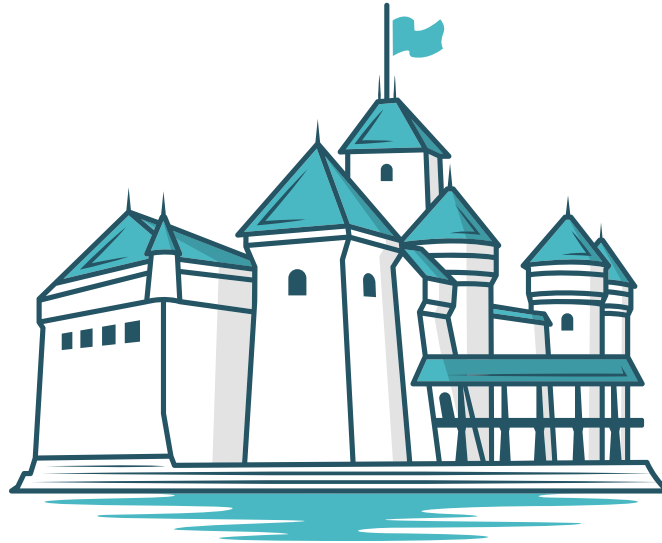




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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

—Exodus 33:18–23

Show Me Thy Glory

Moses said to Jehovah, “Show me thy glory.” God’s glory is the brightness and splendence of all his perfections, which shine forth from him in brilliant light. The glory of Jehovah on the top of Sinai blazed as a devouring fire (Ex. 24:16–17). Having heard God’s promise that God was Israel’s way unto himself and that God’s presence would go with Israel into Canaan, Moses now says to Jehovah, “Show me thy glory.”

It seems like a strange request, especially for one such as Moses. After all, Moses had already seen the glory of Jehovah. He had seen the glory of Jehovah as the devouring fire upon Sinai (Ex. 24:17). He had seen the glory of Jehovah with the seventy elders as he ate and drank with God (v. 10). But Moses had also seen the glory of Jehovah like no other man had. Moses had not only seen the cloud and fire upon Sinai; he had also gone into the very midst of the cloud to meet with Jehovah (v. 18). Moses had heard God’s glory as Jehovah spoke to him in the mount when the people were afraid (Deut. 5:5). Moses had seen God’s glory when Jehovah came to the tabernacle of the congregation and spoke to Moses face to face (Ex. 33:11). God spoke to Moses mouth to mouth, and Moses beheld the similitude of the Lord (Num. 12:8). There was no prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face (Deut. 34:10). Moses had seen God’s glory like no other!

Then why does he now say, “Show me thy glory”?

Because Moses knew that there was yet another manifestation of God’s glory to be seen. He knew this unimaginable truth about God’s glory: it is possible for the divine glory of God to shine forth from a man! “Show me thy glory” means “Show me thy glory in that form in which thou wilt lead us to thyself.” Moses looked for the glory of God dwelling bodily in a man! God’s reply shows that this is what Moses looked for, for God spoke of himself as having a human body. He spoke of his face, which Moses could not see, and his back parts, which Moses would see. God spoke, and Moses believed, that all the fullness of the Godhead could dwell bodily (Col. 2:9).

Oh, such a man as God in the flesh must seem to the eyes of all other men to be ridiculous and shameful. Such a man must bear reproach and contradiction. Such a man must be God’s back parts, God’s hinder parts. But to the eyes of faith, such a man is the revelation of God himself. The man who is despised and rejected of men (Isa. 53:3) is exalted and extolled and very high (52:13).

How could Moses know such a thing? Because Moses was a man who was charged to bring the people unto Jehovah (Ex. 32:34; 33:1, 12). But Moses was a mere man, who could not atone for the stiff-necked people (32:32–33). Only Jehovah could give

the people rest (33:14). Therefore, if a man must bring the people unto Jehovah, that man must be the glorious God in the flesh.

And indeed he is. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his

glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Jesus Christ, the glory of God!

Show me thy glory!

—AL

FROM THE RAMPARTS

Reflections on the PRC’s Centennial Celebration Commemorative Book

Winston Churchill famously said, “History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it.” We could bring that forward to today and say something similar: “History will be kind to the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), for they intend to write it.” And indeed they do. There has been a smattering of writing by Protestant Reformed theologians that purported to give the history of the split that took place in 2021; but finally, in their centennial celebration commemorative book, which celebrates their one hundred years of existence as a denomination, we have a collection of writings, many of which touch on the controversy that culminated in 2021.¹

In this article I intend to examine those accounts. History matters; and although politicians may speak of writing history so that they come out looking good, those who write the history of Christ’s church bear a far greater responsibility. The PRC have now given their official retelling of the events surrounding the controversy of 2021. It deserves a response.

Controversy? Or Schism?

At several points throughout the book, a controversy is referenced. Although the controversy is several

times pejoratively referred to as a schism, it was nothing of the sort. The controversy referred to began around 2015 over preaching at Hope Protestant Reformed Church. It concerned the doctrine of justification by faith alone, specifically whether God alone saves man or whether God and man together save man.²

Many in the PRC insisted that God and man together save man, over against which a precious few objected, which won them the opprobrium of the denomination for their trouble. The controversy culminated, as many doctrinal controversies do, in the deposition of a minister and the formation of a new denomination.³

Let us start with how the book addresses the controversy.

The Nature of the Controversy

In Trinity Protestant Reformed Church’s article relating its history, it writes this:

He [Rev. William Langerak, the current pastor] has been very helpful and instructional in our understanding of the doctrinal controversy recently affecting our churches and the proper response to the moral and ethical challenges it poses.⁴

¹ *Stories of Grace: The Protestant Reformed Churches in America Centennial Celebration Commemorative Book, 1925–2025* (Wyoming, MI: The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2026).

² For more detailed accounts of this controversy, see *Sword and Shield*, vols. 1–2 (Byron Center, MI: Reformed Believers Publishing, 2020–2022), and Dewey Engelsma, *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), <https://astraitbetwixtwo.com>.

³ That denomination, the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC), has since adopted the doctrine of the PRC and, with it, has lost the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This is evident from its own words: “Be assured that there is forgiveness with God and with men when we confess our sins and turn from those sins” (Consistory of Second Reformed Protestant Church, letter to Brandon and Alana Oostra dated September 24, 2024).

⁴ *Stories of Grace*, 208.

Ignoring for a moment the strange ending to the paragraph, that the instruction the members received had to do with how to handle moral and ethical challenges, Trinity PRC comes out and says the truth about the controversy: it was doctrinal. You would not think this would be all that noteworthy, but many in the denomination have attempted to frame the controversy as simply a matter of behavior. There was one naughty minister who would not listen to his upright and steadfast consistory; and finally, after suffering long with him, the consistory had to take the ultimate step of deposition, with many tears and much hand-wringing. That was never true, and if Trinity PRC's declaration that this was a doctrinal controversy represents a movement toward an honest telling of the facts, then I am all for it. So I say, kudos to Trinity PRC for telling the truth about the nature of the controversy.

Prof. Brian Huizinga, who was assigned to write a synopsis of the doctrinal aspect of the controversy, also made an accurate statement about the nature of the controversy and what it did not include. He wrote,

While the matter of repentance and its relation to forgiveness was not made an issue by the leaders of the schism in calling their followers out of the PRC, it quickly became a key doctrinal issue to distinguish the RPC from the PRC and an attempt to justify the separation.⁵

Actually, he is only partly correct. He is correct when he writes that those who called people out of the PRC did not make the matter of repentance and forgiveness an issue in 2021. (He omits why they did not make it an issue: the PRC had not invented their novel doctrine of man before God yet.) But Professor Huizinga goes astray when he writes that the issue of repentance and forgiveness was used to justify the separation. That is simply not true. The separation was warranted because the PRC manifested the marks of a false church set forth in articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession, before any discussion of the relationship between repentance and forgiveness.

⁵ *Stories of Grace*, 358.

It is necessary to understand that the controversy was doctrinal in nature and, more specifically, concerned the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Away with any suggestion that it was merely a division over behavior or some other such trifle. It concerned the doctrine by which the church stands or falls.

The History

Dan Van Uffelen was tasked with writing the comprehensive history of the PRC. Dan has written or co-written books on church history, teaches church history at the high school level, and is a gifted writer; so he was a logical choice for the task.

It is understood that every historian must make selections. No history records every fact. Nor does a historian come to his task without presuppositions or biases. What he chooses to include, what he chooses to omit, and how he arranges those facts reveal as much about a historian as about the history itself. Indeed, I would contend that historians bear a particularly heavy responsibility because readers expect them to present the facts fairly and objectively before offering their interpretations of those facts. Dan blends the two, and he does so in a way that reveals quite clearly both his view of the controversy and his understanding of church reformations generally.

At first, the reader is encouraged by what appears to be a fair and objective presentation of the facts. Dan writes, for example, that assembly after assembly in the PRC, from the narrowest to the broadest, decided wrongly regarding the doctrinal issues; that an elder was deposed from office for protesting his consistory's errors; and that those errors persisted for years. Had that objective presentation continued, that would have been one thing. But Dan soon leaves objectivity behind.

Compare the way Dan describes two events: the deposition of an elder and the preaching of a minister. First, consider the objective manner in which he recounts the deposition of an elder who protested the corruption of justification by faith alone in the preaching of his minister and in the actions of his consistory:

When one of the elders charged his pastor with teaching conditional theology, Hope's consistory defended the sermon as Reformed, charged the elder with antinomianism, and deposed him from office.⁶

Dan leaves behind such a clinical and objective retelling of the facts when he comes to describe the preaching of the one man in Classis East who was neither actively promoting the doctrinal error embraced by the denomination nor, like so many others, remaining silent in the face of it. An objective account might simply state that Reverend Lanning was warning both his flock and the denomination about the error they were embracing. Instead, according to Dan, Reverend Lanning was not warning God's people but "railing" against the false doctrine. His "fiery preaching" was not proportionate to the seriousness of the threat.⁷ Indeed, Dan even implies that it was Reverend Lanning's "fiery preaching" that attracted new members to Byron Center, instead of allowing for the possibility that these members simply wanted to hear the pure gospel.

What was the climate among the clergy in those days? The ministers of Classis East, save one, fell into two camps. The first consisted of those who actively promoted or defended the error. The second consisted of those who remained (unforgivably) silent in the face of it. Yet Dan reserves his strongest criticism—indeed, his only criticism—for the one pastor who preached the truth; spoke on behalf of the truth at classis; and, unlike so many of his peers, refused to remain silent. A reader of Dan's history would likely come away believing that this man was a troublemaker and a rabble-rouser, whose chief concern was gathering discontents to his side. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Reverend Lanning conducted himself honorably throughout the controversy. Indeed, this was the confession of those who ultimately voted to depose him. Immediately before the final vote

in consistory, one elder at Byron Center PRC who voted in favor of deposition said, "I believe Reverend Lanning is a righteous man." He was right. Time and again, often to his own hurt, Reverend Lanning conducted himself in an orderly and charitable manner. For example, he first sought to deal privately, through personal meetings and correspondence, with those who were teaching or defending error; and when that was met with opposition, he went through the proper ecclesiastical channels.

Dan knows his audience and writes accordingly, but in doing so he gravely wrongs a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

Were Dan to write in this later style, rather than blandly stating that the consistory of Hope defended the sermon, countercharged the protesting elder, and deposed him from office, Dan could have described the deposition of the elder this way:

When a faithful elder rightly charged his pastor with corrupting the doctrine that defines a standing or falling church, justification by faith alone, the consistory immediately defended both the pastor and his erroneous theology. Within days the consistory countercharged the faithful elder with the false accusation of antinomianism, a charge of which the broadest assembly in the PRC later cleared him. In disciplining this righteous man, the consistory took upon itself the unmistakable mark of a false church by persecuting the righteous who rebuked the church for her errors and committed spiritual murder by deposing him.

But he did not describe the events that way. That omission reveals much about Dan Van Uffelen's presuppositions.

Dan also writes this regarding what happened following the split in 2021: "Protestant Reformed office bearers comforted their congregations and defended their denomination."⁸ Truer words were never spoken. The men of the PRC, especially the

⁶ *Stories of Grace*, 36.

⁷ *Stories of Grace*, 37. Neither description characterizes Reverend Lanning's preaching, then or now. And Dan knows it.

⁸ *Stories of Grace*, 39.

officebearers, spared no effort in defending their denomination. Would to God that they had shown the same zeal in defending the truth of justification by faith alone and the honor of Jesus Christ.

I will come back to Dan's article shortly, but now I will move on to the article by Prof. Brian Huizinga.

Distorting the Facts

Professor Huizinga says this about truth: "Truth also includes, more broadly, *factual* truth. We may not claim to love the doctrinal truth of Scripture while distorting facts."⁹ Those words as such are true and noble. The problem is that Professor Huizinga did not mean them. If he had, he would not have distorted the facts.

For example, he includes in quotation marks phrases that have purportedly been made by those who left the PRC, such as, "Come out of the PRC and pull your children from the Protestant Reformed schools or the wrath of God will break out on you all."¹⁰ But he does not attribute those phrases to anyone or add footnotes indicating who said them. Those quotations may be his own interpretations of events and statements, but I would encourage him not to paint such things in such a negative light. Statements like these are meant only to pander to his audience and reinforce their distaste for any careful examination of the controversy. Pandering should be beneath a professor in a seminary.

How else does Professor Huizinga distort facts? Well, consider his explanation of the doctrinal controversy as it led up to 2021. In the introduction to his article, he would have the reader believe that all this controversy stemmed from one minister who could not find a way to express himself accurately in his sermons and, after unintentionally deviating from sound doctrine several times, was released from the ministry under Church Order article 12.

This is about as gross a distortion of the facts as there can be. What Professor Huizinga fails to

mention, though Dan alluded to it in his earlier article, is that the consistory of Hope PRC, with all of its considerable weight and influence within the denomination, supported its minister tooth and nail and embraced and defended his false doctrine.

Well, with one exception. One elder protested his minister's false doctrine. What was the result of that protest? Within days that elder was countercharged as being an antinomian and placed under discipline, under which he languished for over three years. When his wife then protested against the minister and consistory's false doctrine, she was harried and persecuted, indeed abused, by the consistory and members of Hope PRC and ultimately by the entire denomination.

Where was Classis East in the middle of all of this? It was busy supporting Hope PRC and its false doctrine, in addition to falsifying the protestant's words, about which classis was not sorry.¹¹

As if that were not enough, Classis East appointed a committee of its leading lights to help fix the situation. This committee formulated a doctrinal statement to set things straight. Instead, the doctrinal statement taught the exact same compromise of justification by faith alone. All of which Professor Huizinga fails to mention.

I want to interject here with something I have noticed in the last five years. In the PRC, especially among its leaders, no one identifies the man or his wife who contended for the truth of justification by faith alone. They are either referred to as "an elder and his wife" or, in the case of Professor Huizinga's article currently under consideration, for the most part ignored altogether. That is strange. Let me help the PRC out with this. The man's name was Neil Meyer. His wife's name was Connie Meyer. Together they fought for the truth of justification by faith alone and were spiritually murdered for their efforts. I will go a step further and be so bold as to offer a prayer that

⁹ It makes me feel very uncomfortable when I hear Protestant Reformed ministers talking about the importance of truth-telling. We've been down this road before. See Dewey Engelsma, "Foxes in the Desert," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), 12/23/2022, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2022/12/23/foxes-in-the-desert/>.

¹⁰ *Stories of Grace*, 357.

¹¹ See Dewey Engelsma, "Repentance," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), 5/2/2021, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/05/04/repentance/>.

the members of the PRC can pray in their private devotions and in their public prayers that will give evidence that the denomination does, at times, actually practice the repentance and sorrow for sin on which their salvation hinges.

Dear God and Father in heaven, we give thee thanks for Mr. and Mrs. Neil Meyer and for the great work that thou didst accomplish through these servants of thine. While we were busy spiritually murdering them, thou didst give them grace to continue laboring on behalf of thy name and thy truth in this world. We are sorry for what we did to this faithful couple. We know that, on this side of the Jordan, they will never be the same but will carry the marks of this spiritual abuse to their graves; and for that we are responsible. We repent of taking upon ourselves the marks of a false church; and we ask that, for Christ's sake, thou wilt forgive us these trespasses. We pray that thou wilt bless and keep Mr. and Mrs. Meyer, cause thy face to shine upon them, and give them peace. Amen.

All of this abuse and murder was revealed to be especially heinous at Synod 2018, when it was shown that the Meyers were correct all along and that the denomination—especially Classis East, which has had real trouble finding doctrinal truth—was guilty of compromising justification by faith alone and displacing Christ. Yet even then, with the churches' guilt for displacing Christ and his gospel staring them in the face, synod had the brass to send *Mrs. Meyer* home with the suggestion that it was *her* conscience that should be burdened because of the strong language with which she had characterized the error.¹² Perhaps some self-reflection is in order. Mrs. Meyer spoke as she did because one could search through Classis East with a candle and scarcely find a man willing to speak that way about the errors or to lead the way in the controversy. Instead, the Lord was pleased to raise up a Deborah to do what the men, too craven or too carnal to act (to which camps the undersigned

belonged), would not do. This too Professor Huizinga omits from his account.

Professor Huizinga's distortion of these facts serves a very important purpose. It is to characterize those who objected to the denomination's continued compromise of justification by faith alone as radicals and extremists. When members of the denomination read his article, it is certain that not one of them will be moved to repent, whether for walking in doctrinal error or for the spiritual murder they committed against those who stood for the truth. Huizinga diverts the reader's attention from the real issue, justification by faith alone, and redirects it to the supposed character and conduct of those who protested the denomination's error. They become the problem. They are portrayed as contentious men who twisted facts; wrangled endlessly over doctrine; wrested honorable men's words; and behaved like internet trolls who seized upon snippets of sermons in order, by deceit and falsehood, to stir up perverse disputations. In this way the controversy is no longer about the corruption of the gospel but about the alleged misconduct of those who defended the gospel. Professor Huizinga is gaslighting the denomination. He should not do that.

Doctrinal Deviation

Professor Huizinga also has the gall to state that "to this day no one has been able to demonstrate that the PRC has deviated in the slightest from her doctrinal foundation as it is authoritatively expressed in the Three Forms of Unity."¹³ This is false. Huizinga, like Van Uffelen, knows his audience and has no difficulty putting this falsehood into print and before the people. Assuming, of course, that justification by faith alone belongs to the PRC's doctrinal foundation, the denomination has done nothing *but* deviate from that foundation over the last eleven years.

For example, as Dan pointed out in his article, in 2016 every single assembly, from the consistory to the classis to the synod, defended, in some way or other, a sermon that taught that our obedience was part of the way to the Father.

¹² *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America* 2018, 86.

¹³ *Stories of Grace*, 358.

Had matters improved two years later? By Synod 2018's own admission, the theology of Hope PRC, supported by Classis East and Classis East's special committee and by about every other minister or elder who had a chance to weigh in on things, compromised justification by faith alone and displaced Christ.

Instead of rooting out this error, the denomination went on a hunt to find the elusive jackalope, I mean antinomian, all the while ignoring the fact that the only errors that were ever discovered in the denomination, then and now, were its various compromises of justification by faith alone. Which brings up an interesting question: If the only error that the Protestant Reformed assemblies, along with the majority of the denomination, ever adopted and defended was the error of violating the exclusive particle *alone*, wouldn't that demand that instruction be given on the truth of justification by faith *alone*? Instead, all we ever heard, and still hear, is that we need to better understand what *in the way of* means. No, actually, the error was a corruption of faith *alone*. That means your people should hear instruction about faith *alone* and need to hear less about man's responsibility.¹⁴

Then, after Synod 2018, a Protestant Reformed minister came across a book by Herman Witsius and, persuaded by Witsius' teaching that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do, began defending that theology in the *Standard Bearer*. Whatever half-hearted statements the PRC have since made against that theology—long after that theology has done its irreparable damage in the churches—the PRC have never taken that minister in hand. Though they showed themselves capable of disciplining ministers who stood for the gospel, the churches never disciplined that one for his denial of the gospel. To this day that false prophet

enjoys every considerable perk and benefit of being a Protestant Reformed clergyman.

Examples like this could be multiplied.¹⁵ It would have been factually correct if Professor Huizinga had written the exact *opposite* of what he writes: "To this day the PRC has consistently deviated from her doctrinal foundation as it is authoritatively expressed in the Three Forms of Unity."

But what about today? Have the PRC finally put their doctrinal house in order? No. After the chaos of the last eleven years, the Lord God has taken justification by faith alone away from the PRC, and he has done so in striking fashion. Here is the PRC's doctrine of justification, by their own synodical decision: "Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification."¹⁶

Let me ask a simple question, one that does not require a seminary education to answer. Based on that decision, how would you answer the following question: Is assurance of justification by faith alone or by faith and works? There is only one answer consistent with that decision: "By faith and works, of course." Indeed, to answer, "By faith alone" would be to contradict the decision. The only permissible answer is, "By faith and works, and don't you dare slight works!"

Trinity Protestant Reformed Church mentioned in its article its gratitude for its pastor's leadership in understanding the proper response to the "moral and ethical challenges" posed by the doctrinal controversy. But that is not all Reverend Langerak is teaching the members of his congregation. He is also teaching them the very doctrine Synod 2018 allegedly corrected.

Then do you not see how it's impossible to be saved, it's impossible to experience

¹⁴ The denomination is drunk on man and what man must do. In his article titled "Distinctives," Prof. Ronald Cammenga makes sure to end his article such that the reader will be sure to know that the blessing of God depends on them and their obedience: "In this way, and only in this way, will we continue to enjoy the blessing of God on our churches. In this way, we certainly will experience His friendship and fellowship in the years that are ahead, if it may be until our Lord comes again" (*Stories of Grace*, 364).

¹⁵ For another example, see Dewey Engelsma, "Hoodwinked (2)," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), 8/31/21, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/08/31/hoodwinked-2/>.

¹⁶ *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America* 2024, 86.

salvation, it's impossible to be in the covenant and experience the covenant, it is impossible to fellowship with God or experience fellowship with God apart from works?¹⁷

What becomes clear is that Rev. David Overway—the pastor of Hope PRC who, according to Professor Huizinga, frequently, though inadvertently, deviated from sound doctrine—who was unceremoniously shunted off to the sidelines, was simply a man ahead of his time.

Delicate Sensibilities

Professor Huizinga continues to be offended by the strong language that was used throughout the controversy. He has written about this before, so this language must genuinely offend his sensibilities. The language to which he objects is language the Bible uses to describe the false church, for example, the whore of Babylon. Other language that offends him is language used in a sermon that equated the sin of false doctrine with the sin of homosexuality. The problem for Professor Huizinga is that this is biblical language.

Instead of taking offense at the language, Professor Huizinga ought to get to the heart of the matter. Rather than objecting to the words themselves, he should consider what they are intended to convey and ask this question: Is the PRC a false church, or is she not? If she is, then the language applies. If she is not, then it does not.

The argument has been made that she is false, based on the marks of a false church set forth in article 29 of the Belgic Confession. She corrupted the truth, disciplined only the righteous, and took the sacraments away from God's people. That is the real issue. The question is not whether the language offends one's delicate sensibilities but whether it is true.

Division into Sects and Never-Ending Disputes

Professor Huizinga also points out that the group that left the PRC has fragmented and divided.¹⁸ Dan Van Uffelen makes much of this as well. He writes,

But schism breeds schism. At first, the leaders of the RPC strained every nerve to disparage their mother and justify their rebellion, but then they turned their blades and bucklers on each other.¹⁹

And later,

The schismatic groups that left the PRC in 2021 devolved into angry factions in separate institutions hurling abuse at almost everyone. Disillusioned members drifted away to various denominations, and some returned to the PRC.²⁰

Dan goes on to complain that the split led to “the endless division into sects and never-ending disputes.” Oh wait—actually, that wasn't Dan; that was the Roman Catholic theologian Johann Peter Kirsch, lamenting the Protestant reformation.²¹

Instead of merely collecting relics from reformations of the past, Dan ought to study those reformations in order to trace God's preservation of the truth through all the trouble, noise, anger, and everything else that has always accompanied his work of reforming the church. Had Dan traced the history of the reformation that began in the PRC in 2021 down to the present, he would have found that God first reformed the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He then restored the historic Reformed doctrine of Christian education, followed by a reformation of worship and a restoration of psalm singing, and finally led his church to a greater understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. (Oh, that Dan would lay aside his party allegiance and see the hand of God in reforming his church!)

¹⁷ William Langerak, “Love the Lord Thy God,” sermon preached on October 22, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1022231510484694>. See Dewey Engelsma, “Law and Gospel—Corrupted,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 39 (January 6, 2024): 15.

¹⁸ *Stories of Grace*, 358.

¹⁹ *Stories of Grace*, 39.

²⁰ *Stories of Grace*, 39.

²¹ Johann Peter Kirsch, “The Reformation,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 12 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), 710.

A Politician's Timing

What made Professor Huizinga's article so intriguing to me was that he wrote it at all. You see, while the controversy was still unfolding, the consistory of Byron Center PRC asked Professor Huizinga (along with another professor) to speak at a conference on the very issue that was then being hotly debated throughout the denomination. Byron Center's consistory took the proper view, that instruction on the truth of justification by faith alone was required. Huizinga declined. I can now understand why he declined. It was a no-win situation for him politically. To weigh in and give instruction at that juncture would alienate or, worse, offend some people. So, just as any good politician, he declined to get his hands dirty and stayed out of the fray altogether. His tactics were successful. He saved his name and his cushy position, and he ensured that he need suffer no loss.

So I suppose I am glad that Professor Huizinga has now found his voice, but I would have much preferred that he had found it when he was asked to speak, when it could have made a difference.

Pride

In his article Professor Huizinga laments the sin of pride and exhorts against it, as he should. He writes this noble-sounding sentence: "No stench is more rancid and detestable to God than pride (Prov. 6:16–17)."²² Huizinga's problem is that his denomination is as proud as Pontius Pilate. What illustrates that quite clearly is the article written by Hope PRC.

For as long as most of us can remember, Hope PRC has prided itself on its doctrinal supremacy not only over other denominations but also over its sister congregations. *She* was the keeper of orthodoxy, and don't you ever forget it. There was the PRC, and then there was *Hope PRC*. Well, that massive façade came crashing to the ground over the course of the doctrinal controversy. Not

only was it shown that Hope PRC did not have the foggiest idea what justification by faith alone was, but she also proved herself to be as abusive a church as can be imagined in fighting against those who actually did understand it.

This is Hope's legacy in the doctrinal controversy: supporters of false doctrine and persecutors of the righteous.

You would think that Hope would be slightly abashed and that that would be reflected in the history it wrote about its congregation. Yet you do not find one word about how Hope PRC led the denomination into error or took upon herself the unmistakable mark of a false church by persecuting those who lived holily and rebuked her for her errors. Instead, you have Hope extolling its history and then wringing its hands about the "schism" that destroyed friendships and divided families. In the first place, it was not schism; and in the second place, *Hope* is the church mainly responsible for the PRC's loss of justification by faith alone.

Here is what she should have written instead:

Although we have lived as proud, self-righteous Pharisees and held ourselves out as teachers, God has shown us that, in matters of doctrine, we are children. We compromised justification by faith alone and displaced Christ, and we led the denomination in those errors. In fact, to this very day the loudest voices from Hope PRC that supported error continue to serve in leadership positions in the denomination, and the only people we ever disciplined were the righteous. We have nothing to say to the denomination except this: we are sorry and repent in dust and ashes.

I will return to my analysis in the next issue, Lord willing.

—DE



²² *Stories of Grace*, 359.

God's Covenant with Adam

Introduction

Our topic this morning is “God’s Covenant with Adam.”¹ This is a very important topic because what one says about God’s covenant with Adam in paradise is what one will say about God’s covenant with man in general. How one understands God’s relationship with Adam before the fall is how one must understand every covenant that the Lord God makes. That is, if one’s view of God’s covenant with Adam is that it was a conditional covenant of works, then one’s view of God’s covenant of grace will also be that it is, in some sense, a conditional covenant. But if one’s view of God’s covenant with Adam is that it was an unconditional covenant of friendship, then one’s view of God’s covenant of grace will also be that it is an unconditional covenant. What one says about God’s covenant with Adam will affect one’s entire covenant view.

The importance of this topic is also that the majority opinion in the Reformed and Presbyterian church world is that God’s covenant with Adam was a covenant of works. The Reformed world has, in the majority, gone astray in its view of God’s covenant with Adam. And because the majority opinion in the Reformed church world is that God’s covenant with Adam is a covenant of works, the majority of the Reformed church world also views God’s covenant of grace as, in some sense, conditional.

That gives us opportunity this morning to correct that error—not because we are more or mightier than the majority of the Reformed church world; but by the grace of God, we have opportunity to correct the error and, in that correction of the error, to develop in our understanding not only of God’s covenant with Adam but also of God’s covenant of grace in general.

The importance of this topic is also that the truth of God’s covenant with Adam is of great comfort for

the child of God. The child of God who understands that God’s covenant with Adam was unconditional and, in fact, that God’s covenant with Adam was essentially his covenant of grace—that child of God will have the comfort of knowing that God’s covenant of grace with him in Christ is a sure covenant and that he has, through Jesus Christ, all of the blessings of that covenant, including everlasting life in the paradise of God.

We recognize, as we proceed through the lecture this morning, that there is development being made—not development of the truth, as if the truth is lacking until we come along, but rather development in our understanding of the truth. That development in our understanding of the truth is especially in relation to the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ. How is it possible that Christ could merit salvation and life everlasting and righteousness for us his people? Many answer that question according to the conception of the covenant of works. But the development that God gives us this morning is to answer that question according to the gospel of grace that is in Jesus Christ—not according to a conditional covenant but according to who Jesus Christ is, the Lord from heaven.

And so this morning we will consider the topic “God’s Covenant with Adam.” First, let us consider the majority view, which is the covenant of works. Second, we will consider the biblical and confessional view, which is a covenant of grace. Third, we will look at the merit of Christ, a specific and particular application of the biblical view of the covenant in a contemporary debate.

The Covenant of Works

Let us begin by considering the majority view of God’s covenant with Adam. Within the Reformed church world, most teach that God’s covenant with

¹ This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given June 27, 2026, in Singapore. The speech can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nysd9Uql-HM>.

Adam was a covenant of works. The doctrine of the covenant of works is that God's covenant with Adam contained a probationary command. In fact, it is in the probationary command of God's covenant with Adam that the covenant of works finds its essence and its fundamental meaning. God came to Adam, whom he had placed in the garden of Eden, and gave him a command: thou shalt not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now, it is true that God came to Adam and gave him that command. And even more, Thou mayest eat of the tree of life and of all of the other trees in the garden, which have been given to thee for food. God came to Adam with a command. But the covenant of works teaches that that command was a probationary command. That is, God was putting Adam on probation: for an unspecified amount of time, God would watch Adam and see whether Adam obeyed. If Adam obeyed, then by his obedience he would merit everlasting life for the human race. Adam and all of his posterity would go to heaven. But if Adam, during that time of probation, did not obey the command of God, then Adam would die.

Along with the probationary command, there was a conditional promise. The conditional promise is a key feature of the doctrine of the covenant of works. That promise was this: if you obey my command and do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then I will give unto you heaven and all of its blessings and glory. Along with that conditional promise went a conditional threat: if you do eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then you shall die. In fact, I will kill you.

Those are the main elements in the doctrine of a covenant of works with Adam. The term *covenant of works* expresses the reality of that covenant. It was a covenant whose outcome depended on Adam's work. It was a covenant in which Adam, by his works, would earn either eternal life by his obedience or eternal death by his disobedience. There was a probationary command, a conditional promise, and a conditional threat.

When we look at the whole doctrine of the covenant of works with Adam, we can get to the essence of that covenant. What is the fundamental

feature of that covenant of works? The fundamental feature, or the essential idea, of the covenant of works is that God deals with man conditionally. God deals with man according to a contract, an agreement, an arrangement. God, on his part, promises eternal life; and Adam, on his part, must obey in order to merit that eternal life. The central idea of the covenant of works is that God deals *conditionally* and that man's future is *contingent* upon what he does.

We can penetrate even further to the essential idea of the covenant of works. If the essential idea of the covenant of works is a contract and conditions and contingency, that means that the essential idea of that covenant of works is mere man's meriting. Adam could merit with God by God's arrangement of the covenant, which was a covenant of works. By heeding God's probationary command and conditional promise, mere man—Adam in paradise—could merit with God. If he upheld his end of the bargain, Adam would earn for himself and for all of the human race the higher and heavenly eternal life.

Very importantly, those who teach a covenant of works teach a certain relationship of that covenant to the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. They say that the covenant of works is a fundamentally different covenant than the covenant of grace. God's covenant with Adam can be compared to the law, and God's covenant of grace in Christ can be compared to the gospel. In fact, this is the main application of the covenant of works that is made today. The idea of the covenant of works has been around for a long time. But today, the main application of the doctrine of a covenant of works is to say that the covenant of works corresponds to God's law and that the covenant of grace corresponds to God's gospel. God's covenant with Adam was a covenant of works. It was a covenant of earning. It was a covenant of merit. It was a covenant of contingency and conditions and a contract. It was a covenant of a probationary command, "Thou shalt not," along with a conditional promise and a conditional threat. God's covenant of works with Adam was the law. And God's covenant of grace in Jesus Christ is the gospel because in that covenant

it is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ that counts, so that the child of God receives heaven and life everlasting freely, not by works but by grace.

If the covenant of works corresponds to the law and the covenant of grace corresponds to the gospel, then those two covenants must be fundamentally different covenants. They are irreconcilable and cannot be in any sense the same essential covenant.

Confusingly, those who teach the covenant of works and associate it with the law nevertheless teach that the covenant of grace is also a conditional covenant. Their intention is to restrict meriting to the covenant of works and the law and to keep meriting out of the covenant of grace. Nevertheless, their view is that God's covenant is essentially conditional. Their view, in their own words, is that even the covenant of grace in Christ has conditions. The condition of the covenant of works was the condition of works, of obedience to law. The condition of the covenant of grace is no longer works but faith. Faith is the condition that one must fulfill in order to have the blessings of the covenant of grace.

Those who make this distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace go on to teach that whereas Adam stood in the covenant of works and failed, Jesus Christ stood in the covenant of works and succeeded. God made a conditional covenant with Jesus, apparently having the probationary period and commands and conditional threats and promises—everything that makes a covenant conditional. Jesus stood in that covenant of works and succeeded in keeping that covenant, whereas Adam failed. This means that the covenant of grace, in which we enjoy fellowship with God, is essentially just the covenant of works yet but with Jesus Christ's fulfilling that covenant of works on our behalf.

We could go into much more detail about the covenant of works. This doctrine has been developed over more than a century, so that the idea of the covenant of works is embedded in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today. This is their default position with regard to God's covenant with Adam. But we have seen the main lines, according

to the teachers' own interpretation of that covenant. There is a probationary command, with a conditional promise and threat. The essence of that covenant is contingency and merit and condition and a contract. That covenant of works is incompatible with the covenant of grace. It is an entirely different kind of covenant.

Let us critique this majority opinion of the covenant of works. Our critique will not be a critique of the distinction between the law and the gospel. We recognize, and we teach as well, that there is a difference between the law and the gospel. The law is one word of God, and the gospel is another word of God. The law is the word that says, "Thou shalt"; and the gospel is the word that says, "Jesus did." The law and the gospel, we recognize, are different words. But the law does not correspond to God's covenant with Adam and the gospel to God's covenant of grace. We recognize the distinction between law and gospel but believe it is an error to try to associate the law with the covenant with Adam.

These, then, are the points of our critique.

First, the doctrine of the covenant of works is not biblical. That is, the Bible contains no record of the essential elements that the doctrine of the covenant of works requires. The word of God in Genesis 2 does record a command: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2:17). But the Bible never indicates, in Genesis 2 or anywhere else, that that was a probationary command and that Adam, by his obedience, could have earned the higher life of heaven. In fact, if someone would have gone to Adam in paradise and said to him, "I know a way for you to get to an even better paradise in heaven," Adam wouldn't have known what that person was talking about. Adam didn't know anything about a heaven. Adam did not need a heaven. Adam had everything that he needed in the covenant that he had with God in paradise. He had life. He had true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Adam had covenant fellowship with God. Adam had a home with God. Adam had everything he needed there on the earth. He was of the earth, earthy. The living soul that God gave him (Gen. 2:7) was an earthly soul. Adam,

being of the earth, earthy and being a living soul, had everything that he needed on the earth. There was nothing more for Adam to obtain. The Bible knows nothing of a probationary command by which Adam could have elevated himself to the higher life of heaven.

Nor does the Bible know anything of a conditional promise to Adam. God never said to Adam in the biblical record, “If you obey, then I will give you something higher—heavenly life.” There is no conditional promise in the record, whether in Genesis 2 or anywhere else in scripture, and there is no probationary threat. God did teach Adam by the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that he would deal with Adam righteously. That is the way God deals with mankind. God is a righteous God. God cannot deny his own righteousness, so he deals with man righteously. Nevertheless, that righteous dealing with man is *not* conditional dealing with man. There is no conditional promise, and what is taken as a conditional threat is not conditional. The probationary command and the conditional promise are inferred by the teachers of the covenant of works from the command of God that announced that God would deal righteously with mankind. But that probationary command and conditional promise are not in the biblical record. God does not teach in the scriptures that he deals with man conditionally or contingently or on the basis of man’s activity. But rather, God deals with man righteously.

Our second criticism of the doctrine of the covenant of works is that mere man is never, and can never be, in a position to merit with God. God *cannot* put mere man in a position to merit with him. It is an impossible thing. Why? Because God is God. God is infinite. God is the creator, and man is dust. Man is of the earth, earthy. Man is made a living soul by the breath of God. Man is the creature. And the creature can never earn with Jehovah God. If any mere man could somehow possibly obey God perfectly in his entire life, then that man still would not have earned anything with God. Jesus taught in Luke 17:10, “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We

are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” Mere man is *never* in a position to earn, or to merit, with God. It is impossible for man. God would not and even could not put mere man in a position where man could earn. And that is no weakness on the part of God. That is strength because God is infinite, and man is finite. When the covenant of works teaches that Adam, that mere man, was in a position to earn with God, it errs with regard to the possibility of man’s earning with God.

Third, our criticism of the covenant of works is that it makes God’s glorious covenant only a means to an end. The end, or goal, was heaven. It was eternal life for Adam, according to the covenant of works. The means by which he would get to that goal was the keeping of the covenant, the fulfilling of the terms of this contract that God had appointed. That makes the covenant merely the *means* to get to the end, the goal, which is heaven. Once Adam had the goal, he would not need the covenant anymore. In fact, according to the doctrine of the covenant of works, that covenant would have fallen away at some point. It was a probationary covenant, with a probationary command. And once Adam had reached the end of the probationary period, there would be no more need for that probationary command, for that conditional threat and conditional promise. The covenant would have fallen away. But God’s covenant, as we saw last week, *is* the end.² God’s covenant is fellowship and friendship. The essence of the covenant is the relationship of love in which God takes his people to himself in Jesus Christ and gives them to dwell with him forever. The covenant is no disposable, temporary means to an end; but the covenant *is* the end. It is the goal. There is nothing higher than that covenant, which is life with God, dwelling with Jehovah God.

Fourth, our criticism of the covenant of works is that it makes God’s covenant with man to be essentially conditional. That is a fundamental feature of the covenant that cannot be removed. If God’s covenant with Adam was essentially conditional, then God’s covenant of grace must be essentially conditional. And in fact, God’s covenant in himself must be essentially conditional. Those who teach the

² See Andrew Lanning, “God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace,” *Reformed Pavilion* 4, no. 14 (July 11, 2026): 4–15.

covenant of works go on to teach that very thing—that the covenant of God is conditional. They teach that about God’s covenant within himself. They say that the Father—the first person—and the Son—the second person—entered into a bargain with each other for the salvation of God’s people. But that is not the covenant of God. God’s covenant in himself is the life of a family. He is Father and Son and Holy Ghost.

Those who teach the covenant of works, making it a conditional covenant, bring the condition into the covenant of grace and say that that covenant is conditional. There is a new condition now: faith. And pretty soon, added to that are some obedience and some works. The covenant of grace really is just the covenant of works repackaged. We could not get heaven through Adam’s keeping of the covenant of works, they say; but we do get it through Jesus’ keeping of the covenant of works. The covenant of grace turns out to be just the covenant of works repackaged in Jesus Christ.

Although there could be many more criticisms of the covenant of works, we will end with this one: our fifth criticism of the covenant of works is that it turns the gospel into the law and faith into work. For consider that the covenant of grace is still conditional. There is still a contingency upon which the success of the covenant depends. When faith is made the contingent condition of the covenant of grace, faith is made into work. Then the covenant of grace is no gospel but just a new law.

The Covenant of Grace with Adam

Let us move to the biblical and confessional view of God’s covenant with Adam and see this against the background of what we have seen of the false doctrine of the covenant of works. The biblical and confessional view of God’s covenant with Adam, first, is that God’s covenant with Adam was a covenant of friendship and fellowship. That covenant was not a contract. It was not an agreement that God and Adam entered into. It had the same essence as the covenant of grace in Christ. It had the same essence as God’s covenant within himself as the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—which is fellowship and family life.

The scriptures teach us that relationship of fellowship between Adam and God. “In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him” (Gen. 5:1). We find that one of the meanings of that likeness is sonship. “Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (v. 3). When God created Adam, he made him a son, just as Adam, when he begat Seth, had a son. And the idea of sonship is not a contract; the idea of sonship is family life. If anyone is concerned that the connection between likeness and sonship in Genesis 5:1, 3 seems a little tenuous, then in Luke 3:38 that is made explicit. In Luke 3 the genealogy of Jesus Christ is traced all the way back to Adam. In that tracing of the lineage of Jesus Christ, there is the constant refrain that one was the son of another. When we get all the way back to Adam, we read, “Adam, which was the son of God.” Adam was the son of God. That is not a contract. That relationship is not an agreement. That relationship is fellowship. That is family life, Father and son.

Furthermore, scripture reveals that Adam and God lived a life of friendship. They walked together and talked together. God spoke explicitly to Adam and told him, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). God spoke to Adam as a friend or as a father and son speak to each other. Later, after Adam and Eve had fallen, “they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (3:8). The implication is that it was customary that in the cool of the day, God would walk and talk with Adam and Eve, the way a family might walk and talk together after the work of the day is finished. There is fellowship indicated there. Furthermore, we read that God made Adam a home. “The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed” (2:8). The garden of Eden was a beautiful garden. That garden was paradise. That garden was where God placed Adam and Eve to live. It was the place where God would come to speak with them as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day.

God made a home for them. And a home is not a contract. A home is where a family lives.

In the confessions, in the Heidelberg Catechism, we read this:

Q. 6. Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?

A. By no means; but God created man good, and after his own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his creator, heartily love him, and live with him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise him. (Lord's Day 3)

There is nothing of contract or agreement in that answer. There is a life of love and of fellowship. There is a life of knowing God and a life of happiness.

The biblical and confessional view of God's covenant with Adam is *not* that of a conditional, contingent contract but that of a life of warm, family fellowship. And that stands to reason in light of the lecture last week, where we saw God's covenant life within himself as the life of family and God's covenant with his people in Christ as a life of fellowship. So also God's covenant with Adam was simply a life of fellowship and friendship. That first, with regard to the biblical view of the covenant with Adam. It was a covenant of friendship.

Second, God's covenant with Adam was the covenant of grace. It was *not* the covenant of works, nor was it some third kind of covenant, but it was God's covenant of grace. It was not essentially different from his covenant in Jesus Christ that we have now. Remember, the doctrine of the covenant of works makes a sharp division between those two, so that God's covenant with Adam was one thing that was essentially different from his covenant of grace in Christ. That is *not* our view of God's covenant with Adam. Those two covenants are essentially the same covenant, so that we can even call God's covenant with Adam *the* covenant of grace—the covenant of grace.

Here is the key to understanding the covenant with Adam as the covenant of grace: it was God's covenant of grace in *typical* form, or in *figurative* form. The words *type* and *figure* are significant.

The Bible is full of types and figures. A type, or a figure, is the shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ cast onto the Old Testament. The way we can imagine the idea of a type is that behind Jesus Christ stands the bright light of God's eternal counsel, in which God has determined all things. That counsel has as its center the Lord Jesus Christ, so that he is the body upon which and through which that light shines. The light of God's counsel shining upon Jesus Christ casts Jesus' shadow across the whole Old Testament. The people and places and activities of the Old Testament are pictures of Christ, of his kingdom, of his salvation. Those types are real in their own times and places, but they are just the shadows of the true reality to whom they point: Jesus Christ. David, for example, was a very real man, with his own real experiences; but God, in his counsel, had determined David as part of the shadow of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. By studying David in the Old Testament, we learn to recognize what Jesus Christ is like. David was ordained by God as a type, so that knowing David, we know the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet David is just the shadow. He is not the reality of the body that casts that shadow.

You can go all through the Old Testament and find all manner of figures and shadows and types like that. The tabernacle was a type of God's covenant dwelling with his people. It was a beautiful tent with many rich colors and many pieces of furniture and many ceremonies that went with the worship of God. In that Old Testament tent, there was a shadow of what it is to belong to God through Christ. It is covenant fellowship. It is a home with God, just as God dwelled among his people in the Old Testament tabernacle.

The shadows, or the types, of the Old Testament are those shadows cast by Jesus Christ and his kingdom upon the Old Testament.

And now, our contention is that God's covenant with Adam in paradise was the covenant of grace in typical form. Why do we say this? We must do our theology out of the scriptures, and the scriptures point us to the idea of the covenant of grace in typical form. For the scriptures identify many elements of that first paradise—Adam,

paradise, the tree of life, the rivers—as having their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Let's begin with Adam. Adam was a head—a federal, or covenant, head. That is, Adam represented men. In fact, Adam represented, in the garden of Eden, the whole human race. “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the *figure* of him that was to come” (Rom. 5:14). That word *figure* is *tupos* in Greek, or *type* in English. Adam was a type of Jesus Christ. How was Adam a type of Christ? Adam and Christ were both federal heads, who represented their respective people. Adam represented the human race. Jesus represents his elect. As a covenant head, Adam was a type of Christ. That points us in the direction of seeing God's covenant with Adam as the covenant of grace in typical form.

The same truth is found in 1 Corinthians 15.

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. (1 Cor. 15:45–47)

There Jesus is even called Adam. He is “the last Adam.” He is the real Adam. He is the Adam who was only typified by the Adam in paradise. Scripture definitely and deliberately identifies Adam as a type, a figure, a shadow of Jesus Christ.

So it is for the tree of life in the garden of Eden. We read of that tree again in the book of Revelation. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the *tree of life*, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Here we have a reference to paradise, the garden of Eden, which was a picture of heaven. The tree of life that God gave to Adam in the original paradise he now gives to his church to eat of in the midst of the paradise of heaven.

In Revelation 22 we have a river that proceeds out of the throne of God; and “in the midst of the

street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). This passage in Revelation 22 alludes to Ezekiel 47:1–12. For the sake of time, rather than reading that entire passage, here is just a brief summary: Ezekiel is taken, by progressive steps, further and further down the river that proceeds out of the temple—that temple being heaven and the river being the life that proceeds from God's throne in heaven. As Ezekiel proceeds further, the river gets deeper. First, it is only to the ankles. Then he can cross it at his knees. Then he crosses it at his loins. And finally, he cannot cross it. It is too deep. He has to swim in it. And on every side of the river and extending throughout the whole country where this river goes are trees of life, trees that give fruit, trees that heal. That imagery is picked up in Revelation 22. The significance is that the imagery identifies paradise as the place of fellowship. God gave Adam the tree of life as a symbol of his life with God. And now that tree of life fills heaven, so that in every corner of heaven, there is fellowship. That is the meaning of heaven: it is the covenant fellowship of God with his people in the paradise that he has made.

And then we have Jesus' word from the cross: “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). There Jesus takes the word *paradise* and uses it to refer to the reality, to the heaven, of which the earthly paradise was a picture and a type and a shadow.

The whole of scripture, then, points us in the direction of seeing God's covenant with Adam as the covenant of grace in typical form. There was the typical head; the typical river; the typical land of paradise, which was the typical home; and the typical tree of life.

Not only scripture points us in this direction; but also the theology, the doctrine, of the covenant points us in this direction because as soon as one says that the covenant with Adam was *not* a covenant of works, there is only one other covenant left for it to be. If it is not a covenant of works, the only thing it can be is a covenant of grace. That is the only kind of covenant the scriptures know of:

the relationship of fellowship that God graciously gives to his people in Jesus Christ.

What might help us understand the covenant with Adam as a type? We could go to the HDB [Housing and Development Board in Singapore] Hub in Toa Payoh and look there at all of the future developments that are planned. There we will be able to walk among the tables and see the future plans: where the towers will be in the upcoming developments, where the green spaces will be. We can see if there are any waterways that will run nearby. All of the details of the planned HDB developments are laid out there on tables in dioramas. Those dioramas are not the reality. They are dim shadows of the reality. They are only pictures of the reality. The reality of the actual HDB developments will be far greater than what can be portrayed on those tables. That is the way to understand God's covenant with Adam. God, determining from all eternity his glorious covenant of grace with his people in the Lord Jesus Christ, gave them a picture of it from the beginning. God's covenant of grace with Adam was the shadow of the glorious reality of God's covenant of grace in Christ. Adam was of the earth, earthy. God's covenant was a covenant for Adam on the earth. There was no path for Adam to raise himself from the earthly to the heavenly. Adam was in the gracious covenant of God as a type, a picture, of the reality. That is because God from all eternity had determined that he would dwell with men, that his tabernacle would be with men. God from all eternity had determined that he would reveal the glorious covenant fellowship that he had within himself by taking his elect people into that fellowship through Jesus Christ. He had determined that he would give them a home in which to live with him forever. God foreshadowed all of that in paradise.

The typical covenant of grace with Adam, then, measures up to all of the requirements of a type. What is required of a type? What must a shadow be, according to God's determination? First of all, types must reveal the reality by being true to the reality. They must *show* what that reality is. The reality for Adam was that he was the friend and the son of God. Adam was a federal head in paradise,

which was beautiful and a home for him. Adam lived with God by the tree of life and by the rivers of water. Adam's covenant life with God was true to the fulfillment of God's covenant of grace in Christ, so that studying the shadow, you can see the contours of the reality. First, a type must reveal.

Second, a type must give way. Or, to put it differently, a type must fail. Why is it that the beautiful tabernacle in the Old Testament was, in the end, just a tent that would wear out and be gone? Because the type must fail. It never was the reality. It never was the object of the hope of God's people. It was just the shadow of fellowship with God. Why must David—a type of Christ, the king after God's own heart—sin with Bathsheba? Because the type must fail. It must give way to the reality. So also Adam in paradise, in the covenant of God, revealed that covenant; and yet he must fail, in order to give way to the reality, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. And all of this must be understood in the light of the counsel of God, who is the one who has ordained the reality, Jesus Christ, as well as the types that would foreshadow him.

The Merit of Christ

In the third point of our speech, we seek to answer a false doctrine of the federal vision that relates to God's covenant with Adam. As all false teachings do, the federal vision takes hold of an aspect of the truth in order to twist it into the lie. The truth that the federal vision works with in regard to God's covenant with Adam is that God's covenant with Adam was unconditional. That is, Adam could not merit with God. So far, so good. But the federal vision twists that truth to say that just as Adam did not merit with God by his obedience, so also Jesus does not merit with God by his obedience. And if Jesus did not merit for us with God by his obedience, then it is up to us to provide the required obedience for our final justification. Thus the federal vision teaches the heresy of justification by faith and works.

The answer to this false doctrine of the federal vision is that Christ does indeed merit, and he merits as the federal head of his people. That is, everything that Christ did in obedience to the law of God, he did for his people and in place of his people. Jesus' meritorious obedience is counted

as our righteousness. But that leaves the question, how it is possible for Christ to merit? The federal vision says that Christ could not merit, just as Adam could not merit. What is the answer to this denial of Christ's merit?

Those who teach a covenant of works answer the denial of Christ's merit by locating the possibility of his merit in that covenant. They say that merit is possible because of the nature of the covenant. The covenant of works was a covenant of merit. The covenant of works is the law. So Jesus, by his active obedience to the law, fulfilled the covenant of works and thus earned for us eternal life. Those who are fighting the federal vision that way are trying to maintain that Christ can merit. Christ can earn. This we agree with. But their error is that they locate the possibility of Christ's merit in a covenant of works, a conditional covenant. They say that without that structure of the covenant of works, Christ could not merit; only if there is such a structure that requires man's merit can Christ merit with God. They think they have defended the truth against the federal vision attack by maintaining a meritorious covenant of works. And they have dug in their heels on it; the Reformed world today sees the covenant of works as the answer to the federal vision. The Reformed world is not easily going to give up the covenant of works. But they have erred.

There is a solution to the possibility of Christ's meriting. But that solution is not found by locating the possibility of Christ's meriting in a conditional covenant. Not at all. The solution is to see that the possibility of Christ's meriting is located *in him personally*. It is not in some structure, not in some arrangement or contract with God; but the possibility of Christ's earning righteousness for us is located in *his identity*. Adam could not merit with God because he was of the earth, earthy; but the last Adam can merit with God because he is the Lord from heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ can do what no mere man can do because he is God. Mere man cannot earn with God. But the man who is God come in our flesh can earn with God. The Lord Jesus Christ, by his obedience to Jehovah God, did not fulfill some conditional covenant of works. But rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, by his obedience to God, obtained righteousness and life for us. And

he obtained righteousness and life for us even though he was not at fault for our unrighteousness and death. He was not the sinner. He was not the one who had fallen. We were, in our first father Adam. But Jesus Christ came in our place, as our substitute, and restored that which he took not away. Jesus Christ is pleasing to God by what he has done before God. Jesus Christ is the one who can merit with God because of who he is. You don't need a conditional covenant in order to have the possibility of Christ's meriting salvation. What you need is the Lord from heaven.

That brings glory to Jesus Christ. Then Christ, in all of his work, is not simply fulfilling one side of a pact, one side of an agreement or a contract with God, and then waiting for God to uphold his end of that pact. But rather, Jesus Christ can do what no mere man can do. He is the Lord from heaven, who is the Son of God with power; who loves God with all his heart and seeks God's will with all his heart; who is the last Adam; who is not of the earth, earthy; who is not merely a living soul but a quickening spirit. Jesus merits with God—not because there is something inherently conditional in God's covenant with man but because Jesus is the Lord from heaven.

That is the gospel for God's people. The gospel is not that Jesus fulfilled one condition—works—in order to introduce to us another condition—faith. But the gospel is that the Lord Jesus Christ, as the head of the covenant of grace, as the center of God's counsel and the one in whom we have fellowship with God, has done all things to bring us into that fellowship, so that we enjoy it forevermore. Then the covenant is not a means to an end, but the covenant is the end. It is the goal. The covenant is everlasting life. The covenant is the paradise of God that the tree of life fills and that the river waters and gives life to, where the last Adam reigns forever and ever.

This view of the covenant with Adam is the view that harmonizes with the truth of Jesus Christ. It is the view that harmonizes with the biblical evidence and record. It is the view that harmonizes with the truth that God's covenant is always an unconditional covenant of grace. May God give us further understanding of that covenant.

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Article CLXXI: The Seven Churches in Asia: The Church Growing Lax in Discipline

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things saith he that hath the sharp, two-edged sword: I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.

But I have a few things against thee because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat of things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.

Repent, therefore, or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone and on the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.—Rev. 2:12–17

The church in Ephesus was characterized by a lack of its first love, so that it lived largely on tradition and was in grave danger of ultimately seeing its candlestick removed from its midst. The church in Smyrna was a portraiture of the church in tribulation, poor and despised in the world, but rich in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The third congregation addressed is the one established in Pergamum, in which we find a picture of the church growing lax in discipline. Let us study this church from the point of view of:

I. Its Precarious Position in the World

II. Its Faithfulness

III. Its Dangerous Defect

IV. The Message It Receives.

I. It cannot but attract our attention if we compare this letter with the previous ones that the Lord does not commence the description of the church with his usual, "I know thy works." In other words, it is not the condition of the church as such that receives the first and main emphasis, but rather the position it occupies in the city where it was established. Pergamum was a rather large city situated somewhat farther north from Smyrna than the latter was distant from Ephesus. If Smyrna was the competitor of Ephesus, Pergamum emulated both the former in striving for the honor of being the first city of Asia Minor. Commerce and industry found in Pergamum a center, science and art their home. It was one of the foremost cities of the time. Also in this city the Church of Christ, which certainly is not called to retreat into the smaller towns and villages of the world or to hide in the outskirts of the larger cities, had gained foothold and was established.

Judging by the contents of this epistle, it had a hard time of it. The city is called the throne of Satan, and again the dwelling place of that prince of darkness. What is meant by these expressions in a general sense of the word is not difficult to see. A throne in the book of Revelation occurs frequently as the center of dominion, whence the authority of the king emanates throughout his entire kingdom. Satan is the adversary of God and, therefore, in this dispensation the great opponent of Christ and his kingdom in the world, forevermore endeavoring to organize and bring to development the power

of opposition against God's Anointed in the world. Throughout this dispensation he is the instigator of all opposition that manifests itself against the Church of Christ. And, therefore, if we read in this letter that Pergamum was a place in which Satan had his throne, the city is pictured to us as being dominated by this power of opposition, as being dominated by the prince of darkness, as being a stronghold of the devil, where he could have full and undisputed sway except for the little bulwark of Christ that had been built in the city.

And this must be taken with special emphasis in regard to Pergamum. In general it is true of this entire dispensation that the world is under the dominion of the prince of darkness. The whole world, John tells us, lies in the evil one, and the kingdoms of the world belong to his dominion. But it is also true that in one place this dominion of the devil becomes more clearly manifest than in another. In our own time it is generally evident that in the larger cities, like London and Paris, New York, Chicago and San Francisco, sin comes to a higher and bolder form of development, the devil exercises more absolute and undisputed sway than in the smaller towns or rural communities. At any rate, of Pergamum it might be asserted in a special sense that it was the throne of the devil. He dwelled there. While in other places he also manifested his presence occasionally, Pergamum was his continual abode. If he would go out as a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour, he would always return to Pergamum. There you could always find him home, there he had his headquarters, there was his permanent abode, there was the center and seat of his authority and power.

If we inquire more specifically and ask the question in what sense this dubious prerogative could be claimed for the city of Pergamum, the text does not supply the answer. But from history we know two things. First of all, we are informed that among other forms of idolatry practiced in the town, Pergamum was famous for its worship of Aesculapius as its chief god. Characteristic of this god was that its chief symbol representing him was that of the serpent, the symbol also of the devil. The special power attributed to this god was that

he could save people from the miserable effects of sin, from disease and sicknesses of all kinds. People from the city and from all the surrounding country flocked to its temple for help and recovery, and because of this imaginary power of the god he was generally known as Soter, that is, savior. Thus we obtain, indeed, a striking symbolism of the power of Antichrist and the dominion of Satan, consisting ultimately in this, that the serpent, the symbol of the devil, was hailed as the savior of men and worshipped as such. And in the second place we are informed, too, that the city of Pergamum was one of the first centers of worship of the Caesars, the emperors of Rome. As we may know, the emperors of Rome had themselves deified and worshipped as gods; and in the city of Pergamum there was a temple erected in honor of Caesar and dedicated to his worship. In short, it may be said that in Pergamum we meet with a rather striking manifestation of the Antichristian power and dominion, not, indeed, in the same form as Antichrist rules today or as he shall come in his manifestation in the future, but nevertheless the similarity is striking. Satan, the serpent, is honored and worshipped as the savior of men instead of Christ, and Caesar, man, is worshipped as lord of all instead of him to whom is given all power in heaven and on earth. Truly, Pergamum was the throne of Satan, the place where the prince of darkness had his permanent abode.

Of course, in principle, the position of the church of Pergamum in relation to that city is the position of the church of all ages in relation to the world. As we have remarked, the prince of darkness is the ruler of this age, and he still exercises dominion over the kingdoms of the world. He is in principle hailed as the savior wherever the Christ is rejected, and the divinity of man is proclaimed wherever the divinity of the Son of Man is not acknowledged.

But this relation of the Church to the world is not always equally vivid, nor does it manifest itself in the same form in every period of history. During the period of the early Church, Rome, with its emperors raging against the little flock of the Good Shepherd, was no doubt the throne of Satan and his abode. In the age of the Reformation the

Roman Catholic Church might suitably be designated as the throne of Satan, more specifically so, the seat of the pope and all connected therewith; and when finally the Reformation was initiated, it soon became evident that the little church of Protestantism dwelled where Satan had his abode.

But, again, a sad and fatal mistake we would make if we would imagine that also today the center of Satan's authority must be sought in the Roman Catholic Church, as some interpreters have it. It would blind us to the tremendous movement of modernism, of humanism, of man-worship that is sweeping over the world of Christendom and developing with astounding rapidity. Today man is his own savior, man is the savior of humanity; today man is his own god, not, indeed, because he worships any particular human being, be he Caesar or king, but because he has generalized his worship of man in the worship of humanity.

Also today Satan has his throne and dwelling

place. He has it in many a school and college and university where Christ is humanized and man is deified, where the worship of humanity is preached and taught in its boldest and rankest aspect and the blood of Christ is trampled under foot. Nay, still stronger, the devil has succeeded in ousting the true Savior from many a Christian church; his portraiture is upheld from many a modern pulpit no more, or if it is, his features are so distorted that you can recognize him no more! Surely, also today the prince of darkness has his throne and dwelling place; he has them in the midst of the Christian world, and he has succeeded in charming the minds and the imagination of men by upholding before them the image of a modern Aesculapius called Humanity! Also today the church is established where Satan has his throne, and its relation to the world is not so much different from that of the church at Pergamum. May she also be found as faithful as that congregation of the early Church!

(To be continued)

