant. Literally, the Hebrew word is *cut*. I will cut my covenant. That idea of cutting the covenant comes from Genesis 15, where we have God's cutting his covenant. "In the same day the LORD *made* a covenant with Abram" (Gen. 15:18). The word *made* there is *cut*. "In the same day the LORD cut a covenant with Abram."

How did that ceremony go? God told Abram to take a heifer of three years old, a she goat of three years old, a ram of three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon (Gen. 15:9). Abram divided those animals "in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not" (v. 10). What we have here is a bloody path between the two halves of the animals. On the one side, half of the animal; on the other side, the other half of the animal; and in between a bloody path. And then God, who had made Abram fall into a deep sleep, walked down that bloody path. The meaning of God's walking down the bloody path alone is this: "Abram, my covenant is with you. I make this covenant with you. I establish this covenant with you. I cut this covenant with you. And if you do not live like my family member, then you deserve to be cut. You deserve to be divided the way these animals are divided. But Abram, you will not be cut. You will never be cut with my curse. I walk down that bloody path myself, so that if you disobey me, Abram, I will cut myself in your place." That is the meaning of God's walking alone down that bloody path.

God cut his covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is how the covenant is established with us. The problem of how a creature can fellowship with God is not merely this: God is God, and we are creatures. The problem is this: God is holy, and we are sinful. The problem is this: God is devoted to himself perfectly, and we are not. We transgress his law. We have no right to live with him. How can sinners live with God? The answer is, through

Jesus Christ. At the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, God cut his covenant with us. In the bloody brow of Christ, that covenant was cut. In Christ's hands and feet, that covenant was cut. In the welts upon Christ's cheek and the marks upon his back, God cut his covenant with his people. Our sins were laid upon Jesus and all his righteousness laid upon us, so that we, who by nature are unrighteous and have no right to live with God, through Jesus Christ are clean. We are covered in his blood. Our sins are removed, and we may sit at God's table for Jesus' sake and live with God in heaven forever for Jesus' sake. The covenant is an everlasting covenant of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ, a covenant that God has made and not man and a covenant that God will keep and not man. God's everlasting covenant of grace is established in Jesus Christ.

This is very important for the truth of the covenant. The fact that God has established it in Christ according to his counsel and according to Jesus' incarnation and atonement means that the covenant *must* be unconditional. How is it going to be a conditional covenant? How are you going to say to man, in the light of Jesus Christ, which is how God establishes his covenant, "There is something not finished. There is something left for you to do in order for you to have the right to be a covenant member or in order for you to have the right to continue being a covenant member or in order for you to have the right to experience covenant fellowship"? The covenant, because it is established in Christ, *must* be a covenant of grace. It can only be a covenant of grace. It must be an everlasting covenant. It must be an unconditional covenant. God's covenant of grace is established in Christ. And every doctrine that makes God's covenant *conditional* is a doctrine that *denies* the Lord Jesus Christ as the head, as the mediator, and as the atonement for the people of God in that covenant.

You see, then, that we are not dealing merely with some superficial, peripheral idea; but we are dealing with the very heart of the gospel. We are dealing with the right of God's people to live with him. That right is justification. That right is our righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the

covenant of God and the doctrine of justification belong together. Jesus is the mediator and the head of the covenant, so that in him we are covenant friends of God.

One Hundred Years of Learning About God's Covenant

Now let us move to the third point and see one hundred years of learning about God's covenant. What we have been developing in this lecture so far has not been new to the Remnant Reformed Fellowship in Singapore or to Remnant Reformed Church in Michigan. God has led the church through one hundred years of development, and he has given us a place in that development in which he has privileged us to carry forth the doctrine of the unconditional covenant yet today. We do not deserve it, but God in his mercy has set us in the marvelous history of his preservation of this truth through the years. There are three main stations in this history that we want to visit briefly.

The first of those stations is Herman Hoeksema versus the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), all the way back in 1924 and even before. We pick the date 1924 because that is the year that Hoeksema was expelled from the Christian Reformed Church. But Herman Hoeksema, even as a Christian Reformed minister before 1924, had a controversy with his denomination about the truth of the covenant. The Christian Reformed denomination had an influential seminary professor named William Heyns. William Heyns taught a generation of Christian Reformed ministers. And Heyns' doctrine of the covenant was that God made a conditional offer and a conditional promise to all of the children of the church. Herman Hoeksema, as a student under Professor Heyns, realized that he disagreed with that doctrine; but he did not yet know how to set forth the truth positively. It would not be very long after Hoeksema was expelled from the CRC in 1924 that he would write a book in Dutch, the English translation of which is *Believers and Their Seed*. That book was first published in 1927. In that book Herman Hoeksema laid out his understanding of God's covenant with believers and their seed. His understanding of God's covenant was *not* that God makes a conditional offer and promise to every child, which that child has to

accept upon coming to years of maturity in order to have the blessings of that covenant. He taught that the covenant is unconditional. It is a covenant of grace. Hoeksema also rejected William Heyns' teaching of a contractual idea, a pact idea, concerning the covenant. Herman Hoeksema in that 1927 book restored the doctrine of the covenant to the Reformed faith. Heyns had torn the covenant apart from the Reformed faith. Heyns had made the Reformed faith, which is the sovereignty of God, something different from the doctrine of the covenant, which was a conditional offer, dependent on the acceptance of man. Hoeksema brought those two back together and restored the doctrine of the covenant to the truth of the sovereignty of God. When I say that Hoeksema did this, understand that that simply means that he was the instrument. Hoeksema did nothing of this. This was the sovereign work of God to restore the truth of his covenant. Hoeksema taught that the covenant must be found in God, as scripture reveals, and not in man. In fact, Hoeksema bemoaned the fact that all of the world wanted to deal with the covenant merely from the point of view of what it can get me. Can it get me saved? If it can get me saved, then I want to know about the covenant. But even apart from the salvation of man, the truth of God's covenant reveals the wonder of God's divine life.

It was a hundred years ago—1924; then 1927; and even before that, in Professor Heyns' class—that God gave to Herman Hoeksema, and then to the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), a mighty victory in the truth of the gospel concerning the covenant.

The next station that we want to visit in this survey of a hundred years of learning about the covenant is 1953, and that was the Protestant Reformed Churches versus the Liberated churches. The Liberated churches, under the leadership of Klaas Schilder from the Netherlands, had their own particular covenant view; and their covenant view was essentially the same as Professor Heyns' view had been. The Liberated view was that God makes a conditional promise to every single child at baptism. That conditional promise to every single child, elect or reprobate, is this: I will be your God *if* you will be my people. I will be your

God if you choose me and if you obey me. It was a conditional covenant, established universally with all of the children who were baptized—a covenant, then, which depended for its ratification upon the children themselves. That doctrine made its way through the Protestant Reformed Churches like wildfire, so that when the issue was finally settled—partly settled—in 1953, over half of the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches left. Over against the Liberated doctrine, the Protestant Reformed Churches maintained that there are no conditions in the covenant, and they set that forth as official church doctrine in their Declaration of Principles, which was adopted in 1951 and then protested to Synod 1953 but upheld.

The next stage of the history that we want to see is 2021. And we will call this Remnant Reformed Church versus the Protestant Reformed Churches. Remnant Reformed Church was not around in 2021; it was the Reformed Protestant Churches that came out of the PRC. But since Remnant Reformed Church is the continuation of that reformation today, we will call it Remnant Reformed Church versus the Protestant Reformed Churches in 2021. The issue in the latest controversy was whether there are conditions for the *experience* of covenant fellowship, whether there are prerequisites that man must fulfill in order to enjoy the covenant fellowship of God. The PRC for a hundred years before that had been teaching that there are no conditions to the establishment of the covenant, no conditions to the maintenance of the covenant, and no conditions to the perfection of the covenant. But the question arose, what about the *experience* of the covenant? Must the child of God obey in order to enjoy being a member of God's family?

That question had lain unresolved in the PRC since 1953. It had never been settled—rather, it had been settled wrongly. In the 1950s a Protestant Reformed minister named Hubert De Wolf preached two statements that were protested as false doctrine. The classis, in response to those protests, gave Hubert De Wolf a Formula of Subscription examination. In that examination De Wolf very

candidly told the Protestant Reformed Churches that he believed in conditions in the covenant in a very limited sense. He said that he didn't believe conditions like Schilder taught them, but he did believe conditions in a limited sense. He believed conditions for experience, for joy, for fellowship. Here is De Wolf's statement from his examination, after he had quoted several passages from the confessions:

Now, I believe that those articles show, Mr. Chairman, that the assurance of the Holy Spirit, that is, the assurance which the Holy Spirit works concerning our personal participation in that salvation, is conditional, from the point of view of our experience, upon many things—upon sanctification, I would say, as long as we remember—as long as we remember, Mr. Chairman, that persevering is always the fruit of preservation. That's my answer.²

When the chairman of the examination later asked him about good works, this is what De Wolf said:

Mr. Chairman, I have never contended that there are conditions unto salvation in that comprehensive sense of the word. I believe, however, that there are conditions to the enjoyment of our salvation, and I think that that can be shown upon the basis of scripture. And I say once again, Mr. Chairman, conditions which we fulfill by the grace of God, not that we do anything of ourselves, not at all.³

This was De Wolf's confession throughout his examination. There are no conditions for establishing the covenant, for maintaining the covenant. There are only conditions for enjoying the covenant; and God is the one who, by his grace, gives us the power to fulfill those conditions.

That was the exact controversy that erupted in the Protestant Reformed Churches that led to the ouster of many in 2021 and the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches and eventually

² "De Wolf's Examination," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 (April 2022): 15.

³ "De Wolf's Examination," 19.

Remnant Reformed Church. The Protestant Reformed Churches for almost one hundred years had maintained an unconditional covenant. But in this latest controversy, they taught conditional covenant experience. The unconditional covenant of the Protestant Reformed Churches is no more. And that would include her sisters as well, like Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. Even in 1953, the delegates to classis condemned De Wolf's two heretical statements but decided that they rejoiced in his examination, which means that they were willing, in those days, to say that experience was conditional. And even though the PRC would drop the word *condition*, that was still the doctrinal issue all the way through.

It can be demonstrated that the issue of conditional experience or a prerequisite work for experience is the doctrinal position of the Protestant Reformed Churches today. Compare these two quotations. First from Hubert De Wolf in his examination:

I believe that there are also many instances in scripture in which God assures us that he will do something if we will do something. At least, I say, that that's the form which it comes to us in scripture. You have that, for example, in Malachi. Malachi 3:7, in the last part of verse 7: "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts." I say that that is the form, that comes to us in this form, that if we do something, God will do something. You have in verse 10, where the Lord says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

I find the same thing, Mr. Chairman, in James 4:8 and 10: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." In some sense, Mr. Chairman, there is an action of God that

follows upon our action. Verse 10: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."⁴

That is De Wolf.

Now compare Prof. David Engelsma in the year 2021.

First, to repeat, there is a vitally important sense in which, in our salvation, our drawing nigh to God precedes God's drawing nigh to us...Second, this sense has to do with our experience of salvation, which is not an unimportant aspect of our salvation. When we draw nigh to God, by faith including faith's repentance, God draws nigh to us in our experience. We have the consciousness that God is our near-by friend and that we are close to Him, in His bosom, which is Jesus, so to say.⁵

For the sake of time, we will not multiply quotations now, though they could be multiplied. The doctrine that De Wolf taught about conditional covenant experience came to its development in the Protestant Reformed Churches some sixty-five years later and led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches and Remnant Reformed Church—which means that God has given a banner to Remnant Reformed Church and the fellowship in Singapore and God's people wherever they may be who love this truth of the unconditional covenant of grace. He has given us the banner of the unconditional covenant of grace, not only in its establishment, maintenance, and perfection but also in its *experience*. The truth and development of God's everlasting covenant of grace, which we can trace back one hundred years, continues with us today. This not by our worth or work. We are the most unworthy people of all. We need this doctrine for our comfort, as those who are sinners. But God continues the truth of his unconditional covenant of grace with us yet today. May he so preserve us that this doctrine may be known for a hundred more years and, indeed, until the Lord returns.

⁴ "De Wolf's Examination," 12.

⁵ "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra, June 16, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 11.

Question and Answer Session

Pastor, thank you for a very clear explanation of the everlasting covenant of grace and its significance and comfort for us. The thing that puzzles me is that, in spite of its significance and comfort, the early reformers do not appear to have touched or focused on this covenant concept; and it is only a hundred years old, like you mentioned. Why is that the case? I thought they lived during a period when they were under persecution by the Roman Catholic Church. Wouldn't that be something that they should focus on and address during that time?

That is a good question about the history and the reformers. You mentioned that the history that we covered today was only a hundred years, just connecting us to Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Reformed churches did develop the doctrine of the covenant for many years before that, so our historical survey could go all the way back to the time of John Calvin and others. The Reformed were forced to develop the truth of the covenant—or rather, let us say that God in his providence brought the Reformed to develop the truth of the covenant—in response to the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were those who were coming out of Roman Catholicism, but they were not coming out with the Reformed. They were, rather, coming out with all kinds of radical ideas. Many things go into that, which we won't get into now. But one thing the Anabaptists insisted upon was believer's baptism, rather than infant baptism. They viewed all baptisms administered to infants by the Roman Catholic Church to be invalid, and therefore they rebaptized their members as

adults. So the Reformed had to understand from scripture what the biblical basis is for baptizing infants, and they found throughout the scriptures that it is the covenant. “I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). So the reformers were on the forefront of formulating the idea of the covenant in scripture.

And even before the Reformation, because the covenant is so prominent in scripture, God's people did know the truth of the covenant, although maybe not in the terms in which we discussed it today. But even the two parts of the Bible are called the new covenant and the old covenant, or the New Testament and the Old Testament. *Testament* simply means *covenant*. God speaks of his covenant in so many passages of scripture. So God's people did have this comfort, that God has promised us that he is ours; and so whatever comes—the persecution, the suffering, all these things that come—cannot overthrow the promise of God.

But as far as the Reformed development of the idea of the covenant, that happened over against Anabaptism. And then as that continued, especially in the Dutch Reformed tradition, that came to Herman Hoeksema and then to us.

I appreciate the question because it gives us opportunity to illustrate that our historical survey was just very brief, but the development of the truth of the covenant does go back further.

—AL



Article CLXX: The Seven Churches in Asia: The Church in Tribulation (continued)

And, finally, there is also a historical reason for this concurrence of tribulation and strength in regard to the church of Christ. In times of prosperity and wealth and peace, when the church is honored rather than despised in the world, there is a grave danger that many an Israelite that is not of Israel joins the church outwardly for selfish reasons, from motives other than spiritual. These are a danger, a hindrance to the church of Christ. It is these people that often become dominant, that not infrequently aim at leadership in the church of Christ. But they are bound to lead the church to its ultimate destruction. In times of persecution, however, when church membership and the reproach of the world are inseparably connected and when faithfulness even unto death is required, the church is purified of these hypocrites. There is not much danger that the hypocrite will join the church in times of tribulation, nor that he will remain with the people of God if he must lose his life for it. And, therefore, also from this point of view it is clearly evident that times of tribulation are a real blessing to the church of Christ.

And if, then, you ask whether it were not advisable to willfully stir up the malignity of the world and strive for the martyr's crown, we answer: There is no occasion for this whatsoever. If the church is truly faithful, faithful in its confession, faithful in its walk, unfurling the banner of its King in the midst of the world, the latter will naturally hate it; and the reproach and revilement, the suffering and persecution from the side of anti-Christendom is simply inevitable. But in all this we need not be afraid, for especially the sufferings for Christ's sake work together for

good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.

III. We still were to consider what word of advice and comfort the Lord has for the church in tribulation. It is indeed one of the richest and most beautiful messages the church ever received. Also in this case we may call your attention, in the first place, to the self-announcement of the Lord. We observed in a former connection that these self-introductions in the seven letters are generally in harmony with the condition of the congregation addressed. To the church in Ephesus he appeared as the one that walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks and holds the seven stars in his right hand; as the one, therefore, that is able and authorized to remove the candlestick out of its place if necessary. In our letter Jesus introduces himself as the first and the last, who was dead and lived again. It is scarcely necessary to point out the appropriateness of this announcement with a view to the condition of the church of Smyrna. It is entirely adapted to inspire the members with courage and hope in the midst of tribulation. Christ is the first and the last! He was before all history and will be when this dispensation shall have come to a finish. He is the principle of all that is and its purpose. He stands above all time and controls all history. He will be the last, also in the sense that he shall prevail in battle against the devil. Not the devil shall be last on the battlefield, but Christ shall be. He shall be victor. Even with death he was in battle and remained victor, for he was dead and lives again. He stands, as it were, before the congregation in tribulation holding the keys of death and of hades in his right hand and saying: "Behold, my people, I have overcome death and

have power to open and to close, to condemn and to deliver. I, even I alone, am he that controlleth all these things!" And, therefore, with that powerful Victor as their Savior and their King, they need not fear the enemy. The devil may cast them into prison, and terrible tribulation may come in the near future, what of it! Christ has overcome the devil and he is subject to their King. Yea, even death may threaten them, as is implied in the admonition that follows, nothing can harm them. Christ has power even over death, and in due time he shall deliver them and give them life and glory.

This latter assurance the Lord gives them directly in the admonition: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Faithfulness surely is one of the most beautiful virtues that exists, even from a natural point of view. It implies, in the first place, that there exists an established relation between two persons or parties, whether it be a relation of friendship or mutual contract and agreement. It implies, in the second place, that this definite relation is put to the test, whether it be by a long period of time or by adverse circumstances that make it difficult to keep the agreement or the bond of friendship. And, in the third place, it implies that in spite of these adverse circumstances, the relation remains as it always was. A friend in times of prosperity is nothing special, but in adversity the faithfulness of a friend is put to the test.

Faithfulness is, in the spiritual sense, the chief virtue of the covenant people. They belong to God's party in the world, they confess Christ as their King. The question is whether at all times they will be loyal to their King in the midst of the world. There exists a certain definite relation between the King and themselves. The question is whether they shall publicly confess that relation, never deny their King or be ashamed of his name. Thus it was in the congregation of Smyrna. In times of prosperity it is not so difficult to confess the King. When he scores victory upon victory and it is an honor to belong to his army, our faithfulness is not manifest, but when because of his name we are subject to persecution, the objects of the mockery and reproach of the world, when the confession of his name is

the cause of trouble and much tribulation, then to confess that name, that is faithfulness.

The church in Smyrna was in tribulation, could expect a still more severe form of persecution in the future; yea, according to this very admonition might expect that their lives would be demanded a toll for their faithful confession; and, therefore, to them comes the exhortation: "Be faithful unto death." For this last phrase does not merely exhort to a faithfulness unto the hour of death. It is not merely a phrase denoting extent in time, but it indicates a causal relation between faithfulness and death. Be faithful even if confession of my name should cause physical death!

History informs us that this exhortation was literally heeded by the gray-haired angel of the church in Smyrna. He was placed before the very alternative of denying the Lord or being put to death. And placed before this definite choice he answered: "Eighty-six years have I known and confessed my Master, and he has never done me harm. Shall I, then, now deny him? Never!" And he died the martyr's death. History speaks also of thousands upon thousands that have followed old Polycarp in this path of martyrdom. But they have become partakers of the beautiful promise the Lord adds to this exhortation: "And I will give thee a crown of life!"

By crown in this connection, you must not think of the royal diadem, for the original indicates that a wreath of victory is meant. Evidently the meaning is: I will give thee eternal life as a crown of victory. And do not imagine now that this is merely a meaningless form of expression. Surely, we all shall inherit eternal life. Nor is the relation such that we shall merit that eternal life in our own strength or by our own faithfulness. It is because of Christ's obedience that this life is ours. But if once we shall stand in glory among the 144,000 of the elect of God, we shall notice that the glory of that throng is varied according to the different degrees of reward each shall receive. And among them shall also be those that wear the crown of life, those whom eternal life adorns as a crown of victory in a special sense of the word. They are the ones that have been in special tribulation, that have not

loved their lives even unto death, that have been faithful even unto death in the most literal sense of the word. More than others, they shall appear as victors and occupy a victor's place of honor in the new creation.¹

And, finally, the Lord closes also this letter to the church of Smyrna with the general admonition and promise: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." We all are in the midst of the battle of faith. We may not all be called to sacrifice our lives upon the altar of faithful confession; we surely must all fight. And in the battle against sin, the world, and the devil and his whole dominion, we must overcome. Not in our own strength, not by sword and cannon, but spiritually in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. And to him that thus overcometh, the Lord promises that he shall not be hurt of the second death. From our point of view the first death is the separation of body and soul, physical death. The Lord does not promise his church that they shall not be hurt of it. Surely, also his people die that death, often die it violently. But though they may experience temporal suffering and want, though they may be called upon voluntarily to descend into the valley of death for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, they shall not

be hurt in the real sense of the word. The second death does not touch them, and, therefore, the first death is merely transition to life. This second death is eternal death, absolute separation from the Fount of all good in everlasting woe. Of that death the fornicators and unfaithful shall be hurt, but he that overcometh shall pass through the first death into glory everlasting!

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches!" What doth the Spirit say? Be faithful unto death! Seek not the things of this world. For the things of the world pass away, and behind them lurks the second death. Be faithful, O church of God, in the midst of the world. In serious times we are living, indeed. Serious because we hear of wars and rumors of war as never before, but serious still more because of the rather general apostasy from the truth and the God of our salvation. Be faithful and confess him that is your King. And if the struggle should become hard, and the battle well-nigh to be endured, then look upon him that walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, who is your Guard and Protector at all times. He is the First and the Last, who was dead and he lives, and he holds the keys of death and of hades forevermore!



¹ Throughout this paragraph Hoeksema teaches the idea of degrees of reward and degrees of glory for God's people in heaven. According to this idea, some have a greater reward and more glory, while others have a smaller reward and less glory. Hoeksema was teaching what was the common understanding of his day in the Christian Reformed Church. Nevertheless, Hoeksema would continue to teach the idea of differing degrees of reward and glory throughout his ministry. This paragraph from the *Banner* is included nearly word for word in Hoeksema's exposition of the church in Smyrna in his book *Behold, He Cometh!* The idea of degrees of reward and glory is suspect at best. Although Hoeksema does not teach man's merit, the teaching of degrees of reward almost inevitably introduces some level of merit. Besides, the passage in Revelation that Hoeksema is working with contains no hint of greater or lesser degrees of life and victory. It is true that God's people will have different callings in heaven. In the symbolic language of Jesus' parable, some will rule over ten cities and some over five (Luke 19:17, 19). But it would be better to speak of this difference as a difference of station and calling, rather than differing degrees of reward and glory. Just as there is a great variety of stations and callings among God's people now on earth, so shall there be in heaven, according to the eternal good pleasure and appointment of God. With regard to the biblical idea of reward, that concept is not used in scripture to teach that one will have more glory than another because of his work, as if one must labor harder on earth so that he reaps more than another in heaven. Rather, the gospel of the reward is that what the believer shall receive from God in heaven far outweighs all that he loses on earth for the gospel's sake. —AL