

Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* is late—very late. For that we apologize to our readers. The main explanation for its lateness is the fact that the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary sponsored a special conference commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19. It was a three-day conference that demanded the involvement of all our faculty members. Each of us gave a major speech or presentation, along with a number of foreign representatives of churches with whom the Protestant Reformed Churches in America have an official relationship. In addition, we were able to host a goodly number of representatives from other countries and churches with whom we have some official contact. The theme of the conference was “Dordt 400: Safeguarding the Reformed Tradition” (for the conference website, visit dordt400.org). The conference was well attended. The speeches are in the process of being published in book form by the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Our readers may be interested in obtaining the book when it becomes available. All of the presentations can also be accessed at Sermonaudio.com (under Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI). Archived are not only the speeches, but the shorter historical presentations as well.

This issue includes a number of articles that we are confident you will find edifying, instructive, and thought-provoking. Our lead article is by the Reverend Martyn McGeown and is entitled “Faith: A Bond, a Gift, *and* an Activity, but *Not* a Condition for Salvation.” Rev. McGeown focuses on how we are to understand the activity of faith, while at the same time rejecting any teaching that makes faith a condition for salvation, or denies the activity of faith. With appeal to Scripture, the Reformed confessions, and the Reformed tradition, he demonstrates how properly Reformed Christians are to view the activity of faith.

The undersigned contributes to this issue an article on the Old Testament judge, Jephthah. The article focuses on the vow that Jephthah made to offer up to the Lord whatever came out of his house to greet him, when he returned victorious from the battle against the Ammo-

nites. On his return, his daughter came out of the house to meet him “with timbrels and with dances” (Judges 11:34). Controversy swirls around whether or not Jephthah actually offered his daughter up as a human sacrifice, and whether, therefore, his vow was righteous or rash. Read the article to discover my viewpoint and the grounds for the support of the position that I take.

The Reverend Garrett J. Eriks, pastor of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan, contributes an article entitled, “The Needed Light of Biblical Counseling.” Pastor Eriks is doing advanced degree work in the area of pastoral counseling. His contribution is a revised form of a paper that he submitted for one of his courses. In the article, he demonstrates the need for sound, biblical counseling for the people of God in their distresses, burdens, and sins. The article is a call for truly biblical counseling, as opposed to unbiblical, Freudian psychology, which is the basis for much of what passes for counseling in our day.

This issue of *PRTJ* also includes two entries that bring to a conclusion two bibliographies that we have been publishing in installments. My colleague, Prof. Douglas J. Kuiper, concludes his bibliography of the writings of George M. Ophoff, one of the original faculty members of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. Our readers should know that Prof. Kuiper has recently been awarded his Master in Theology degree from Calvin Theological Seminary. Congratulations to Prof. Kuiper on this achievement!

I also bring to a close my “John Calvin Research Bibliography.” The last two entries are sections #17 and #18: “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Last Things,” and “Calvin’s Views on Worship.” It is possible that in the future the entire “John Calvin Research Bibliography” and the George Martin Ophoff bibliography will be published in some form or other, and made available by our seminary.

And there are our book reviews. We are able to include eight reviews in this issue. The reviews are always an enjoyable and worthwhile part of *PRTJ*. Thanks to all our reviewers, but special thanks to Prof. David Engelsma, who, although emeritus, continues to write and to produce. His book reviews are always insightful and worthwhile.

Read and enjoy!

Soli Deo Gloria!

—Ronald L. Cammenga, editor

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Faith: A Bond, a Gift, *and* an Activity, but *Not* a Condition for Salvation

Martyn McGeown

Defining Salvation

In the minds of many, salvation is assumed to be equivalent to justification. Salvation, however, is broader than justification. Salvation is the entire work of God by which He delivers us from sin and brings us into the enjoyment of blessedness in body and soul forever. Salvation includes our future bodily resurrection and our everlasting enjoyment of heaven in the new creation. Finally, salvation includes our conscious enjoyment of the benefits purchased by Christ.

With that in mind, consider the following statement: “Salvation is by faith alone.” Is that true? Yes—justification is by faith alone. No—regeneration is not by faith alone. Actually, regeneration is not by faith at all: regeneration precedes faith in the *ordo salutis* (1 John 5:1). Or consider this statement: “A man is saved without good works.” Is that true? Yes—justification, now and on the last day, is without good works, that is, by grace alone through faith alone. Is that true? No—without good works a man will not be saved on the last day, for good works are the necessary fruit of justification and the evidence of a man’s justification (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 64, 86-87).¹ A man without good works is lost, for if he has no good works, he is not holy but has only sins. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

We are justified in eternity, at the cross, and in the final resurrection, but the main way in which Scripture speaks of justification is in time. We are justified—we come into the consciousness of our justification—in time *when we believe* (Luke 18:14; John 8:11; Rom.

1 All references to the creeds (The Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort) are taken from *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005).

5:1). We believe only because faith has been given to us, and even breathed into us, bestowed on us as a gift (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; Canons 3-4, 14). Nevertheless, we *do* believe, and therefore faith is necessary for justification (Canons 3-4, 12-14).²

In the *ordo salutis*, we confess regeneration, calling, saving faith, justification, and sanctification, in that order. It is not Reformed soteriology to say without any qualification, “God gives the whole of salvation in regeneration,” as if there were no *ordo salutis*. We teach the *ordo salutis* to our teenagers in Essentials of Reformed Doctrine. In Lesson 21, Q.&A. 1 we read, “What is the *first fruit* of God’s calling in the heart of the sinner? *The activity* of saving faith in him.”

Faith As a Bond *and* an Activity

The reader will notice my deliberate emphasis on the activity of faith. In Reformed circles, the teaching that faith is a bond or union with Christ is dominant, for it is a good and healthy counter to Arminianism, which promotes the idea that faith is only an activity—namely the activity of man’s freewill by which he accepts Jesus Christ and makes himself to differ from others who do not accept Him, something the Canons call the “proud heresy of Pelagius” (Canons 3-4, 10; see also Canons 3-4, RE 6 where the Arminians are cited as calling faith “*only* an act of man”). Nevertheless, the truth that faith is our union with Christ must not eclipse the equally important truth that faith includes the activity of believing. If we neglect that aspect of faith, we are not faithful to the Word of God or to the creeds. In addition, we must be careful to define our terms. Some define “the activity of faith” as the good works of obedience that flow out of faith, but I define the activity of faith as the activity or act of believing itself. When the Canons refer to the good works that flow out of faith, they

2 “All in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe... man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of the grace received” (Canons 3-4, 12). “By this grace of God they are enabled to believe with the heart and love their Savior” (Canons 3-4, 13). “[Faith] is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him... [God] produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Canons 3-4, 14); *Confessions and Church Order*; 169.

use the expression “the obedience of faith,” not “the activity of faith” (see Canons 1, 9; RE 1, 3, 5 and Canons 2, RE 4).

That faith is a bond and *also an activity* is the teaching of all Reformed theologians, including Herman Hoeksema in the chapter of his *Reformed Dogmatics* on “Faith.” Hoeksema writes, “Saving faith is that work of God [...] whereby the sinner is engrafted into Christ and embraces and appropriates Christ and all his benefits, relying upon him in time and eternity.”³ Later Hoeksema writes, “By faith we may live from him, draw [...] from him, and receive all his benefits.”⁴ To embrace Christ is *an activity*. To appropriate Christ is *an activity*. To rely upon Christ is *an activity*. It is not an activity by which a sinner merits salvation—not a “work” in that sense—but it is nevertheless an activity by which a sinner appropriates salvation, specifically justification. Hoeksema clearly describes activities—to live, to draw, and to receive are activities.

Hoeksema teaches that faith is an activity as well as a bond when he writes, “A distinction can be made between the essence and the operation, or between the *potentia* and *actus* of saving faith.”⁵ Both *potentia*, which Hoeksema calls the essence (I prefer the term “faculty”) and *actus*, or activity, are *faith*. Later, Hoeksema explains the *actus*: “It [faith] develops into the conscious activity of believing through contact with the gospel.”⁶ Hoeksema adds: “It is therefore the Spirit of the Lord who calls and awakens the power of faith into the conscious activity of belief.”⁷ Hoeksema also writes, “The reception and appropriation of the benefits of Christ ... is a *profound activity of the entire soul*.”⁸

And, of course, the creeds, not to mention Scripture, teach that faith is *both* a bond and an activity. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the “graft” (A. 20) and “knowledge and confidence” (A. 21), while the Belgic Confession speaks of the Holy Spirit “kindling” faith in us, by which we “embrace,” “appropriate,” and “seek” Christ (which are activities), and calls faith “an instrument that keeps us in communion with Christ” (Art. 22).

3 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:62.

4 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:62.

5 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:64.

6 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:64.

7 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:65.

8 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:63 (My italics).

The Canons give detailed instruction on faith. While it is true that God works faith and repentance in us (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; Acts 5:31; 11:18), *we still believe and repent*. God does not believe for us. God does not repent for us. We do the believing and repenting. We do by virtue of the grace of God, but by grace we do believe and repent. The Canons explain: “By this grace of God *they* [the elect] *are enabled to believe* with the heart and love their Savior” (Canons 3-4, 13). “[Faith] is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him ... [God] produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Canons 3-4, 14). “God spiritually quickens ... [so] that ... a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign” (Canons 3-4, 16). “God infuses new qualities of faith, obedience, and of the consciousness of his love into our hearts” (Canons 3-4, RE 6). The Canons even speak of “the exercise of faith” which can be “interrupted” for a time (Canons 5, 5). According to the same Canons, “we by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved” (Canons 2, RE 4) and “the special gift of mercy [powerfully works] in [the elect], [so] that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace [of justification]” (Canons 2, RE 6).

Herman Hoeksema boldly preached the demand of faith, as well as the serious warning to the unbeliever:

“Repent! Believe! Be baptized, and I will forgive you all your iniquities!” And that Word of God they heard. That is why they were amazed. That caused them to be pricked in their hearts. That made them tremble with fear. That filled them with sorrow after God. That humbled them in the dust and caused them to repent. And that impelled them unto *the obedience of faith* ... *There is the hearing of obedience* and there is the hearing of disobedience. There is a hearing unto salvation, and there is a hearing unto damnation. There is a hearing unto conversion, and there is a hearing unto hardening. But still even the latter is a hearing of the gospel... God always demands, just because he is God. And *in the way of obedience* to what he demands, he blesses us with life and glory. When any man, therefore, hears the sound of the gospel, *this demand of God* is conveyed to his consciousness. You ask: what demand? I answer: *the demand* to repent, to mourn over sin and sorrow after God, to turn away from unrighteousness and corruption and rebellion against the Most High, to seek righteousness, to turn back to God. That is *the demand of the*

*gospel ... Faith is out of the preaching that is heard! And that faith is obedience. Even as unbelief is disobedience to the gospel of God in Christ, so faith is obedience.*⁹

But does not the Bible promise justification to the inactive when Paul writes, “To him that worketh not, but believeth”? Notice that Paul does not say, “To him that worketh not, *but doeth nothing*.” He says, “But believeth.” He does not even say, “To him that worketh not, but is engrafted into Christ by a true faith.” Paul’s emphasis is—as the emphasis usually is in Scripture—on the activity of faith. Abraham did not work—he did not seek to obey God’s commandments in order to be justified—but he *believed* (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3), which is an act or an activity. For Abraham it was the act or the activity of holding for truth God’s promise of the coming seed; it was the act of laying hold of the promised righteousness of Jesus Christ; it was the act of trusting.

Christians must not attempt to separate faith from *believing*. A faith that does not believe is not faith, for faith always comes to expression in believing. True faith refuses to *work* for salvation, but true faith does not refuse to *believe*. True faith receives for truth everything that God has revealed in his Word (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 21). About Scripture the Belgic Confession teaches, “Whatsoever man ought to believe *unto* salvation is sufficiently taught therein” (Art. 7, *my italics*).

Listen to Hoeksema again, for he is very far from teaching an inactive faith:

We must come, then, to Christ, in order to drink the water of life, that is, to receive from Him, and to appropriate unto ourselves all the spiritual blessings of grace, to obtain righteousness and life ... Christ is the open Fount of the water of life. He is our righteousness. He is our complete redemption. And He imparts Himself and all the blessings of salvation unto us through His Spirit. But this is done in such a way, that we receive and appropriate these blessings of salvation by a conscious and willing act on our part corresponding to Christ’s act

⁹ Herman Hoeksema, *God’s Eternal Good Pleasure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1979), 199, 200, 204, 207 (*My italics*).

of imparting Himself to us. *This act on our part* is expressed by the words: “Come and drink!” The water of life, if I may retain the figure for a moment, is not poured down our throat *without any act on our part*, or even against our will. Even if such a thing were possible, we would never taste its pure and refreshing sweetness. But it is the will of God that we taste it, for we are saved to the glory of His grace in the Beloved. He wills that we taste His grace, that we consciously experience the wonder of His grace. We must come and drink the water of life!¹⁰

In that connection, since faith is an activity, we are commanded to believe: “And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (I John 3:23). Notice that John uses the word “commandment” to describe the duty of faith, and that it is not only the unbeliever who is commanded to believe for the first time (Mark 1:15; John 4:21; 10:38; Acts 16:31), but also the believer is commanded to keep believing throughout his life (John 14:1; 20:27; I John 3:23). The difference between the call of the gospel and other commands/commandments in Scripture is in what God calls us *to do*. In this instance He does not call us to avoid theft (the Eighth Commandment) or to be truthful (the Ninth Commandment), but he commands us *to believe*. Believing is a unique activity because of its object. In addition, we do not trust in the activity of faith, which was the Arminian error—to make the ground of justification the act of faith or the activity of faith (Canons 2, RE 4). We do not trust in faith itself, but we trust in Christ: “Not that I am acceptable to God *on account of* the worthiness of my faith” (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 61). “But to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith *itself* justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ” (Belgic Confession, Art. 22).

For some, to speak of obeying the gospel sounds like the teaching of good works, works righteousness, legalism, and a threat to the gospel of grace. There is no need for alarm, however, for not only does Scripture speak of obeying the gospel (Rom. 10:6; II Thess. 1:8; I Peter 4:17), but also obedience to the gospel call is not the same as the performance of good works in obedience to the Law of God (see

10 Herman Hoeksema, *Whosoever Will* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, repr. 1980), 53 (My italics).

Canons 1, 3; 2, 5 and 3-4, 10). While God requires obedience to the Ten Commandments, the word “obey” here simply refers to doing what God *commands us to do* in response to the call of the gospel. Reformed authors have commonly referred to this response to the call of the gospel, namely repentance and faith, as “obedience,” without teaching thereby that the act or activity of faith is a meritorious work or a work on which salvation, especially justification, depends.

The call to faith in the gospel comes to every sinner. That call came to the Jews in Acts 2:37-41, and they obeyed that call, believed, and were baptized; and that call came to the jailor of Philippi in Acts 16:30-34, and he obeyed that call, believed, was baptized, and rejoiced with his household. They did those things by the grace of God, but they still *did* them. They did not sit idly waiting for God to save them—they heard the call to repent and believe and received the “end of their faith, even the salvation of [their] souls” (I Peter 1:9).

In April 1950, Hoeksema wrote in the *Standard Bearer* in connection with Acts 2:

Salvation here, therefore, does not at all refer to the act of God which includes the gift of faith unconditionally, but to the fruit of that act of God within them, *to the activity on their part of the saving faith which God had already implanted in their hearts*. Again, do not forget the context. Through the word of Peter, that is, through the preaching as a means of grace by the Holy Spirit, the multitude were pricked in their hearts. God had already worked faith in their hearts. *And that faith is further awakened into conscious activity by the preaching of Peter, that is, by the Word of God, exhorting them to repent and be baptized* and to save themselves, or to be saved, from that untoward generation. Hence, they must be saved *not on condition of faith, but by the power of faith* which God had implanted in their hearts and *which had been brought to activity* by the preaching of the gospel as a means of grace through the Holy Spirit.¹¹

While it is true that faith does not work for righteousness or justification, for faith is the instrument by which the sinner receives the righteousness of another, it is not true that faith is inactive—by faith

¹¹ Herman Hoeksema, “Faith A Condition According to Scripture?” *Standard Bearer*, 26, issue 13 (April 1, 1950), 293 (My italics).

the sinner believes, embraces, trusts, and rests on Christ; and because God commands us to believe, the believing response *is*—and can be called—obedience or an obedient response:

Therefore, faith is God’s gift, faith is a bond that unites us to Jesus Christ, and faith is an activity. Our activity of faith is not God’s activity, it is really ours—God does not believe; we do—but that spiritual activity proceeds entirely from God’s gracious operation in us causing us to believe; or faith is God’s gracious operation in us so that we believe. Faith is not a condition on which salvation, especially justification, depends, for faith is part of salvation. Nevertheless, without faith, conscious, active faith, it is ordinarily impossible to be saved, that is, to enjoy the assurance of salvation, and to be glorified on the last day.

The Relationship between Faith and Justification

If faith is something without which no sinner is justified, is faith a condition on which salvation, and especially justification depends? Or to put it another way, what according to the Scriptures and the Reformed creeds is the relationship between faith (the activity of believing) and justification? Is a sinner justified merely by being engrafted into Christ or does he also believe *for* his justification and *in order to* be justified?

The Heidelberg Catechism describes the role of faith in justification in these words: “I cannot receive and apply [the righteousness of Christ] to myself any other way than by faith only” (A. 61) and “[Christ’s righteousness becomes mine] inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart” (A. 60). Receiving, applying, and embracing are the activities of faith. A sinner cannot be justified—that is, in his own consciousness, so that he consciously enjoys peace with God—without such faith, for an unbeliever is not justified. In addition, the preaching must proclaim this relationship: “It is declared and publically testified to all and every believer, that, *whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith*, all their sins are really forgiven them of God” (A. 84).

On this point the other creeds are in full agreement with the Heidelberg Catechism: “To speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we

embrace Christ our righteousness . . . Faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits” (Belgic Confession, Art. 22). “[We are] relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours *when we believe* in Him” (Belgic Confession Art. 23). “[W]e by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the righteousness of Christ, are justified before God and saved” (Canons 2, RE 4). “[God’s] special gift of mercy . . . powerfully works in them, that they [the elect] rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace” (Canons 2, RE 6).

The creeds, therefore, teach that the sinner must do something to appropriate salvation or justification—he must believe.

A sermon from the heat of the battle in 1953, well known in Protestant Reformed circles, in which Herman Hoeksema preached about the Philippian jailor in Acts 16, seems to contradict this. In the course of that sermon, it is claimed that Herman Hoeksema explained that the correct answer to the jailor’s question, “What must I do to be saved?” was to “Do nothing.”¹² In other words, so argue some who appeal to this sermon, the jailor must do nothing *to be* saved—he must do nothing *for* his salvation. Instead, salvation is by faith, which is not an activity, but the gift of God.

12 Herman Hoeksema preached this sermon on July 5, 1953; the sermon was entitled “The Calling of the Philippian Jailor.” The transcript of that sermon is available online, <https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/4612137350.pdf>. In that sermon, reacting to the conditional theology being promoted at the time, Hoeksema declared, “And although, of course, there is truth in that statement, you must believe, when those people, people of that kind, that want to contrast, that want to make contrast or distinction or rather a contradiction between we must believe and election on the other hand, I usually express myself very strongly, beloved, in saying, ‘*No, that isn’t so. You must not believe. We must not believe. We must not believe. We must not believe.*’ And they are astounded, usually” (p. 2). Later, on the same page, Hoeksema states, “We must believe, but there is no hope in that statement, and there is no salvation in that statement . . . *You must know nothing, believer. Believe nothing, do nothing, but believe.* Believe, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (2). Later, he says, “The activity of faith is in its first manifestation that we cling to Christ. That’s active faith and by that active faith we receive out of him all our salvation” (8-9).

While that statement, “Do nothing,” has been exaggerated, we must remember two things. First, Hoeksema did not say, “Do nothing.” He said, “Do nothing, *but believe.*” Paul’s answer to the Philippian jailor, therefore, was *not*: “Do nothing.” Second, it is a disservice to Hoeksema to reduce his views on such important topics to one or two phrases in a speech or sermon, while ignoring multiple lengthy quotations from Hoeksema where he deals explicitly, systematically, and carefully with these topics. While in the minds of some, Herman Hoeksema’s “do nothing” statement is central to the 1953 controversy concerning the conditional covenant, it ignores what Hoeksema wrote on the same topic in the *Standard Bearer* in the midst of the conditional covenant controversy just a few months before Synod 1950 provisionally adopted the Declaration of Principles, which document brought the controversy to a head:

This last remark by the Rev. [Andrew] Petter causes me to wonder whether he has ever understood the pure Protestant Reformed truth that must have nothing of conditions, but insists that the salvation which God works for us and in us is absolutely unconditional, is not even conditioned by faith. Does he really imagine that it is Protestant Reformed to answer one who anxiously inquires about the way of salvation, who therefore was already pricked in his heart by the Holy Spirit, by saying very foolishly to him *that he must do absolutely nothing* and that he cannot do anything? If that is really the Rev. Petter’s conception, *then he has never understood us at all.* How could we ever say to a man that is anxiously inquiring for the way of salvation, or, in fact, to anyone, whether he is inquiring or not: “My dear man, you must do absolutely nothing; you must not even repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Just wait, like a stock and block, and you shall surely be saved.” On the contrary, to such a man, as well as to anyone, we simply preach the gospel, that is: *we preach the Lord Jesus Christ and faith in Him as the only way of salvation. We do not hesitate to preach the way of faith even in an imperative form, as the apostle Paul does to the jailor in Philippi: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”* For we know that the preaching of the gospel is a means of grace and that through that means the Holy Spirit will work faith in the hearts of the elect. And this is exactly what happened in the prison at Philippi. *There was a man who already was anxiously inquiring about the way of salvation,*

a man, therefore, who, as Calvin explains, had already been influenced by the Holy Spirit and was *prepared to obey the gospel*. And there was Paul preaching to that man, preaching the gospel. Mark you, Paul did not merely function as a man, simply informing another man about the way of salvation. But he functioned as a preacher that was sent. He was confident, therefore, that if it pleased God to save that jailor, *Christ Himself would speak through Paul's word and work faith—active faith—in the heart and mind of the jailor at Philippi*. And that is exactly what happened. For the jailor and all his house were saved. And in the same confidence, namely, that the Holy Spirit will work faith in the heart of the elect, we preach the gospel, as a means of grace. *But we do not say ever, to any man, whether he be elect or reprobate: "God will save you on condition that you believe; you must first fulfil a condition before God will ever save you."* That certainly is not the gospel; and it certainly is not the Reformed conception of the relation between faith and salvation.¹³

That is a far cry from “Do nothing.” Hoeksema would not tell a person who asked, “What must I do to be saved?” to do nothing. He would answer, as the apostle Paul did, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). We learn that the jailor did that: “[he] rejoiced, *believing* with all his house” (v. 34).

Prof. David Engelsma agrees and identifies a hyper-Calvinistic nervousness in some who would call such a jailor—or any sinner for that matter—to do nothing:

If the fruit of the preaching of the gospel is that men, pricked in their hearts, cry out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” or that a Philipian jailor says, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” it is not in place, it is not typically Reformed, to launch into a fierce polemic against freewill or to give a nervous admonition against supposing that one can do anything toward his own salvation. The answer to such questions, the Reformed answer, is “Repent...” and “Believe.”¹⁴

13 Hoeksema, “Faith A Condition According to Scripture?” *Standard Bearer*, 293-4 (My italics). If the Lord Jesus Christ and faith in Him is the way of salvation, and that way is preached in the imperative form, then Hoeksema must be referring to the *activity* of believing and not merely to the bond of faith.

14 David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Grand-April 2019

The Philippian jailor did not yet enjoy the consciousness of the forgiveness of his sins and Paul addressed him not as a saved man, but as a sinner under the conviction of sin who desperately needed to know the gospel of salvation. If the jailor had already enjoyed the consciousness of the forgiveness of his sins, he would not have anxiously cried out, “What must I do *to be saved*?” He would have said, “I am saved. What must I do to show gratitude to God for my salvation?” Then Paul would have preached, to speak anachronistically, a sermon on Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 32 on the necessity of good works. If the jailor had already enjoyed the consciousness of the forgiveness of his sins, he would have not have had his sword at his own throat ready to commit suicide (Acts 16:27). Because he was not yet saved in the sense that he did not yet enjoy (consciously) the forgiveness of his sins, he asked the urgent question, “What must *I do* to be saved?” And because the jailor did not yet enjoy the consciousness of the forgiveness of his sins, Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be (in the future) saved, and thy house.”

Therefore, we should understand the jailor’s salvation in this way: Paul addressed the Philippian jailor with the command: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Paul did not say, “You are saved already because you are regenerate; therefore, do nothing.” He said, “Believe and thou shalt (in the future) be saved.” In other words, the jailor would enter into the enjoyment of the other benefits of salvation—justification, the forgiveness of sins, and, ultimately, heavenly glory—through faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith in Jesus Christ no man *enjoys* salvation, not even this panicking jailor. It is possible to possess salvation (to be regenerate, for example) without conscious faith, but it is not possible to possess the other benefits of salvation such as justification and sanctification, and to be consciously aware of them, and thus to enjoy and experience them, *without faith* (Rom. 5:1; I Pet. 1:22; Acts 26:18).

Indeed, any faithful Reformed preacher could say to anyone, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” To every person the command comes: “Believe!” In the ears of every person the promise is preached: “And thou shalt be saved.” However, the promise is only for believers; unbelievers will not receive the promised

salvation. Homer C. Hoeksema writes, “A command has nothing in common with a condition... Characteristic of a command ... is that it is exactly unconditional and absolute. It *must* be obeyed without any question ... As such, this clause [‘whosoever believeth’ in Canons 2, 5] does not state a condition or prerequisite for salvation, but it identifies those who shall be saved.”¹⁵

The case of Cornelius is similar. At the beginning of Acts 10, Cornelius was regenerate—his prayers and his good works were acceptable to God (v. 4); these good works were the fruit of regeneration and even faith, faith of a Gentile God-fearer, but one who did not yet know the gospel. The angel told Cornelius: “Call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house *shall be saved*” (Acts 11:13-14). Part of Peter’s message to Cornelius was, “To [Jesus] give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him *shall receive remission of sins*” (Acts 10:43). Cornelius *was saved* (regenerate); Cornelius would hear words by which he *would be saved*; Cornelius was told that whoever believes in Jesus *would receive* the remission of sins. This simply illustrates the truth that Scripture speaks of the reception of salvation in *different senses* and with *different tenses*. And this is *exactly why* definitions are important.

Herman Hoeksema explains the relationship between faith and justification:

Christ is our righteousness, and Christ only. If you ask, in this sense, “What must we do to be righteous?” the answer is, “Nothing!” Can we do nothing that is pleasing to God, that will make us righteous? The answer is no. Does it not make us more righteous if we do good works? The answer is no. Our righteousness is perfect. Christ is our righteousness. Our own righteousness is nothing but unrighteousness. Christ is our righteousness. When the End of the law came, he fulfilled it all for everyone who believes. If you ask, “Must I do nothing to be righteous?” *I say that you must believe.*¹⁶

15 Homer C. Hoeksema, *Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 355. (Hoeksema’s italics).

16 Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), 451 (My italics).

“You must *believe*” is the call to an activity. How can a person possibly have knowledge of his justification unless he believes? Christ put it even more strongly, “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Paul expressed it thus: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, *that we might be justified by the faith of Christ*, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16).¹⁷ Or consider Belgic Confession, Article 23, “[We rely and rest] upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours *when we believe in him.*”

In *The Gospel Truth of Justification* Engelsma sets forth the relationship between justification and faith in these words:

The faith that is counted for righteousness is a faith that consciously and deliberately “worketh not.” It is as if the sinner whom God has awakened to his guilt and burdened with the weight of deserved punishment cries out, “How shall I seek and find forgiveness and righteousness with the God whom I have offended?” Hearing the word of the gospel of grace, the sinner then responds to his cry, “I will not work; I will believe only.” The faith that renounces working and works for justification is true faith. Whatever supposed “faith” insists on working for righteousness is thereby exposed as a false faith.¹⁸

“I will not work; *I will do nothing*” is not the answer. “I will not work; *I will believe only*” is the answer. To believe is an activity. Faith, then, is *the instrument* of justification. Faith is *not the ground* of justification. Faith is not our righteousness. The obedience of Christ is our righteousness. Faith is the God-given means by which we embrace the righteousness of Christ and the instrument by which God imputes Christ’s righteousness to us. Nevertheless, faith always includes an act and an activity.

17 We have believed with the purpose that or with the result that we are justified is the meaning of Galatians 2:16.

18 Engelsma, *The Gospel Truth of Justification* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 190.

What a Regenerate Sinner Can and Must Do

In any discussion about salvation, justification, and faith, we must differentiate between a regenerate person and an unregenerate person. The latter *cannot* believe, although he is commanded to do so; the denial of the truth that the unregenerate man is commanded to believe is classic hyper-Calvinism. The regenerate person *can and must* believe.

The distinction between an unregenerate and a regenerate person is very significant. An unregenerate person is totally depraved. Therefore, he cannot perform any obedience pleasing to God, although God still requires obedience (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 4, Q.&A. 9). The same is *not* true, however, of a child of God. While an elect, regenerated believer has a totally depraved flesh, which is never improved, he is more than the totally depraved flesh, for he has the new man: “Christ having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, *also renews us by His Holy Spirit*” (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 86). The result—the inevitable fruit—of that renewal is “that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God” (A. 86). Therefore, insists the Catechism, “it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness” (A. 64), or as Paul puts it, “we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) and we are “a new creation” (II Cor. 5:17). Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate, indeed, necessary, to call a child of God to obedience.

A preacher can—and must—call his audience to believe in Christ. And a fellow believer can—and must—call an erring saint (brother) to repentance. Such an erring saint must not retort, “I am totally depraved; I cannot obey. You cannot require obedience of me. That’s works righteousness.” A Christian parent can—and must—require obedience and a walk in good works from a rebellious child or teenager. Such a disobedient child must not reply: “I am totally depraved; I cannot obey. You are trying to teach works-righteousness. I know that I am saved by grace.” An elder can—and must—require repentance and obedience of a church member under discipline. Such a member must not object: “I am totally depraved; I cannot obey, and you must not require obedience of me. That would be works righteousness, and we are saved by grace alone.”

If the professing Christian, whether adult or child, whether under discipline or not, is a true child of God, he not only *must* believe, but he also *can* believe; he not only *must* repent, but he also *can* repent; he not only *must* obey, but he also *can* obey. The Holy Spirit, who has regenerated and renewed him after the image of Christ, enables him to repent and obey, albeit imperfectly. Let not the reality of imperfection be an excuse for disobedience, for the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, “With a sincere resolution they [true believers] *begin to live* not only according to some, but *all* the commandments of God” (A. 114). Moreover, in the quickening of the new man we live “with love and delight according to the will of God in *all* good works” (A. 90).

The Form for the Administration of Baptism states, “Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, *admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in Him, and love Him, with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.*”¹⁹ To cleave, to trust, to love, to forsake, to crucify, and to walk are activities of faith, which the Form calls “new obedience.” Nevertheless, the Form does not teach that “the new obedience” (including faith), of which we are admonished and to which we are obliged, is a condition that we fulfill on which God’s promise of salvation depends. Moreover, the *Form* does not teach that the promise of the covenant extends also to the reprobate children of believers or to reprobates in the sphere of the covenant (Rom. 9:6). The promise is to the elect, redeemed children who have “the washing away of [their] sins through Jesus Christ” (preceding paragraph in the Form).

The fathers at the Synod of Dordt made a special point of emphasizing the activity of the regenerate person. They did so because the Remonstrants alleged perversely that Reformed theology makes man a stock or a block, that God believes *for* us or *in* us, as if *we* do not believe at all. That would make us puppets: God would simply cause us to move, to repent, to believe, to do good works, and the like, *without our conscious activity or participation*: the divine hand in

19 Form for the Administration of Baptism in *Confessions and Church Order*, 258 (My italics).

the human puppet! Scripture teaches in Philippians 1:29: “It is given to you not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” It is given—that’s God’s grace. “To believe and to suffer”—that’s our activity. God does not suffer in us; we suffer. God does not believe in us; we believe. Similar is Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:13. We work because “it is God that worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God works—that’s God’s grace. We will and we do—that’s our activity. That constitutes our working out (not our working for) our own salvation.

“The will,” says Dordt, “becomes itself active. Wherefore, also, *man is himself rightly said to believe and repent* by virtue of that grace received” (Canons 3-4, 12). Homer Hoeksema comments on that article:

All of this, however, does in no wise abrogate the responsibility of the Christian. God does not repent and believe for him, but the Christian himself believes and repents, by virtue of that grace received... [God] never interferes between the heart and will and the mind of a man, on the one hand, and the actions of that man, on the other hand. On the contrary, the act of faith and repentance proceeds from the will of the man; that man believes, that man repents. But he believes and repents only by virtue of the grace received. God renews him. God actuates and influences that renewed will. And in consequence of that influence (infallible and effectual), the renewed will also acts. Hence, man is *rightly* said to believe and repent.²⁰

Some well-meaning Christians appeal to Paul’s words in Galatians 2:20, where Paul writes of his Christian life and experience: “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Clearly, Paul does not refer to the replacement of the human person, as if Paul’s ego is no longer present, or as if Christ’s person has replaced Paul’s person. That is impossible! Then Paul would be assimilated into Christ; then Paul would no longer exist. If that were the case, Paul would not be the subject of his thinking, willing, and acting. Paul would simply be an empty shell in which Christ performs the activity, and in no sense could it be called *Paul’s* activity. Then that would be true for all Christians—Christ’s person (his ego) would replace the individual persons (or egos) of millions of Christians; that is impossible and absurd.

²⁰ Hoeksema, *Voice of Our Fathers*, 523-4. (Hoeksema’s italics).

Paul makes similar statements elsewhere. In I Corinthians 15:10 he writes, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain: but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

In that verse Paul does not deny that he worked diligently, but he ascribes the praise to God. God’s grace worked in him; God’s grace was the source of his strength. Yet God did not work in him in such a way that he did not *also* work. God did not bless Paul’s sloth, but God blessed Paul’s diligent efforts. Yet, God’s grace was first. Paul depended on God’s grace for his work; God did not depend on Paul.

Similarly, then, Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, “Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Christ is the source of Paul’s life; Christ dwells in Paul by the Holy Spirit; Christ gives Paul the grace to live, to fight sin, to follow after holiness, to bring forth good works of obedience, and to endure affliction by the power of faith. Yet Christ does not fight sin—Paul does by the power of Christ; Christ does not follow after holiness—Paul does by the power of Christ; Christ does not obey—Paul does by the power of Christ; Christ does not endure affliction—Paul does by the power of Christ.

Believers must not fall into mysticism by confusing their persons with Christ. We must not imagine that we are assimilated into Christ so that we no longer do anything. We do not sit idly and expect without any effort on our part to walk in God’s commandments and to serve him. That is not how it works—and that is not what Paul means.

The Canons of Dordt address this also, and in so doing they refute the “Let go, and let God” error of some professing Christians. Some Christians, in an attempt to elevate the grace of God, teach passivity in the life of a Christian. “Let go—make no effort. Let God—God will save you while you are unconscious, and he will do so without your activity.” That sounds pious, but that is not how the Bible describes the Christian life: the Bible describes the Christian life as a battle, a struggle, a fight, and an agonizing race (I Cor. 9:24-27; II Tim. 4:7; Heb. 12:1-2). God works in us in such a way that we work, something emphasized in the Canons: “Grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is his work advanced” (Canons 3-4, 17).

That this is the correct meaning of Paul ought to be obvious when we read the rest of the verse. Paul very definitely refutes the view of the mystics on this verse when he writes, “And the life which I now live in the flesh” (v. 20).

So Paul does, in fact, live after all—he lives *in the flesh*. The word *flesh* is a reference to Paul’s human nature or his human existence: it is human nature from the perspective of its weakness and even its sinfulness. When Paul writes Galatians 2:20, he has not yet reached the perfection to which he aspires.

But notice what Paul does not say, “The life that I now live *according to* the flesh.” Paul lives in the flesh, because he cannot (until Christ releases him in death) escape from the flesh. Nevertheless, Paul does not live according to the flesh, or in harmony with the flesh, for he does not serve the flesh; he does not serve sin.

Salvation in Principle and in Reality

If faith is a bond that unites us to Jesus Christ, is that bond not necessarily present in regeneration, so that we do not need to believe *to be* saved? Is it not true that in a certain sense we are already saved when we are regenerated? While that is certainly true, we still must do justice to I John 5:1, which states, “Whosoever believeth [present tense] that Jesus is the Christ is born [has been born—perfect tense] of God.” In other words, the faith (believing) occurs *after* regeneration or is the *fruit* of regeneration (Canons 3-4, 12 refers to it as the “consequence” of regeneration). Similar is the testimony of John 1:12-13: “As many as received him [the activity of faith], to them gave he power to become the sons of God [adoption, which is an aspect of justification], even to them that believe on his name [faith], which *were* born... of God [regeneration].” Therefore, regeneration occurs *before* faith, that is, the activity of faith.

There is also an important difference between being saved *in principle* and being saved *in fact*. This applies especially to the infant children of believers, who possess the bond or faculty of faith before the activity of faith is expressed in their lives. Certainly, this is the experience of many, if not most, of those who grew up in the church—they do not remember when they first believed in Christ; for them it was a gradual, even imperceptible growth into Christ. The Bible does

not deny that infants possess salvation, but we do not know what they experience, for they are (in a sense) unconscious. The activity of faith takes place subconsciously. They do not, at least not in any way that we can comprehend, have certain knowledge of, and assured confidence in, Christ. They do not yet hold for truth everything revealed in the Word of God (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 21). They do not even know what the Word of God is—not yet. The Bible does not address unconscious persons, although Christ can: you cannot preach to an unconscious person and expect a conscious response, but Christ can call such a person (if he is elect) by the efficacious call. However, apart from a few examples, such as the infant John the Baptist (Luke 1:41, 44) and Jacob's prenatal struggle for the birthright (Gen. 25:22), the Bible speaks almost exclusively about adults and about their calling to repent and believe in Jesus, such as the Philippian jailor in Acts 16.

Nevertheless, we do not underestimate the power of the Spirit in an unconscious child, which is why parents bring their children to hear the voice of Jesus (which they can hear even before they understand the words of the preaching of the minister) as soon as possible. If the life of regeneration is present before the child is born, Christ certainly addresses that child in its earliest infancy.

Besides that, the issue is not *what is required*; the issue is *what is given* and in what way is it given. God's gift to an unconscious infant of the whole of salvation in principle, *but only in principle*, can be likened to the planting of a seed into the child's heart (I John 3:9). Ordinarily, a seed grows, the life that God gives develops, and the child comes to conscious faith. We do not believe in dormant regeneration, which was an error of Abraham Kuyper. He taught that a person (usually a child) could be regenerate, but not come to conscious faith for twenty, thirty, or even sixty years. We do not know that a child is saved unless that child grows to maturity *and believes*, and we do not presume it either. But if God takes the child in infancy, we have no reason to doubt that child's election and salvation (Canons 1, 17).

However, if a child who is baptized in the church never expresses faith as the activity of believing, which also produces good works, but instead grows up unbelieving and rebellious, we have no right to view him as a saved person and we have no right to tell him that he is a saved person either. Instead, we call him to repentance and faith,

which is a call that comes to him, whether implicitly or explicitly, in every catechism lesson and in every sermon, as well as through the admonitions of parents, grandparents, Christian school teachers, and officebearers.

David Engelsma explains how God uses means to save covenant children, without which He is not ordinarily pleased to work salvation in the children of believers:

No Christian parent and no child may presume upon the gracious promise of the covenant. Parents may not presume that their children will be saved, *regardless that the parents do not rear them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord Jesus*, which rearing is the means that God uses to save covenant children. The children may not presume that they are and will be saved, *regardless that they do not believe on Jesus Christ with the true faith that produces a life of holiness*, which faith is the means God uses to justify and save the elect children of believers. The covenant promise does not allow for unbelieving presumption, but rather works, addresses, and assures faith.²¹

Therefore, salvation (justification—conscious justification) does not *depend* on any activities of the child, for all the benefits of salvation are gifts, but justification comes in no other way than by faith only, which faith includes an embracing, a conscious embracing, of Christ as the righteousness of the child, as the child grows to maturity. Commenting on the “Declaration of Principles,” Engelsma explains the relationship between faith, salvation, and assurance in covenant children:

The Declaration has laid down the dogmatic truth that the promise is for the elect. But this statement does not assure the individual child of his being the object of the promise personally. Nor does it assure him of salvation. For the only way one can know himself elect is *by coming to Christ by a true faith in response to the preaching of the gospel*. The form, therefore, that the particular covenant promise takes to all of the elect children is this: ‘Come to Christ, and to everyone who comes, I will give the life and peace of the covenant of grace.’ *By coming to Christ, they thus know themselves also as chosen by God in Christ in eternity.*²²

21 David Engelsma, *Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2013), 37 (My italics).

22 Engelsma, *Battle*, 44 (My italics).

There certainly *is* a difference between the salvation of a newborn child and the salvation of a fifty-year old person. It is the difference between an acorn and an oak tree, or an acorn and a sapling (if we prefer to reserve the oak tree illustration for the glorified saint in heaven). What is “required” for an acorn, which is an oak tree “in principle,” to become an oak tree in fact? Time, water, sunlight, and other nutrients are required—but the acorn does not *produce* these; the acorn *receives* these. In God’s providence an acorn will ordinarily develop into an oak tree under God’s blessing (Ps. 104:13-17, 30). Similarly, faith, which includes the conscious activity of believing, is required, but God works faith in us by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, by which He is pleased to save the child and by which He causes the child to experience and enjoy his salvation as a mature, confessing member of the church (Canons 3-4, 17). The Spirit causes life and growth in the natural and in the spiritual realm; much of God’s work is mysterious and hidden. We cannot see what God is doing in the heart of an elect infant, but, unless God is pleased to take the child in infancy, we shall see the fruit of God’s work when the child begins to demonstrate faith.

All saints are planted into Christ by a true faith, but there is a difference in development, rate of development and degree of development. God has planned each saint’s life—his birth, the number of his days, and even the good works in which he is ordained to walk (Eph. 2:10). God takes some saints to heaven earlier than others, but His work in every saint is completed and perfected according to God’s good pleasure.

Faith *Not* As Condition

Many respond to this emphasis, which is a biblical and creedal emphasis, on the activity of faith, with the fear that the teaching that sinners must “do something” (that is, believe) *to be* saved makes faith a work on which salvation depends. They fear that it will lead to conditional theology, if it is not in fact already conditional theology.

In the midst of the conditional covenant controversy that erupted in the PRCA during the 1950s, Hubert DeWolf, one of the three pastors of the First Protestant Reformed Church, of which Herman Hoeksema was also a pastor and member, uttered the infamous words: “Our act

of conversion is a prerequisite to enter the kingdom.” Is the insistence that the sinner must believe in Christ to be saved, that is, to come to the conscious knowledge and enjoyment of his salvation, especially his justification, not a similar error to the conditional theology of DeWolf? To understand the difference we should briefly examine the ecclesiastical judgment rendered in the DeWolf case and explain the nature of conditions. Without a definition of “condition,” we are liable to go astray.

Classis East (1953) ruled on DeWolf’s “prerequisite” statement:

[This statement means] that we convert and humble ourselves before we are translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, while Scripture and the confessions clearly teach: that the whole of our conversion... [in] which we humble ourselves, is sovereignly wrought by God, by His Spirit and Word through the preaching of the gospel in His elect ... This entire work of conversion is our translation and entering into the kingdom of God. Hence, it is not, cannot be before, but THROUGH our conversion that we enter the kingdom ... Our ACT of conversion is never antecedent to our entering in, but always is performed IN the kingdom of God, and there are no prerequisites.²³

Classis East of the PRCA (1953) appealed to Colossians 1:12-13, where the apostle is referring to regeneration, not justification: “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” In addition, Hoeksema in his “Hull Mass Meeting” of 1953, in discussing the heretical statement, appeals to John 3, where Christ refers to regeneration. We do not enter the kingdom by justification or by conversion (including our activity of believing and repenting), but by regeneration. And remember that the jailor, for example, to whom the command to believe came, was *in the kingdom already*, that is, he was regenerate.

In that “Hull Mass Meeting” of 1953, at approximately the twenty-nine minutes mark, Hoeksema, in discussing DeWolf’s statement, says: “He did not say, ‘I preach to you the promise that, if you believe,

²³ Quoted in Engelsma, *Battle*, 105 (Upper case letters in original).

you shall be saved.’ That would have been not quite clear, but it would have passed muster.”²⁴ The issue was that DeWolf said, “God promises to *everyone of you* that, if you believe, you shall be saved.”

Hoeksema did not condemn the word “if.” He condemned the word “prerequisite.” Hoeksema could not have condemned the word “if” because he knew that the Bible uses the word “if” (John 15:10, 14; Rom. 11:22; II Tim. 2:12). Hoeksema knew that sentences with the conjunction “if,” although they are grammatically conditional in form, do not imply conditional salvation. Instead, the “if clause” has two functions: first, it identifies the recipients of salvation: in John 15:10 those who abide in Christ’s love are those—and only those—who keep His commandments; and in John 15:14 those whom Christ calls His friends are those—and only those—who do whatever He commands them. Second, the “if clause” motivates the hearer to obedience, for God uses warnings on the one hand, and the promises of rewards on the other hand, to motivate his children; godly parents do the same thing. A third connected purpose of “if clauses” is to separate the hearers or to sift the audience: the command comes to all, but by it God works the positive response of faith and repentance in the elect, while He hardens the reprobate and leaves them inexcusable. Commands and “if clauses” are prods to stir us up to new faith and obedience. We need them because we are so sluggish through the weakness of the flesh; it would be perilous to our salvation for the preacher to omit warnings, exhortations, and sharp applications. The fathers at Dordt understood this very clearly: “And as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments” (Canons 5, 14). The same Canons describe the neglect of such sharp, pointed preaching, including exhortations and threatenings (as mandated in Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 115) as “[the presumption] to tempt God” (3-4, 17).

24 The Hull Mass Meeting (1953), <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=46121146431>

It is interesting to note that the antinomian party of Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) in New England “denied all commands and exhortations.”²⁵ To them “even the gospel command to believe in Jesus Christ *for salvation* is a law, and therefore, is illegitimate. If a preacher does give this command, the command will not bear the fruit that anyone believes. Rather, the command [to believe] only ‘killeth.’”²⁶ According to Hutchinson, “[the believer] cannot believe. He is not to be exhorted to believe. *But Jesus believes for him.* If there is some faith in the child of God, *it is Jesus believing in him, not his own believing.*”²⁷

Therefore, when (not—“if”) a preacher preaches such “if” texts, he should not spend most of the sermon explaining away the text, so that the sharpness of the exhortation or warning is lost. The preacher should not be afraid to use the “if” word, *lest someone think that he is guilty of preaching conditional theology.* By running scared of conditional grammar, he plays into the hands of the men of the Federal Vision—what defence will he have when the members of his congregation come across that false doctrine if he has taught them to view “if” as a bogeyman?

As an example of how this is done, I quote from a sermon that David Engelsma preached at the British Reformed Fellowship Conference, which sermon was later edited for publication:

This instruction and admonition are important. The importance of hearing this instruction and heeding this admonition is that a holy life is a necessity. *It is a necessity for final salvation*, according to the text itself (1 Cor. 6:9-11): the unholy person shall not inherit the kingdom of God. There is the danger that this necessity is explained wrongly, even heretically. *This would be the explanation that by our holiness we ourselves earn final salvation. Or it would be the explanation that our holiness is a condition that we must perform in order to obtain final salvation ...* Such is the necessity of holiness of life that no unholy person shall receive this final salvation in the day of Christ: ‘Without which [holiness] no man shall see the Lord’ (Heb. 12:14). Positively,

25 Engelsma, *Be Ye Holy! The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification* (United Kingdom: British Reformed Fellowship, 2016), 79.

26 Engelsma, *Be Ye Holy!* 79 (My italics).

27 Engelsma, *Be Ye Holy!* 79 (My italics).

such is the necessity of holiness that only the holy man or woman shall be saved in the day of Christ. All those who were, and remained, unholy will be condemned, damned and lost outside the kingdom in the outer darkness of hell. All such will be excluded from the kingdom of God ... The warning has practical benefit. *It is a means of God's sanctifying us. The warning motivates us to fight our sinful, unholy nature, and to strive after holiness.* The warning motivates one who is presently living impenitently in one of the sins mentioned in the text, or any other sin, to repent, be forgiven and begin again to live a holy life. And the warning moves us to be thankful to God in Christ for the saving work of sanctification in our life.²⁸

Herman Bavinck, a Dutch theologian who resolutely rejected conditional theology and who taught an unconditional covenant governed by election, also offers helpful insights into the conditional-sounding language in which Scripture sometimes presents the covenant. While Bavinck rejects “conditions” in the conditions, as activities of the sinner on which salvation in the covenant depends, he still does justice to the language of the Bible. Engelsma quotes Bavinck:

Bavinck will speak only of the “conditional form” of the administration of the covenant: “In its administration by Christ, the covenant of grace does assume this demanding conditional form.” By a conditional form, Bavinck refers, among other constructions, to the biblical exhortations and admonitions that use the conjunction ‘if’ ... A conditional form of the administration of the covenant is not the same as a conditional covenant. The conditional form of the administration of the covenant does not mean, for Bavinck, demands for a human work upon which the covenant depends, or for a human work that must make impotent covenant grace effectual in the case of the one performing the work. The conditional form of the administration of the covenant rather refers to *God's dealings with “humans in their capacity as rational and moral beings ... to treat them as having been created in God's image; and also ... to hold them responsible and inexcusable; and finally to cause them to enter consciously and freely into this covenant and to break their covenant with sin.”*²⁹

28 David Engelsma, “Only the Holy Inherit the Kingdom,” in *Be Ye Holy!*, 102, 107, 110 (My italics).

29 Engelsma, *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand-

What, then, is a condition—and how can one detect the *real* threat of conditional theology? The main elements of conditional theology are these three. First, the covenant is deliberately severed from election. The Protestant Reformed Churches and her sisters gladly teach that election governs the covenant and that only the elect are in the covenant. Second, God promises salvation to all the children of believers, whether elect or reprobate, on condition of faith. The Protestant Reformed Churches and her sisters vigorously defend the unpopular position, faithful to Scripture and the creeds, that God promises salvation only to the elect and included in that promise is faith itself (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 73). Third, the promise of salvation, although sincere on God's part, is not fulfilled in those who do not believe, and therefore it fails. The Protestant Reformed Churches and her sisters teach that God's promise of salvation cannot fail and that it cannot remain unfulfilled in any of God's elect (Rom. 9:6).

Klaas Schilder, the theologian who more than anyone else injected conditional theology into the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 1950's, was notoriously unclear in his definition of "conditions" in the covenant.

"Condition" in liberated theology is merely "means for the execution of the decree of ELECTION." A 'condition' is merely "the way by which the elect come to and are assured of salvation... God... does not give B without A, C without B, and D without C."³⁰

These words above do not *in themselves* constitute conditional theology. Nevertheless, Schilder's underlying theology was objectionable to Hoeksema and to the Protestant Reformed Churches, although strangely alluring to DeWolf and his allies.

Of course, if this is what "condition" means in the covenant theology of the liberated Reformed, the Declaration [of Principles] is confused and mistaken in its opposition to conditional covenant theology. What Reformed church or theologian denies that faith is the "way" to forgiveness and salvation, or that God follows a certain "order" in his

ville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2011), 170-1.

30 Engelsma, *Battle*, 179 (Upper case letters in original quote by Schilder.).

salvation of his people in the covenant?³¹

Indeed, what Reformed church or theologian denies that faith is the way to forgiveness and salvation? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house! We must never be afraid to preach in those terms—afraid to call unbelievers to the act of faith in Jesus Christ for fear of preaching conditions. Such a fear would cripple preaching not only on the mission field, but also in the established congregations. Such a fear would muzzle the preacher from making sharp warnings and applications, lest his words sound like conditional theology. Such a fear would betray not an incipient conditional theology, but an incipient hyper-Calvinism, a charge that the enemies of the Protestant Reformed churches have hurled at her and her sisters for many years, and one that they have consistently rebuffed.

Hoeksema explained the matter of conditions in the *Standard Bearer* in April 15, 1950, a few months before the synod at which the Protestant Reformed Churches provisionally adopted the Declaration of Principles—vintage Hoeksema, therefore. He writes, “[A condition] is something that must be fulfilled prior to something else” or “[it is] something demanded or required as a prerequisite to the granting or performance of something else.” In the same article, Hoeksema writes positively about the relationship between faith, election, and salvation:

God is first in the calling, and man *obeys* the calling as the fruit of the work of God in him” and “there are no antecedent conditions which man must fulfill *in order to receive that faith or the gift of active belief*. God causes him to become an active believer... Never is any work or act of man prior to the work of God, but always the act of God is first. And by virtue of the work of God in him can the sinner become active.

In the same article, with his eye on Canons 3-4, 16, Hoeksema denies that man is a senseless stock or block in salvation:

[Man] is freely responsible for the new obedience unto which he is called. Just because God works within him to will and to do of his good pleasure, he heeds the admonition to work out his own salvation...

31 Engelsma, *Battle*, 179.

God regenerates them, and they live. God calls them, and they come. God gives them faith, and they believe. God justifies them, and they are righteous. God sanctifies them, and they walk in a new and holy life. God preserves them, and they persevere even unto the end. And all this work is without condition. That is the relation between the work of God and our work.³²

These statements of Hoeksema are also reflected in “The Declaration of Principles,” of which he was the principal author, and which document includes a section about responsibility, which is not the same as conditionality:

The sure promise of God which he realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer. All those who are not thus disposed, who do not repent but walk in sin, are the objects of his just wrath and excluded from the kingdom of heaven . . . The preaching comes to all; and . . . God seriously commands to faith and repentance; and . . . to all those who come and believe he promises life and peace.³³

Commenting on this important document, Engelsma drives home the responsibility of the believer in the covenant:

God commands his covenant friends to pray. The Catechism teaches also that the way of salvation is a way of *sincere, diligent, spiritual activity*. Sovereign grace does not nullify responsibility; it maintains responsibility. . . . The grace of God in Jesus Christ (which is covenant grace), treating men and women as rational moral creatures (“not. . . as senseless stocks and blocks”), irresistibly makes the objects of this grace alive and *willingly, actively holy*. In this work of sanctification, God uses the means of the gospel, with its “precepts” and “admonitions.” This confessional proof guards against misunderstanding and abuse of the truth that the covenant promise is unconditional for the elect children of believers. *Thus godly parents, trusting God’s promise*

32 Herman Hoeksema, “As to Conditions,” *Standard Bearer* (April 15, 1950).

33 Engelsma, *Battle*, 43.

to save their children, will not avoid sharp warnings to their children (as though warnings would compromise grace) but will use them in the rearing of their children (as grace employs warnings to accomplish the purpose of the salvation of the children). The same holds true of good Reformed pastors with regard to their congregation. The notion that admonitions are unnecessary is a form of the antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism that the Declaration rejects.³⁴

When one emphasizes that the work of God is *first*, and that the subsequent response of active, conscious faith is the *fruit* of God's particular, efficacious grace in the sinner, one does not teach conditional theology, even if one uses the biblical conjunction "if."

In light of the confusion and controversy that swirls around the idea of demands in the covenant and conditional language, perhaps it is time for the theologians of the Protestant Reformed Churches and her sisters to heed Engelsma's plea:

We must develop this doctrine of the covenant. *We must develop it* with regard to the demand of the covenant upon the members, with regard to the warnings, with regard to the full, active life of the covenant, with regard to covenant obedience and covenant unfaithfulness on the part of the covenant people, with regard to the important part of the people of God in the covenant, with regard to divine rewards and chastisements, with regard to the genuine mutuality of the covenant. All of these aspects of the full reality of the covenant, and more, *must be developed* not in tension with election, certainly not in contradiction of election, but in harmony with election, as the very outworking of the eternal decree.³⁵ ●

34 Engelsma, *Battle*, 261-2 (My italics).

35 Engelsma, *Covenant and Election*, 226-77 (My italics).

Jephthah's Vow: Righteous or Rash?

Ronald L. Cammenga

Background to Jephthah's Judgeship

The history of the judge Jephthah is probably not as well-known as some of the other judges. Mention of Jephthah in the Old Testament is limited to Judges 11 and 12. Usually what is known of Jephthah is the vow that he made, which is recorded in Judges 11:29-40. Even then, there is often misunderstanding about the nature of that vow. Frequently, Jephthah's vow is regarded as a rash and sinful vow. Jephthah is criticized for making an unrighteous vow, a vow that he should not have made. The text is cited as an example of a man who did not think before he spoke. He spoke ill-advisedly. And if that is true, then Jephthah serves as a *negative* example, an example of what Christians should *not* do and how they should *not* act.

However, there are good reasons to examine this explanation of Jephthah's vow. In fact, I am convinced that careful consideration of Judges 11:29-40 makes plain that Jephthah's vow was a righteous vow—altogether righteous. And his vow was also a costly vow, a very costly vow. If we understand the circumstances in Israel under which Jephthah labored as judge, then the making and keeping of this vow by a godly father in Israel will be seen, I have no doubt, as an outstanding example to believers then and today.

Hebrews 11:32-33 is the one passage in the New Testament that calls attention to Jephthah: "And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions." The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, places Jephthah in the illustrious company of those who lived by faith and whose faith New Testament Christians ought to follow. He belongs to those who by faith "obtained a good report," according to Hebrews 11:2. He belongs to the "so great a cloud of witnesses" by whom we are compassed about, according to Hebrews 12:1.

What did Jephthah do by faith? At the very least, he did two things, according to Hebrews 11:33. By faith he “subdued kingdoms” and by faith he “wrought righteousness.” The first part of Judges 11 tells us about his subduing of the Ammonites. That is the kingdom that he subdued by faith. The second part of Judges 11, describes how he wrought righteousness—wrought righteousness in the matter of his righteous vow.

I am convinced that Hebrews 11 compels us to view Jephthah’s vow as the *evidence* of his faith, the evidence of a *strong* faith. Hebrews 11 mentions Jephthah *not in spite of* the vow that he made, which is the position that most commentators take. But Hebrews 11 mentions Jephthah exactly *because of* his vow. And that means, of course, that he serves as a positive example, an example which Christians in every age ought to follow.

A Solemn Vow

The episode concerning Jephthah belongs to the history of the judges. The era of the Judges was a period of approximately four hundred years between Joshua and the first king of Israel, Saul. During this time, God delivered His people by men whom He specially called and sent. These men are designated in the book of Judges as שֹׁפְטִים, that is “judges,” as in Judges 2:16. There were fifteen such men, and one woman, Deborah.

The period of the Judges was characterized by especially two things, from a spiritual point of view.

First, it was a period of great spiritual ignorance and indifference. We read that the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who were contemporaries of Joshua, but after that generation had been gathered unto their fathers, there arose another generation, which knew not the Lord nor the mighty works which He had done for Israel, according to Judges 2:10.

The explanation for this spiritual ignorance, the explanation for the fact that a generation arose who knew not the Lord, was two-fold. Number one, parents did not instruct their children in the fear of the Lord. There was a horrible neglect of parental responsibility. Parents did not fulfill their calling in the covenant, their part in the covenant. And, number two, the children of Israel mingled with the heathen

Canaanites whom Israel had wrongly permitted to remain living in the land. They did not live antithetically, as a spiritually separate people. They did not live “in” the world, while not “of” the world. But, according to the first part of Judges 2, they made leagues with the inhabitants of the land and even intermarried with the wicked Canaanites. They gave their daughters to the sons of the Canaanites, and permitted their sons to marry the daughters of the Canaanites, according to Judges 3:6. And that had its effect! A predictable and disastrous effect! A generation arose that “knew not the Lord,” but rather knew the gods of the wicked Canaanites who surrounded Israel.

In the second place, not only was the period of the judges a time of spiritual lethargy, it was also a time of extreme lawlessness. More than once the point is made in the book of Judges that there was no king in Israel, and that every man did that which was right in his own sight. The people did not regard an absolute authority in their lives. There was no ultimate standard of right and wrong, but everyone decided for themselves what they would or would not do. There was no regard for the revealed will of God.

The period of the judges, therefore, was a period of apostasy. Israel forsook the true worship of God and turned to the worship of the idols of the Canaanites, who were Israel's neighbors. We are told that the Canaanites became a snare to Israel, Judges 2:3. Recounting this history, the psalmist says in Psalm 106:34-39:

34. They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them:
35. But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.
36. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.
37. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,
38. And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.
39. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.

The result was that a cycle of events began to repeat itself during this period, a vicious cycle that repeated itself over and over again. Israel would forsake God and turn to the idols. God would punish

Israel by giving them over into the hands of their enemies. In time, Israel would be chastised, repent, and cry out to the Lord for deliverance. And God would hear the cry of His people and raise up a judge to deliver them. In fact, this cycle repeated itself some *fourteen times* in the book of Judges. That cycle of events can be seen in the history described in Judges 11.

According to Judges 10, God punished Israel at this time by causing her to be vexed by the Ammonites. For some eighteen years the Ammonites oppressed Israel. After the eighteen years, the Israelites repented and cried out to God for deliverance. And once again, the Lord heard their cry and raised up a judge to deliver them. That judge was Jephthah.

Jephthah was a rather unlikely man to be chosen by God as a judge in Israel. He was the son of a certain man named Gilead by a woman who was a harlot—a prostitute's offspring. Although, apparently brought up in Gilead's house, and probably after Gilead's death, his brethren, the sons of Gilead by his lawful wife, cast Jephthah out of the house. They were determined not to permit him to partake of their father's inheritance with them. And so, they forced him to flee.

The result of the hatred and rejection of his brothers was that Jephthah went to live in the land of Tob, far to the north and east of Israel. Yet the Lord was pleased to choose Jephthah to deliver His people. He moved the hearts of the elders of Israel to send for Jephthah, who in the meantime had shown that he was a mighty man of valor. Judges 11:1a, informs us: "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor." And so Jephthah, after he had gained certain assurances from the elders of Israel, returned to Israel and became the head and captain over them. God would use Jephthah to deliver the children of Israel from the oppression of Ammon.

Before the battle against Ammon, however, Jephthah made a vow unto the Lord. That vow is recorded in Judges 11:30-31, "And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

Jephthah made a vow, a solemn promise. He made a vow *to God*, according to vs. 30: “And Jephthah vowed a vow *unto the Lord*.” That is what constitutes a vow; a vow is a promise made to God. That is what Jephthah did. And it appears that he made his vow publicly, so that all the people knew of his vow. That, at least, is the impression that is left. We read that he vowed a vow “and said,” vs. 30. He did not say something only in his own heart or to himself. But he “said,” that is, he “spoke aloud,” at least in the hearing of those near him, and quite likely in the hearing of all Israel gathered at Mizpeh of Gilead.

In the Scriptures there are two kinds of vows. There is, first of all, a vow that concerns what we are going *to say*—our words or speech. This type of vow the Scriptures generally refer to as an *oath*. This, for example, is what is often still today required in a court of law, that we swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

But there is also in the Bible a vow that concerns something that we are going *to do*, a solemn promise that we make before God to do something. Examples from our own day would include the baptismal vow of Christian parents, the marriage vow, the vow of confession of faith, and the ordination vow of officebearers. Jephthah made that kind of vow. He vowed that when he returned in peace from the battle against the Ammonites, whatever came out of the doors of his house to meet him, “would surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering,” vs. 31. That was the solemn vow that he made before God and before His people.

A Controversial Vow

It is this vow of Jephthah that is controversial. Many commentators question whether Jephthah’s vow was a righteous vow. Most, in fact, judge that Jephthah’s vow was a rash vow. In their view, it was a sinful vow, a vow that Jephthah should never have made. Those who understand Jephthah’s vow as a rash vow usually explain his vow in one of two ways. Either they judge that his vow was a rash vow, but that he kept his vow, just as he had vowed. This is clearly the majority view. Jephthah carried out his vow, actually making his daughter a human sacrifice unto the Lord.

A minority of commentators agree that Jephthah's vow was a rash vow, but for this reason argue that he went back on his vow. He did not perform his vow as he had vowed. Because his vow was a rash vow, they judge that Jephthah did not keep his vow, not at least as he had vowed it. Although he intended to make a sacrifice of whatever came out of the house to meet him, because unexpectedly it was his daughter who greeted him, he went back on his vow. Instead of offering her as a human sacrifice, he consecrated her as a Nazarite unto the Lord. Although the outcome is different, both the majority and the minority views have in common that those who hold to them judge that Jephthah's vow was indeed a rash vow.

It is the extreme (majority) view, the view that Jephthah actually offered his daughter up as a burnt sacrifice to God, which I wish to consider first in this article. In demonstrating that the extreme view is mistaken, it is my hope that I will at the same time have demonstrated that the less extreme view is also implausible. In the end, I will take exception to both views, though more so to the majority viewpoint.

The view that Jephthah's vow was a rash vow and that he actually offered his daughter, whom Jewish tradition identifies as Sheilah, "the one demanded," has a long history. Already in the early church, such notable biblical exegetes as Ambrose and Augustine took the view that Jephthah's vow was a rash vow and that despite the fact that it was rash, carried it out by offering his daughter up to God as a human sacrifice.

This was also the prevailing view of the Protestant Reformers and those who followed them. John Calvin gave expression to this view in his commentary on Hebrews 11:32, where Jephthah is included among the giants of faith. Calvin refers to "Jephthah, hasty in making a foolish vow, and too obstinate in performing it, marred the finest victory by the cruel death of his own daughter."¹ As will also become the prevailing rationale for the inclusion of Jephthah in the list of the giants of faith, despite such an objectionable act as making his own daughter a human sacrifice, Calvin reasons that in the likes of Jephthah we are made to see the weakness of even the strongest faith. Says Calvin: "Thus in all the saints, something reprehensible is ever to be found; yet faith,

1 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, tran. John Owen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), 303.

though halting and imperfect, is still approved by God.” And, so he concludes that “[t]here is, therefore, no reason why the faults we labour under should break us down, or dishearten us, provided we by faith go on in the face of our calling.”² Many of the other examples of strong faith, betrayed the same imperfection of faith. Noah became drunk and exposed himself. Abraham lied—twice. Moses struck the rock and was sinfully angry with God’s people. Samson was guilty of immorality and disobedience to the word of God. The purest of faith is tainted by human weakness and imperfection. So also, goes the argument, was Jephthah’s faith an imperfect faith—an illustration of the truth that even the holiest of God’s people have only a “small beginning” of the new and heavenly obedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Q.A. 114).

Biblical scholars and exegetes in the centuries after the Reformation, almost unanimously adopted the same viewpoint as Calvin. The English clergyman and member of the Westminster Assembly, William Gouge (1575-1653), takes up consideration of Jephthah and his vow in his *Commentary on Hebrews*. Recall that Jephthah is mentioned with the giants of faith in Hebrews 11:32, along with others whose faith the writer does not have time to treat in any detail. Gouge entitles the section that contains his comments on this passage, “Of Jephthah’s infirmities, and of his rash vow.” Concerning the vow, he says: “Jephthah’s vow, take it in the best sense that you can, was exceeding rash, and no good pattern.”³ He concludes his treatment of Jephthah’s vow with the question, “Was his vow, being rashly made, to be performed?” His answer makes clear that in his view, Jephthah literally offered his daughter as a sacrifice: “No, it failing in the matter of a vow, the performing of it proved a double iniquity; one in making it, another in performing it.”⁴

The well-known biblical commentator, Matthew Henry (1662-1714), treats Jephthah’s vow in his comments on the historical account in Judges 11. He introduces his consideration of the vow by saying that “Jephthah’s vow is dark, and much in the clouds.” His vow was

2 Calvin, *Hebrews*, 303.

3 William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews: Exegetical and Expository* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980 repr.), 872-3.

4 Gouge, *Hebrews*, 873.

“that, if God would graciously bring him back a conqueror, whosoever or whatsoever should first come out of his house to meet him it should be devoted to God, and offered up for a burnt-offering.” Of Jephthah’s daughter, he writes that

she was willing to be herself offered up as a thank-offering...and would think her life well bestowed when laid down on so great an occasion. She thinks it an honour to die, not as a sacrifice of atonement for the people’s sins (that honour was reserved for Christ only), but as a sacrifice of acknowledgement for the people’s mercies.

After considering the possibility that the daughter was not offered as a sacrifice, but only dedicated to the Lord, Henry judges that “[i]t seems more probable that he offered her up for a sacrifice, according to the letter of his vow...” And he concludes that Jephthah “did ill to make so rash a vow, and worse to perform it.”⁵

The Englishman John Kitto (1804-1854) was a deaf missionary, biblical scholar, and Christian author. He treats Jephthah’s vow in his *An Illustrated History of the Holy Bible*. He writes:

It is much to be regretted that the reluctance of the sacred writer to express in plain terms the dreadful immolation which we believe to be thus indicated has left the whole matter open as a subject of dispute. The early Jewish and Christian writers (including Josephus) made no questions that Jephthah, under a most mistaken notion of duty, did, after the manner of the heathen, really offer his daughter in sacrifice.⁶

Joining his fellow Englishman, Sir William Smith (1813-1893) expressed the same view in his *The Old Testament History*. “Our natural horror at the consequences of such a meeting [of Jephthah and his daughter when he returned in victory from battle] is mitigated by the sublime scene of resignation that passed between the rash father

5 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Volume 2, Joshua to Esther* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d. repr.), 196-8.

6 John Kitto, *An Illustrated History of the Holy Bible: Being a Connected Account of the Remarkable Events and Distinguished Characters Contained in the Old and New Testament* (Norwich: Henry Bill, 1868), 258.

and the submissive daughter.” In his view, the biblical notice that Jephthah “did with her according to his vow which he had vowed” (Judges 11:39), are “words which can leave no possible doubt of her fate.” In a footnote, Smith dismisses appeal to the statement in Judges 11:39, “and she knew no man” as support for the position that Jephthah did not make his daughter a human sacrifice.⁷

The nineteenth-century German theologian, longtime professor at the University of Göttingen, Heinrich Ewald (1803-1875), in his eight-volume work, *The History of Israel*, treats the period of the judges. He, too, maintains that Jephthah offered up his daughter as a human sacrifice. “Fearfully is avenged upon the father and ruler,” he says, “the thoughtless vow of the soldier of a brutalized age.” Ewald goes on to compare Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter to some striking parallels in pagan Greek mythology.⁸

Contemporary Scholarship

Twentieth and twenty-first century exegetes and commentators, for the most part, take the same position as that of the majority before them. C. J. Goslinga is the author of *The Bible Student’s Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*. This is the English translation of his commentary, which was originally part of the popular Dutch commentary series, *Korte Verklaring de Heilige Schrift*. He introduces his consideration of Jephthah’s vow with the remark “that Jephthah’s vow strikes us as extremely ill-considered and reckless. He grossly overestimated his own willingness to give to the Lord, if necessary, his dearest possession...Jephthah was guilty of making a thoughtless boast...” His conclusion is that “[i]t is hard to understand how a man like Jephthah could have taken a vow that obligated him to offer a human sacrifice, but verse 31 clearly shows that he did so.”⁹ In his judgment, the two

7 William Smith, *The Old Testament History, from the Creation to the Return of the Jews from Captivity* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879), 356-7.

8 Heinrich Ewald, *The History of Israel, vol. II, History of Moses and the Theocracy*, trans. Russell Martineau (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1876), 394-5.

9 C. J. Goslinga, *The Student’s Commentary, Volume 7: Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, trans. Ray Togtman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 389-90.

months during which his daughter was in mourning should have been sufficient time to bring him upon reflection to the understanding “that to keep his vow would be a greater crime than to break it. . . .”¹⁰

In the July-September 2011 issue of *Answers in Genesis* magazine, Tim Chaffey concedes with regard to Judges 11:30-40, that “[w]e may never be completely sure of the full meaning of this passage until we dwell with the Lord. However,” he continues, “the plain reading of Scripture indicates Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering, and it never gives any indication that God approved of such an act.”¹¹ Clearly, Chaffey is convinced that, although we may have to wait until heaven to be sure of our understanding of this difficult passage of Scripture, nevertheless the evidence tips in favor of the position that Jephthah actually made his daughter a burnt sacrifice to the Lord.

Mark J. Boda, in *Judges*, his contribution to volume 2 of Zondervan’s *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, is convinced that Jephthah’s vow was a rash vow, which vow he carried out. He speaks of it as “his foolish vow.” And he goes on to say that “[h]aving made this vow Jephthah feels compelled to fulfill it.” After granting her request to spend two months with her companions weeping in the solitude of the mountains, “he did with her according to his vow which he had vowed.” This clearly means, in Boda’s view, that “he sacrifices her as a burnt offering.”¹²

In his *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, Walter Kaiser gives consideration to Jephthah’s vow in chapter 26, “Jephthah Did with Her as He Had Vowed.” He reminds us that we must remember that these were the days of the Judges, days in which every man did that which was right in his own eyes. The fact that “Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter, tragic as that would be, seems the most natural reading of the text.” And he draws the conclusion that “[t]he tragedy of Jephthah’s foolish and autocratic vow stands as a reminder to the perverseness of human wisdom when we fail to depend on the living God.”¹³

10 Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 395.

11 Tim Chaffey, “Jephthah’s Rash Vow—Was Child Sacrifice Condoned in the OT?,” *Answers in Genesis*, July-September 2011, 177.

12 Mark J. Boda, *Judges*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, revised edition, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 1196.

13 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, repr. 1988), 104-5.

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. is Chairman and Professor of Old Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. He also lines up with those who are convinced that Jephthah made of his daughter a literal burnt offering to the Lord. Already in the introduction to his commentary on Judges, he makes this clear.

The description of the promised offering (11:31) suggests that Jephthah intended to offer a human being, not an animal, perhaps thinking that such a radical (but pagan!) bribe would guarantee divine support. Of course, the vow proved to be a rash and foolish one, for as Jephthah returned victoriously from the battle he was shocked to see his daughter, his only child, was the first to come out of the house to meet him. True to his word and at the insistence of his daughter (v. 36), he sacrificed her as a burnt offering to the Lord (v. 39)... Ironically Jephthah, who should have been a great hero because of his military success, ended up being one of the most tragic figures on the pages of Scripture because of his lack of faith and foresight. His 'allegiance' to God (if one dare call it that) took the grotesque form of human sacrifice and brought a curse, rather than a blessing, on his daughter.¹⁴

Chisholm goes on to compare Jephthah and Samson, both of whom exhibited rash behavior and lack of foresight. In addition, "both Jephthah's daughter and Samson's Timnite bride died by fire."¹⁵ He goes on to contrast the heroic women of the early chapters of Judges to "the brutalized victims of the later chapters." Whereas Achsah (Judges 1:12-16) was richly blessed by her father, Caleb, "Jephthah's daughter had to swallow the bitter pill of infertility and death served up by her father. Her painful experience foreshadowed the widespread oppression and bloodshed that stain the pages of the book's final chapters." In Chisholm's view there is development in Israel's apostasy and idolatry from the early chapters of the book of Judges to the concluding chapters.

When Chisholm finally comes to consideration of the history of Jephthah and his daughter in Judges 11, he entitles the subsection, "*A foolish vow spells death for a daughter (11:29-40).*" He faults

14 Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 74.

15 Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 75.

Jephthah for a vow that “was wrong.... Jephthah did not need to bargain with the Lord, for he was the champion of a just cause....”¹⁶ In the end, “triumph quickly turned to tragedy.” For, “[n]o matter what Jephthah’s intention may have been at the time of the vow, the fact that he actually did offer up his daughter indicates the language of the vow was fluid enough to encompass human beings, including women.”¹⁷

In a recent issue of *Tabletalk* magazine, the March 2019 issue, the devotional for Friday, March 1, 2019 was entitled “Jephthah’s Rash Vow.” The author of the devotional notes that “[a]ncient commentators held that Jephthah’s daughter was actually sacrificed, that she was put to death, and there is no real reason to think otherwise given the language of the passage.” The devotional concludes: “Jephthah should have repented of his rash vow and not killed his daughter, for God does not want us to fulfill vows that break His commandments. We can be grateful that God’s grace covers all of our sin when we trust in Christ, but that gives us no license for evil.”¹⁸

The Minority Opinion

Alongside this majority opinion that Jephthah’s vow was a rash vow, which rash vow he fulfilled by making his daughter a human sacrifice, there is a minority viewpoint. The minority opinion agrees with the majority in that it holds that Jephthah’s vow was indeed a rash vow. It was a vow recklessly and foolishly made. Jephthah should not have been so thoughtless as to make such a vow, a vow that in the end put his own dear daughter at risk. It was altogether presumptuous on his part to have made the vow.

But those who hold to the minority position, argue that because his vow was a rash vow, a vow that threatened his daughter with death, Jephthah went back on his vow. He did not fulfill his vow, not at least in the way in which he had originally intended to fulfill his vow. Caught off-guard by the fact that his daughter came down the path from their home to greet him, he rent his clothes in sorrow and cried out at the grief she had involuntarily caused him. Because

16 Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 351. Chisholm’s italics.

17 Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 353-4.

18 “Jephthah’s Rash Vow,” *Tabletalk* (March 2019), 36.

of his love for his daughter, who was his only child, and likely also because he knew how abominable in God's eyes a human sacrifice would have been, he drew back from carrying out his vow. Instead of offering up his daughter as a human sacrifice, he devoted her unto the Lord. He consecrated his daughter to the Lord, much as Hannah would do with Samuel towards the end of the era of the Judges. In some special way, Jephthah's daughter rendered a life-long service to God, remaining single all the while. Rather than to be guilty of two sins, a rash vow and a sacrificial abomination, Jephthah broke his vow, or at least altered his vow.

Such is the view of Andrew R. Fausset (1821-1910), the Irish Anglican, who is well known as a biblical exegete. In his commentary on the book of Judges, Fausett, as so many others, faults Jephthah for making his vow. He views the vow as an attempt to strike a bargain with God.

Though not positively unlawful, the vow betrayed remainders of doubt and weakness of faith. Though the Spirit had come on him, whose presence might have sufficed to assure him of victory without bargain on his part, he suffered the flesh to suggest the thought, that by promising some great sacrifice to God, he could ensure it. Our vows ought to be, not in order to purchase God's favour, but to testify our gratitude. It is wise also to avoid such vows as may afterwards prove an entanglement to conscience....¹⁹

Fausett is convinced that at the time he made his vow, "Jephthah contemplated a human burnt-offering." Nevertheless, he "knew that a literal human sacrifice was forbidden as an abomination before Jehovah (Lev. xviii. 21, xx. 2-5)." He also knew that "[h]uman beings belonging of right to Jehovah, were to be redeemed (Exod. xiii. 13, xxxiv. 20; Numb. xviii. 15)," and that "[p]ersons devoted under a ban (*cherem*) were slain, not as a sacrifice or burnt-offering, which was a voluntary act, but in fulfillment of the command of God, who required their righteous execution (Numb. xxi. 2, 3; Deut. xiii. 12-18; 1 Sam. xv. 33)." All the circumstances considered, Fausett supposes that Jephthah "*devoted his only daughter to life-long virginity as a*

19 Andrew R. Fausset, *Judges*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 1999), 203.

spiritual burnt-offering consecrated to Jehovah.”²⁰

Similar is the position of the Dutch Reformed theologian, S. G. De Graaf, whose Old Testament history of redemption entitled *Verbondsgeschiedenis*, literally *History of the Covenant*, was translated into English and published as a four-volume set under the title *Promise and Deliverance*. He, too, is critical of Jephthah for making his vow.

It was by faith, then, that Jephthah was able to deliver Israel. Yet that faith did not set Jephthah free from all mistaken notions concerning the Lord and His service. He swore a vow to the Lord that the first one to come out of his house to meet him after the victory [over the Ammonites] would be sacrificed to the Lord.²¹

It is De Graaf’s view, however, that from the first, “[w]hat he meant was that the one to be sacrificed would be banished from society to live a life of solitude.” De Graaf dismisses the view that Jephthah made his daughter a human sacrifice, but he does consider Jephthah’s vow to be a “useless” vow. “What blindness in those two!” he avers.

Even the motive behind Jephthah’s vow was wrong. He thought that he himself had to suffer a bit if the Lord gave the victory. This suffering, which he had taken on himself of his own free will, would serve as a kind of settlement of Israel’s debt to the Lord—as if the Lord had not delivered His people out of free grace! Jephthah did not realize that the favor shown to Israel would be earned completely by Christ, that we can never repay the least bit of our debt to the Lord. Moreover, what could such a sacrifice mean to the Lord? Would the sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter be pleasing to Him? Could it do anything to atone for the guilt of the people? This was a senseless, aimless sacrifice. The Lord does not expect us to take suffering on ourselves to make ourselves pleasing to Him. The needed sacrifice was made by the Lord Jesus Christ. He made that sacrifice to atone completely for our sins. God will show us His full favor only because of that sacrifice.²²

20 Fausset, *Judges*, 204 (Fausset’s italics).

21 S. G. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance, Volume II, The Failure of Israel’s Theocracy*, trans. H. Evan Runner and Elisabeth Wichers Runner (St. Catherines: Paideia Press, 1978), 35.

22 De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, 2:36.

Thus, according to De Graaf, Jephthah “sacrificed” his daughter, by devoting her to a life of solitude and separation. Only this allowance was made, to mitigate the girl’s self-sacrifice, that “four days per year were Israelite girls allowed to comfort her in her loneliness.”²³

An interesting voice for the minority position that Jephthah did not literally make a human sacrifice of his daughter is found in the *Westminster Annotations* on Judges 11. The *Annotations* was the joint work of several prominent Presbyterian divines, some of whom were members of the Westminster Assembly, and all of whom were Puritans who wrote in agreement with the Westminster standards. The annotations are made to every book of the Bible, with the English facsimile published in six volumes.

The annotations on Judges 11:36 include the judgment that

[n]either can we probably think, that Jephthah, commended for his faith, Heb. 11:32, should offer his daughter for a burnt-offering, seeing that would have been much more odious to God than to have offered unto him swine’s blood, or a dog’s head, Isa. 65.4, and was expressly forbidden as most abominable....²⁴

The question is asked, why did the daughter ask leave to mourn for four days with her companions, if she was to have years and months to do so later? The answer provided in the *Annotations* is twofold. First, infertility and childlessness were regarded among the people of Israel as a greater curse than death. And, secondly, this was the commencement of the long road that lay ahead for Jephthah’s daughter. It was altogether appropriate and necessary for her to receive the encouragement of her companions to take up the burden that would be hers for the rest of her life.²⁵ And so, after the two months of mourning, Jephthah “did unto her according to his vow,” and “[d]id not redeem her, according to the law, but consecrated her unto the Lord, as a virgin to serve him in single life, I Cor. 7.32.”²⁶

23 De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, 2:36.

24 *The Westminster Annotations and Commentary on the Whole Bible (1657)*, by *Some of the Westminster Divines & Other Puritans* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, n.d. for publication of the facsimile), no page number.

25 *Annotations* on Judges 11:37.

26 *Annotations* on Judges 11:39.

The Alternative Explanation: Preliminary Considerations

I am convinced that both the majority and minority explanations are mistaken. There is evidence in the passage itself that it is a mistake to understand Jephthah's vow as a rash vow, rather than a righteous vow. In order to lay the ground work for the alternative explanation, we ought to notice several things from the passage, Judges 11:29-40.

First, there is the clear statement in verse 39 that Jephthah carried out his vow: "he did with her according to his vow which he had vowed." He did not draw back. But he performed his vow. And he performed it exactly as he had intended when he made the vow. Of that we are explicitly informed.

In the second place, the language of Jephthah's vow indicates that from the very beginning he had a *person* in mind when he made his vow. That is clear from verse 31. He made a vow concerning someone who lived in his house with him, who would come down the pathway to greet him when he returned from the battle against the Ammonites. That would not be an animal, a cow, a sheep, or a dog living in his house with him. But that would be a *person*, and the only person who lived with him in his house was his daughter, his only child. If Jephthah intended that his vow would be general, "whatever comes out" of my house, including animals, or anything else, this would have been indicated by the feminine form of the substantive participle. Since the substantive participle is masculine in form, הַכּוֹצֵה it must refer, as it does in every other context, only to persons, and not to animals or anything else.

In the third place, if Jephthah actually intended to make a human sacrifice of his daughter, or worse, actually did make a human sacrifice of his daughter, he sinned grievously and would certainly never be held up in Hebrews 11 as an example of faith. This would not have been a matter merely of weak and imperfect faith. It would have been public, gross sin. Over and over again, the Old Testament Scriptures forbade the children of Israel to make human sacrifices. Whenever they did, God disapproved and judged them severely, as is indicated by Ezekiel 16: 20, 21. There the prophet is called by God to "cause Jerusalem to know her abominations" (Ezekiel 16:2). Among those abominations was Jerusalem's making human sacrifices of their children to the idols, especially to the idol god of the Ammonites,

Israel's enemy in the days of Jephthah, Molech. Through the mouth of Ezekiel, God rebukes Jerusalem: "Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou has borne *unto me*, and these hast thou sacrificed. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain *my children*, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?" (Ezekiel 16:20-21, italics added).

It is also the case that if indeed Jephthah's vow was a rash vow and not a righteous vow, there was a way in which he could have gotten out of that vow. That way is prescribed in Leviticus 27. Jephthah knew the Old Testament Scriptures. In his letter to the king of Ammon, recorded earlier in Judges 11, he quotes from memory large portions of Numbers 20 and 21. If his vow was a rash vow, Jephthah would have renounced that vow and done what the Old Testament law required in the case of one who had made a rash vow. Then he would not have added sin to sin.

And, then, there is the significance of what we read at the beginning of verse 29: "Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah." The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah! And then we read immediately about his vow. What Jephthah did, he did by the Spirit of the Lord who came upon him. He made his vow as a fruit of the Spirit of the Lord who was working in him. That can only mean that his vow was a righteous vow.

The Proper Understanding of Jephthah's Righteous Vow

We must understand Jephthah's vow to offer up whatever met him coming out of his house for a burnt offering *symbolically*. It is as if Jephthah says, "And I will offer up to God whatever comes out of my house *like* a burnt offering."²⁷ That is very expressive language. The burnt offering was utterly consumed on the altar; it was completely consecrated to God. It symbolized that the one who brought the offering was *wholly* dedicated to the Lord. It was the reality of that which

27 The Hebrew construction is simply the verb וַיִּזְבֹּחַ , Hiphil waw consecutive perfect, 1st c.s., plus the 3rd m.s. pronominal suffix. Literally, translated, "I will offer him." The verb is followed immediately by the noun (no prefixed preposition that is its object: עֹלָה). The literal translation of the entire phrase is: "I will offer him an offering."

the burnt offering pictured that Jephthah had in mind when he made his vow. That was the problem in Israel in the days of Jephthah: they were not consecrated to the Lord—solely to the Lord.

It is clear that Jephthah had his daughter in mind all along. She was the only one living in the house with him. We read nothing of Jephthah's wife, the mother of his only child. She is not in the picture, or perhaps she is dead. Whatever the case may be, Jephthah and his daughter are likely the only ones living in the house. He knew, he certainly knew, that it would be she who would come out of the house to meet him, in joy and celebration of his victory over the Ammonites. In thankfulness to God who had called him out of exile and made him a judge in Israel and in thankfulness for delivering Israel from the oppression of their enemies, Jephthah dedicates his daughter to the Lord. He would not offer her on an altar of stone in death, but he would dedicate her to the Lord with her life. She would be a Nazarite, devoted in all of her life to the service of God.

The implications of this were that she would never marry and would never have children. Jephthah would never have the joy of seeing his grandchildren. I am a grandfather. One of the greatest joys in my life is seeing, enjoying, interacting with, and sharing in the lives of my grandchildren. It breaks my heart to think that Jephthah willingly giving all this up. He would never experience any these joys. His daughter would be a perpetual virgin, married only to the Lord. And since she was Jephthah's only child, God's covenant would not continue in his generations, but would cease with his daughter. That is the vow, the very deliberate, well-thought out and costly vow that Jephthah made: "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, I will dedicate my only daughter unto thee, so that she will be a virgin all her life."

His vow was clearly a vow *of faith*. That is the reason for the mention of Jephthah with the giants of faith in Hebrews 11. First, Jephthah believed that God would surely give him the victory in the battle with the Ammonites. He did not say, "*If I return in peace from the battle with the Ammonites;*" but he said, "*When I return in peace from the children of Ammon,*" v. 31. The King James captures exactly the meaning of the inseparable preposition $\text{אֲ$ appended to the Qal infinitive construct plus the first person singular pronominal

suffix. The preposition is used temporally: “when.” That is faith and the assurance of faith; God would surely give him the victory over Israel’s enemy. By faith he “subdued kingdoms,” as Hebrews 11 says. But, secondly, by faith he also “wrought righteousness;” that too is what Hebrews 11 says. By consecrating his only child to the life of a virgin unto the Lord, he provided Israel in that dark day with a striking picture of her calling. The calling of Israel was to serve Jehovah God and Him alone. She was called to cleave to Him and not to any of the idol gods; she was to serve God with an undivided heart. She was to be married to the Lord. In faithfulness to God’s covenant, she was to be devoted to Him and to no other god. Now Jephthah’s daughter would be a living and constant reminder in Israel of her calling. And that is the calling of the church in every age. That is the calling of the church today. To that the individual members of the church are called. In our congregations, in our homes, in our marriages, and in our walk in the world as individual believers, we must be and must show ourselves to be consecrated to Jehovah our God.

A Fulfilled Vow

And so Jephthah kept his vow. He did not defer to pay it, but performed his vow. God gave him victory over the Ammonites and by faith he fulfilled his vow. He came home to Mizpeh and he walked down the pathway that led to his house, and just as he knew she would, his daughter came out of the house to greet him. She was joyful for the victory that God had given her father and the army of Israel. She met him, v. 34 says, “with timbrels and with dances.” And then we read: “she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.”

It was at this point, with her standing directly before him, that the implications of his vow came home to him. His only child, the dear daughter whom he loved more than anything in the world, welcomed him with joy and gladness. He rent his clothes, we read, and he exclaimed in agony, “Alas my daughter, thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me.” Oh, he was grieved at the thought of the vow he had made and what he must demand of his daughter. But he did not draw back! “I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.” No matter what his personal feelings were, no matter what pain and self-sacrifice his vow brought to him, at all costs he must fulfill his vow.

And his daughter agreed! That also belongs to the instruction of the passage. She did not resist her father's vow, or criticize him for making his vow, or denounce his vow. She did not exclaim, "You vowed *what*!?" "You promised God *what* concerning me?!" How could you have done that?! But she agreed to the vow: "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth." There is some indication that she knew about the vow that her father had made already before this. She expressed no surprise at the vow whatever. What a powerful example she is to the children and young people of the church. She honored her father and his rightful authority over her. More than that, she was determined that she would submit to him and to his vow. She was agreeable to the vow that he had made concerning her. That is truly amazing! And that is an evidence of the godliness of this young woman.

And so, Jephthah performed his vow just as he had vowed. He agreed to his daughter's request to take two months to spend with her friends, walking upon the mountains of Israel, bewailing her virginity. Note that: to bewail *her virginity*, not to bewail her death. To bewail the fact that she would be perpetually a virgin; a life stretched out before her in which she would remain unmarried, childless, and alone. No husband to love and be loved by. No sharing the experiences of life with a loving spouse. No children to care for, to nurture, to mother. And so it is explained: "She knew no man" (v. 39).

But there is more, for we are informed in verses 39 and 40, "And it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year." The original Hebrew states that it was a "decree" or an "ordinance" established in Israel. What was that decree or law? That every year the young women of Israel would spend four days "lamenting" the daughter of Jephthah. They would spend four days comforting her, fellowshiping with her, sharing their own life experiences.

The original of this word "lament" has the root meaning of "to praise, to celebrate." The root is לָמַד, which in the Piel verbal pattern, the verbal pattern of the form in Judges 11:40, means "to recount, to commemorate." It is used earlier in the book of Judges, in Judges 5:11, in the Song of Deborah, which celebrates Israel's deliverance from

Sisera and Jabin. There the verb is translated in the King James as “rehearse.” “There shall they *rehearse* the righteous acts of the Lord,” we read. Clearly, included in the idea of “rehearse” is the closely related idea of “celebrate” and “commemorate.” That, too, was Israel’s response to the daughter of Jephthah and the vow of Jephthah over her: every year they “rehearsed” and “celebrated” this vow. Publicly they commemorated God’s great deliverance through Jephthah. And publicly they celebrated the spiritual picture of Jephthah’s daughter. And during that time, the young women in Israel would minister to and comfort her. By doing this, there would be a continual reminder in Israel of her calling—her calling as pictured in the daughter of Jephthah. Her calling to love God and be devoted to God! The calling to forsake all the idol gods and the spiritual adultery of devotion to them. The calling to serve Jehovah God, and Him alone. Thus they remembered Jephthah’s vows! And they remembered Jephthah’s daughter!

And that is the instruction of this Word of God for the church today also. First, we learn from this history that we must keep our vows. No matter what personal sacrifices or hardships might be involved in keeping them: “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it” (Ecclesiastes 5:4). A vow is a serious matter; we must take our vows seriously. We must perform our vows: baptismal vows; marriage vows; vows of profession of faith; ordination vows as officebearers. We must perform our vows, no matter what the cost personally. Only they who perform their vows are blessed by Jehovah God. Woe to them who go back on their solemn vows!

We must keep our vows because God has kept His vow. This is both the reason and the incentive for keeping our vows as well as the power for our path-keeping. That was His oath to save us in the Lord Jesus Christ, as Hebrews 7:21 teaches: “But this [this one, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, was consecrated] with an oath by him that said unto him, the Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.” This was the oath that God confirmed in His own name, according to Hebrews 6:16-18.

16. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

17. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs

of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath. 18. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

God vowed and promised from all eternity to save us. And that vow was a costly vow; it cost God the suffering and death of His own dear Son. And still, what He vowed, He performed. He did not defer to pay, but performed His solemn oath. So must we. And in the cross of Jesus Christ, we receive the grace and strength actually to keep our vows. By the power of His grace and Spirit, we consecrate ourselves to Him. We do it out of thankfulness for His great deliverance of us from an enemy greater than the Ammonites, the enemy of sin and death, the Devil and hell. By the grace and power of His Spirit we are enabled to keep our vows.

Secondly, the instruction of the passage comes out when Jephthah says, “When I return *in peace*.” That, too, was the outcome of Jephthah’s vow: peace, blessed peace. In Psalm 68:30b, the psalmist prays, “Scatter thou the people that delight in war.” There are always those who delight in war. Through His faithful officebearers, like Judge Jephthah, God scatters the people who delight in war. That was Israel’s prayer in Jephthah’s day, as it the prayer of God’s church in every age. God answered that prayer of Israel in the days of Jephthah, and He answers it today also. In answer to that prayer, He wrought peace in Israel through his faithful servant Jephthah. There was peace between Jephthah and his daughter, between father and daughter who were one in the Lord. There was peace in Israel, in the church of that day, as they remained faithful in the worship of God. There was peace between Jephthah’s daughter and her companions, her friends in the Lord, who were one in the faith. There was peace in Zion; God’s people were of one mind and of one heart in the Lord. And they encouraged one another to love and to serve the Lord faithfully by reminding one another of Jephthah’s daughter.

Let the church never forget, but always remember, Jephthah’s righteous vow! ●

The Needed Light of Biblical Counseling

Garrett J. Eriks

Although God's people are called to live for His glory, because of indwelling sin and many temptations, God's people sometimes fall into great and heinous sins. By these sins they offend God, experience guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, and may even lose the sense of God's favor (Canons of Dordt, 5.3). The church sees this reality in marriages, which are under the constant assault of Satan and this world. Within churches today, many members are enslaved to sins of pornography, drunkenness, drug use, self-harm, and many others. Such sins arise out of a heart that is not seeking the one, true, and living God.

Many of God's people are also struggling in their faith as they endure suffering and struggle with the weighty responsibilities of their lives. Any Christian who has lived long enough knows the great hardships of life. So many of God's people are experiencing the afflictions of cancer, financial struggles, the death of a loved one, a child walking in sin, a spouse (or a parent) who has abandoned the home. Instead of trusting in God by committing their way to His sovereign love, they lean upon their own understanding, attempting to find satisfaction and joy in the things of this world. Our culture says that what people need the most is relief from the suffering they experience. Other men, women, and young people pursue whatever seems to provide quick relief. This thinking has infiltrated the church also. Therefore, at times God's sheep struggle to respond rightly to suffering in their lives.

When God's people struggle with these spiritual problems, where should they go? Who is competent and qualified to counsel? What are the options? Should they go to the professional, secular psychologist because he is the "expert" in these issues? Or should they go to their medical doctor for medication? Or should they be sent to Christian counselors, who have integrated secular psychology and Christian truth? Is the answer to be found in pastors, elders, and church members

pursuing more education in psychology? Or should the church counsel with God's Word? Or is the answer found in some combination of these options? These are the difficult questions the church faces today.

God's people who are hurting and struggling with spiritual issues and sin, should seek biblical counsel from pastors, elders, deacons, and fellow church members. God's people should seek biblical counseling and not secular psychology or counseling that seeks to synthesize the two. Instead, the church should be addressing these spiritual problems with biblical truth because the church has the Scriptures, which are sufficient.

The Antithesis

Why is not secular psychology the answer to life's problems? The reason is the biblical truth of the antithesis. The antithesis has to do with how Christians relate to an ungodly world and culture. The word "antithesis" means to be against a certain position or viewpoint. The antithesis refers to something that is the direct opposite of something else, which can include a person, ideas, and truth claims.

Although the word "antithesis" is not found in Scripture, the concept is. To understand this concept we reflect on the mother promise of God found in Genesis 3:15. After Adam sinned, God declared the antithesis as part of His promise, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Speaking to the devil, God said there would be hatred between the children of the devil and the children of God, between the ungodly and the righteous, between the church and the world. This is the antithesis. From this point in history onward no fellowship, friendship, or love would be found between these two peoples in the world, but only hatred.

This hatred exists because God has put it in place. In Genesis 3:15, God says, "I will put enmity between..." Because God does this, the two peoples in the world are radically different. The wicked live for self-glory, while God's people live for His glory. The wicked are under God's wrath and will suffer eternally in hell, while God's people are under God's favor and will live with Him forever in heaven (Psalm 73). The wicked hate God, while God's people love Him. Therefore, there is spiritual separation between them. Adam's sin

of eating the forbidden fruit brought death into the world (Romans 5:12). But God has separated His people from the world by choosing, redeeming, and calling His people out of darkness into His marvelous light (I Peter 2:9). God's grace for His elect people has created this spiritual separation.

The antithesis is to be lived by God's people. Antithetical living is God's command in II Corinthians 6:14-18, which says,

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, said the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

In James 4:4, God calls us to the same spiritual separation from the world, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

What does this mean for the consideration of biblical counseling? The antithesis must be applied to biblical counseling and secular psychology. Because the origin of secular psychology is a world that hates God, it is rooted in a false religion. This does not mean everything in psychology must be rejected and cast into the depths of the sea. Yet modern psychology is not harmless. Neither is it morally or spiritually neutral. Nothing in this world is spiritually neutral. Either an idea or philosophy or person is for God or against God. Secular psychology is against God. Remember that "antithesis" means to be against a certain position or viewpoint.

Secular psychology is anti-God and anti-christian. First, "anti" means that it is against God and against Christ. But it is more than this. "Anti" also means, "in the place of." Secular psychology claims to be a better alternative than biblical counseling. With its anti-christian perspective, secular psychology pretends to know man's problems and falsely promises a salvation from these problems.

Secular psychology is rooted in the false religions that falls under the description found in Romans 1:20-23, which explains what a totally depraved man does when he sees the eternal power of God and His Godhead revealed in the creation. Secular psychology professes to be wise, but really has become a fool because it has changed the “glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:22, 23). God’s glory has been exchanged for the “glory” of man’s own understanding of himself.

How has secular psychology rejected God and His truth? They do not find truth in Scripture, but in man’s study and understanding of man. Truth is found in man. What is so absurd about this is that psychology views man as an advanced animal, which is basically good, or at worst a blank slate secular psychology has adopted Darwin’s view of man. Yet, it believes this same advanced animal has all the answers. In the end, man is able to solve his own problems because man is autonomous.

To be more specific, secular psychology identifies as disease what Scripture calls sin. The obvious example of this is alcoholism. What Scripture identifies as the sin of habitual drunkenness, psychology has identified as a curable disease. Scripture identifies selfishness as sin, but psychology identifies it as narcissism. The scriptural answer to these sins is the cross of Jesus Christ. The man, woman, or child who struggles with these sins must repent and believe in Jesus. But psychology knows nothing of the cross of Jesus Christ. Instead, the answer is medication and therapy, similar to the treatment for a pulled muscle or a broken arm

Secular psychology has made man to increase and Christ to decrease. The very foundation of secular psychology is man-centered and not God-centered. In other words, man is the god of psychology. Man is the beginning, the center, and the end. The idol of psychology is not a statue that man has carved out of wood, but man himself. Man has elevated himself to a position higher than the Creator of the heavens and the earth. As those who know the one, true, living, and holy God, we should be outraged at such idolatry, as much as we would be when we read about the people of Israel bowing down to Baal under the godless leadership of Ahab.

In contrast to secular psychology, biblical counseling is God-centered, Christ-centered, and Holy Spirit-centered. The standard of truth is God, Who reveals Himself in the Holy Scriptures. God created man to be dependent on Him for all that he needs physically and spiritually. God created man in His image to obey and serve Him (Genesis 1:28). But man fell into sin, disobeying God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17 and Genesis 3). Thus man's greatest problem is not sickness or suffering, but sin. He has rebelled against God, making himself worthy of God's wrath in hell. But God has sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem His chosen people by His death on the cross. Man's greatest need is salvation from sin, which God alone provides graciously.

Thus psychology and Biblical counseling are two religions diametrically opposed to each other. To integrate secular psychology and biblical counseling is to mix light and darkness, Christ and Belial, the temple of God and idols. To integrate the two violates the Word of God in II Corinthians 6:14-18 and James 4:4. Integration is making friends with what is opposed to God.

The antithesis between biblical counseling and secular psychology is evident in the areas of authority, goals, and hope.

Authority

Biblical counseling is sufficient to address man's sin and spiritual problems because Holy Scripture is entirely sufficient to address spiritual needs in every situation. There are those who think that Scripture is not sufficient to address some issues in the church. Some think the Bible is not sufficient to address spousal abuse. Others might think the Bible is not sufficient to address depression. But the Reformed, biblical truth is that Scripture is sufficient. Clarification is needed at this point, and so we will return to this shortly. This does not mean medication should never be taken for depression. Medication may help with the symptoms of the depression, but this does not take away from the sufficiency of Scripture to address what a depressed person is feeling, thinking, and desiring.

But what about general revelation? Does not God reveal Himself in the creation? These are important questions because some have argued that psychology has authority because it is part of God's general

revelation to man. There is no doubt that God reveals Himself in creation. This is the plain testimony of Romans 1:20, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” What many have done today is elevated what is found by man (usually unbelieving man) in the creation to the same level as Scripture. This has crept into the church with the rise of liberalism, which rejects the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Beyond liberalism, in our postmodern age, the wicked world says there is no absolute truth because truth is determined by the individual, as he observes and understands this world. According to the postmodernist, truth can be found in everything. This has greatly influenced the church to reject the authority of Holy Scripture. One of the great threats to the church today is this rejection of Scripture’s authority. In contrast to liberalism and postmodernism, the church must understand the relationship between general revelation and special revelation (Scripture).

General revelation refers to God’s work of making Himself known in creation, conscience, and history. This general revelation is defined in the Belgic Confession, Article 2 this way:

We know Him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith (Romans 1:20). All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.

Romans 1:20 says that God makes Himself known in the things of creation. This is true of all things in the creation. All men everywhere see the Creator’s signature on this earth. What God makes known about Himself in creation is limited: His eternal power and Godhead (Romans 1:20). General revelation does not provide another way of salvation. The idea is not that general revelation exists so that the wicked can be saved by an obedient response to general revelation. Romans 1:20 makes clear that general revelation only serves to leave

the wicked, who deserve God's wrath because of their sin, without excuse. In fact, the response of the wicked to general revelation is a stubborn rejection of God. They change "the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man..." (Romans 1:23).

What man finds in this world cannot be trusted at face value because general revelation only leaves the wicked without excuse. Man always distorts what he sees in this world because he views life only through the distorted, cloudy lens of sin that blinds him to God (Jeremiah 17:9). This does not mean that sinful man cannot understand how the human body works or how the brain functions. This does not mean everything that man produces or discovers is evil and to be rejected. I Timothy 4:4, 5 tells us, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." But man does not see this from God's perspective. Sinful man's evaluation and conclusion will always be wrong. Man's solution for man's problem is focused on relief from suffering and not salvation from sin. Sinful man is not concerned with salvation from sin.

Because general revelation is insufficient, God's people need the divine word to know truth. Scripture alone is sufficient because Scripture is that Word of God. The authority of Scripture comes from the authority of God Himself for He inspired the Scripture. II Timothy 3:16, 17, says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." That Scripture is inspired means that it is God-breathed. Scripture did not come by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as the Holy Spirit moved them (II Peter 1:20, 21). Because it is the Word of God from beginning to end, Scripture is infallible and inerrant. This is what makes it sufficient.

What does this mean for biblical counseling? Biblical counseling has an unchanging, rock-solid foundation. Biblical counseling shines the light of God's truth to those who are struggling in the darkness of sin and unbelief (Psalm 119:105). The Bible is sufficient for all that a man needs spiritually. Because Scripture is living and powerful, it is able to discern the "thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). As we read the Bible, it has the power to read us—our actions,

thoughts, and desires. When the Holy Spirit uses the Word to expose the evil thoughts and desires of a man, the same Spirit uses the Word to make the heart of this man wise (Psalm 19:7). When the Holy Spirit uses the Word to expose our sinful actions, thoughts, and desires, the Bible gives the one and only answer to our sin: the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. The only way the Bible is able to do this is through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Secular psychology is powerless to bring about repentance and strengthened faith because it does not bring the truth of God's Word. This exposes one of the outstanding problems of psychology. It has no absolute standard of truth. It has no standard of moral values. Psychology is always in a state of flux. This is evident from the one book that is considered the bible of psychology, the DSM, which is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In 2013 the DSM-V was produced, which indicates that this authoritative book is constantly changing. The DSM knows nothing of sin. In fact, the DSM-II identified homosexuality as a mental illness but in the next edition homosexuality disappeared altogether. Although the DSM reflects the humanistic and anti-God agenda of modern psychology, there are things to learn from the DSM. It can be used by the biblical counselor to understand human behavior, but it is not the manual the biblical counselor uses to understand the motives of the heart or the solution to problems.

In stark contrast to the DSM V, the Bible has only one edition because it is the changeless truth of God. This distinction in authoritative books highlights the opposition of psychology to biblical truth.

Grace

Counseling from Scripture is needed because of man's fall into sin. Sinful man needs God's saving grace to see life's struggles and sin through the lens of Scripture.

The argument has been made that saving grace is necessary because of the insufficiency of common grace. I humbly object to the concept and idea of common grace because the Bible does not teach a grace or favor of God that is common, meaning for all men. Instead, Scripture teaches that God's grace is always particular and only for the elect. This is the teaching of Proverbs 3:33, which says, "The curse of the

Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.” Notice that God’s blessing is only on the house of the just, those who are righteous in Jesus Christ. But God’s curse rests on the house of the wicked. This curse is not future, but present. This is the teaching also of Psalm 73. In this Psalm, Asaph is struggling with the storms of his life, while it seems that the wicked experience smooth sailing in life. But God reveals to him that the wicked are riding a slide into destruction (v. 18) while God guides the lives of His people to bring them to glory (v. 24).

An objection to common grace, however, does not rule out that God gives good gifts to the wicked. God does give good gifts to the wicked, but not in an attitude of grace or favor. In addition, God restrains sin, not as a display of favor, but in His providential control of all things. After Adam’s fall into sin, man was total depraved, meaning he can do no good and is inclined to all evil. Yet, man is still man. God created man a rational-moral creature. This did not change post-fall. Therefore, man has the ability to understand things in this world. Wicked men are able, under the providence of God, to make progress in understanding science, the body, the mind, etc. However, fallen man will not glorify God in all that he perceives because of his depravity. The providence of God allows man to understand the things of this world although he is opposed to God and His truth.

Therefore, man needs the saving grace of God to see himself, this world, and God Himself rightly. When God regenerates a man, implanting in his heart the new life of Jesus Christ, God enables that man to see things rightly through the lens of Holy Scripture. The saving grace of God wondrously opens blind eyes to see truth.

This means that the chosen, redeemed, regenerated believer needs the light of Scripture to see himself, this world, and his place in it. Biblical counseling helps the struggling and weak child of God to receive comfort, hope, and direction for life. As I Corinthians 10:13 says, God, Who is faithful, provides the way of escape for all temptation that is common to man. The way of escape is found in the Scriptures.

Not only does Scripture provide the way of escape, but it also provides the standard of truth that enables the child of God to discern truth from error when evaluating what sinful man has uncovered in

this world. The teachings, promises, and principles of Scripture are the timeless truth of God. God's inspired Word is able to make sense of all things in all places and at all times. God's Word is to be used to discern truth from error in both the secular and religious realms of this world. For example, when modern psychology says vent and take out your anger on a punching bag, Scripture calls us to put off anger (Ephesians 4:26).

Specifically, when it comes to modern psychology, any discoveries must always be tested with the standard of Holy Scripture. Because God's providential rule through the ascended Christ governs modern psychology, the biblical counselor does not reject all the learning of man in the area of science and psychology. Instead, the biblical counselor wisely tests what is found in science and psychology with the infallible standard of God's Word. If what is found in secular realms does not disagree with Scripture, then he can use it. Where science and psychology oppose God's truth as revealed in Scripture, they must be rejected.

Goals

The goals of biblical counseling far surpass the goals of secular psychology because the goals of biblical counseling are God's goals found in God's Word. The consideration of goals demonstrates the radical divide between the two and encourages those with spiritual struggles to seek the guidance of biblical counseling within the church.

What are the substandard goals of secular psychology? Secular psychology promises happiness. Some might wonder if this is really a substandard goal. Who does not want to be happy? After all Christ promises joy to His people in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), "Blessed (happy) are the..." But this does not mean God promises a constant feeling of happiness. The chief goal of the world today is doing whatever makes one feel happy. This has been adopted by many "Christian counselors" who advise their counselees to divorce unbiblically, for example, because it makes them happy. They falsely claim that when we are happy, God is happy.

This brings up another goal of psychology - a life free from suffering. Psychology promises health, especially since it misdiagnoses sins as sickness. All of this is so appealing to the sinful flesh when

there is the experience of great hardship in life. Those who experience pain and turmoil long for relief. There is a place for such relief. For example, if you have a headache because of sore muscles, you might take an ibuprofen or make an appointment for a massage so that you can have relief. But the desire for relief must not become the ultimate goal. Such a goal is substandard because it falls far short of God's good goals for believers.

The goals of biblical counseling are the *highest* goals because they are God's goals. The goal of biblical counseling is to give instruction from Scripture so that the counselee achieves God's goals in his/her life in dependence on the Holy Spirit. What are these goals?

First, God's ultimate goal is the glory of His name. Biblical counseling sees this as the primary goal, reminding counselees that this must be the focus of their entire lives, as is taught in I Corinthians 10:31, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This highest goal of God is commanded in Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." Biblical counselors set this goal before God's people, reminding them that this is the reason we live, work, and play because this is the reason that God does all that He does (Romans 11:33-36).

Second, God is glorified when believers are Christ-like. Biblical counseling has as a fundamental goal that God's people be conformed to the image of His Son. This is the "good" that God works in our lives through all things (Romans 8:28, 29). This molding and shaping specifically is described as the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Third, biblical counseling's goal is growth in faith. In the painful hardships and awful sufferings of this life, God is teaching His people to trust in Him alone. Scriptures often call God's people not to fear, but to trust. This is the command of a well-loved passage, Proverbs 3:5, 6, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not on thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." In Psalm 37, we find many words that teach what trust in God looks like (fear not, trust, delight, commit, rest, wait patiently, cease from anger), which trust is based on the faithful promises of God.

Finally, the goal of biblical counseling is everlasting life in heaven. The final hope and goal of all God's people is communion with Him forever. This life without sin and hardship is certain because of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Relief from pain (physical and emotional) and happiness in life are nice. But God's goals of His glory, our sanctification, growth in faith, and heaven are infinitely higher.

Hope

Along with the goals of biblical counseling comes the hope that these goals will be accomplished because of the saving grace of God. A striking difference between biblical counseling and psychology is the true hope that biblical counseling provides. Without the hope of the gospel there is only despair. The world is full of despair because the world is without the hope of the gospel.

One of the great deficiencies of secular psychology is the absence of hope. Biblical hope means the assurance of a certain future good. Secular psychology cannot provide this kind of hope. Psychology might provide a kind of relief and happiness, though not really. But how can psychology provide hope when it is constantly changing and is dependent on the wisdom of man's mind and discoveries? Secular psychology is without the hope of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the only hope and comfort for the child of God, as we read in Colossians 1:27, "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Therefore, we should not expect to find hope or answers to our struggles in psychology.

Biblical counseling provides the certain hope of good in the future. This future good does not mean a life that is smooth sailing. This does not mean a life free from all pain and suffering. The hope of biblical counseling is the hope of the gospel. It is the hope of Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." It is the hope of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary where He paid fully for all the sins of all His people. It is the hope that because Jesus Christ died and rose again, so also we will be raised from the dead and will dwell forever with our Savior in the glory of God's presence in heaven (I Thessalonians 4:13, 14). This is true

and certain hope built upon a rock solid foundation: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15).

Because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, there is the hope of the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7). Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there is the hope of real change in our hearts and lives (Philippians 1:6). Because of the victory of Christ's ascension into heaven, we have the hope of everlasting life with God (Psalm 23:6). We have the sure hope that all the sufferings of this life are working for our glorification in Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 4:17, 18). We have the hope that even if our circumstances never change in this life, God is with us in our suffering (Philippians 4:19). His grace is always sufficient (II Corinthians 12:9). Therefore, we will glory in our infirmities, as Paul says in this verse.

Conclusions

After contrasting biblical counseling and secular psychology, the question we face is what is the relationship between the two? First, this clearly means that the church must not send her members to psychologists for spiritual problems. Secular psychology does not have the answers for man's greatest need: deliverance from sin.

Secondly, this means that Scripture and psychology do not belong together as equals. Scripture and psychology are not two oxen pulling a plow in the same direction, but are more like the oxen and donkey who are unable to pull together. The two are going in opposite directions, therefore they must not be paired as equals. They do not belong together because of the truth of the antithesis. They do not belong together any more than the Bible and science belong together in theistic evolution. Just as secular psychology is a false religion with man on the throne, so also is evolutionism. Those who explain the origin of the world with some form of Darwinian evolution are anti-Christian. Evolutionism is a false religion that denies the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth. But there are many today who try to integrate the Bible and science to give an explanation of the origin of the world that allows for an old earth and that God has created all things. If anyone began teaching theistic evolution in our Christian schools or churches, the member would be outraged! And they should be. Light and darkness do not belong together.

But how much of psychology has the church adopted and tried to integrate into her worldview and her teaching from the pulpit and in the counseling room? The church must seriously consider this and put off the darkness of psychology where it has compromised the gospel.

Thirdly, does this mean we are left only with a world-flight principle when it comes to psychology? Does it mean a complete rejection of it all? Absolutely not. The Holy Scripture is sufficient to address and meet all of man's spiritual needs. Scripture is authoritative for what Christians believe and how they are to live. Because man is still man and God is sovereign over all things in this world, the church can use what God provides in the latest developments of science and psychology, but always testing them with God's Word. The church must not stick her head into the sand, ignoring the physical, bodily, and emotional components of life, thus thinking there is absolutely nothing to learn from science or psychology. However, the church should never view psychology as an authority in itself simply because well-educated men have come to these conclusions. All things must be tested with Scripture. The result of this evaluation will be that much in secular psychology must be rejected. Yet, there are other things to be used in biblical counseling. How helpful to understand how an addiction like pornography or gluttony affects the mind. How helpful to understand the brain of someone suffering from OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder).

God has gifted the church with great scientific advances and learning today. He has gifted us with educated, bright Christian men who study the sciences, and the church needs more of these men and women. In the midst of these advances, God has gifted His church with the higher and better resource of the Holy Scriptures to lead and guide us until we are taken to our heavenly home. The church needs biblical counseling to help God's people on their pilgrim journey. ●

George Martin Ophoff: A Bibliography (4) His Doctrinal and Miscellaneous Writings

Douglas J. Kuiper

This installment concludes the bibliography of George M. Ophoff (1891-1962), one of the three founding pastors of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The first installment (November, 2017) was devoted to writings *about* Ophoff, as well as works *by* Ophoff that are not found in the *Standard Bearer* (*SB*). The next installment (April, 2018) included Ophoff's *Standard Bearer* writings in the areas of New Testament Studies, Church History, and Church Polity, while the third installment (November, 2018) covered his Old Testament writings. This final installment is devoted to Ophoff's *Standard Bearer* articles that fall in the category of doctrinal and miscellaneous.

If any reader now or later should find a mistake in this bibliography, or a work that was inadvertently omitted, please bring this to my attention.

Additions to Previous Installments

The previous installments should have included the following articles. To be added to Ophoff's "New Testament" *SB* writings are:

Matthew 5:16, "The Christian and the World," 6.7.151. Though the title is different, this article is essentially the same as Ophoff's article "Let Thy Light So Shine" in 16.15.354.

Matthew 6:5-6, "Praying to the Father," 27.15.350.

Matthew 6:7-8, "Vain Repetitions in Prayer," 27.13.301.

Romans 9, "Sovereign Grace," 6.15.344.

Romans 9:20-21, "The Potter and the Clay," 24.5.107.

1 Peter 1:5, "Temptations," 12.21.492.

Ophoff's "Church History" writings included a number of articles in volumes 27 and 28 regarding Arminianism. Even though some of

these articles focus on the teachings of Arminianism, they began as a historical survey of the doctrine. To those should be added:

“Arminianism and Justification by Faith,” 28.16.382.

“Arminianism—A Subtle Heresy,” 28.17.407.

Overview of Ophoff’s Doctrinal and Miscellaneous Writings

Ophoff’s doctrinal and miscellaneous writings can be subdivided into four general categories.

In the first are those writings that directly relate to Henry Danhof’s, Herman Hoeksema’s, and George Ophoff’s expulsion from the CRC and the formation of the PRC. These “directly relate” in that they bear on the immediate history, and on The Three Points of Common Grace as formulated by the CRC Synod of 1924. Most articles that fall in this category were written in the first five years of the *Standard Bearer’s* existence.

A second category of Ophoff’s doctrinal writings, found particularly in volumes 25-31, include articles that arise out of the conditional covenant controversy that culminated in the 1953 split in the PRC. Some of these examine the doctrine of a conditional covenant; valuable contributions from Ophoff’s pen include articles such as “The ‘If’ Sentences in Deuteronomy” (25.18.423), “The Fathers Regarding Conditions” (25.20.466), “On Breaking the Covenant” (26.15.351), and “Once More—The Promise” (27.16.375 and subsequent issues). In other articles Ophoff responded to men within the PRC (A. Petter, particularly) or outside the PRC (Klaas Schilder). By publishing one of them – “Revs. DeJong and Kok in the Netherlands: A Report” (25.20.469) – Ophoff added fuel to the fire of the controversy.

The third category consists of Ophoff’s doctrinal and ethical contributions. These, in turn, are of three sorts. They include the printed version of speeches that he gave. These speeches usually related to some point of doctrine. They also include Ophoff’s response to articles that he had read in other Reformed periodicals such as the *The Banner*, *De Wachter*, or *Reformed Guardian*. Ophoff would note what that article was about, or even quote it at length, and give his response. Ophoff did not limit himself to CRC writings and teachings; he was ready to disagree with Abraham Kuyper, as well as with RCA men such as Albertus Pieters, and former RCA men such as M. R. DeHaan.

Also included in this third category are three book reviews: Ophoff reviewed R. B. Kuiper's book *As to Being Reformed* (reviewed in volume 2), John C. DeKorne's book *Chinese Altars to the Unknown God* (volume 3), and Loraine Boettner's book *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (volume 10). These reviews did not summarize the book's main teaching and point out its strengths and weaknesses, as book reviews commonly do. Rather, these were series of articles that responded at length to particular statements in the book with which Ophoff disagreed.

Articles in this third category are subdivided by topic. This subdivision provides a general subject index of Ophoff's doctrinal and polemical writings. Within these subdivisions the articles appear chronologically, not alphabetically. The reader must understand that this classification is general, and that some articles could logically fit into more than one category.

Into the fourth category, "Miscellaneous," falls every article that does not clearly fall into the other categories. These are few in number, and often have historical or autobiographical value.

Ophoff's Polemics

To read these articles is to study Ophoff as a polemicist. These articles are not the *only* articles in which Ophoff was polemical; particularly in his Old Testament writings, but in almost every other category also, Ophoff opposed error when he saw it. However, in distinction from the other articles, these were written in order to defend a doctrine or practice that was being attacked. If polemics was part of Ophoff's *method* in writing articles that appeared in the other installments of this bibliography, it was his *purpose* in writing many of the articles that appear in this installment.

This explains why many of Ophoff's doctrinal writings, regardless of their particular subject, relate to the two great controversies in which he was personally involved: the common grace controversy of 1924 and subsequent years, and the conditional covenant controversy in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Perhaps the division of articles below does not reflect this point well; the first two categories include articles that directly relate to these controversies, while the third category is by far the largest. But, assuming that Ophoff read far more articles than

he ever responded to, what made him decide which articles merited a response? Often the answer is that they touched on some point relating to common grace.

Ophoff's doctrinal writings are worth examining. Their value is more than historic, although they certainly have historic value for the Protestant Reformed Churches. Their value is also in that they reveal the foundational principle that guided Ophoff in all his life: God's absolute sovereignty. He rejected the notion of common grace because it compromised the doctrine of sovereign, particular grace, and he rejected the notion of a conditional covenant because it did not square with the doctrine of a sovereignly established, gracious, unconditional covenant. Because Ophoff tenaciously held to those two points in his doctrinal writings, his writings are of value for Reformed people today.

Ophoff's doctrinal writings also reveal something about the man. First, they manifest his tenacity. When he was convinced he was right and his opponent wrong, he did not budge an inch. When one responded to Ophoff's defense of the truth by defending an untruth, Ophoff would respond again. His writings regarding the teachings of B. Kok and A. Petter during the conditional covenant controversy are evidence of this. Second, his doctrinal writings indicate the reason for his tenacity. Ophoff was concerned to be right, not because he had a high view of himself, but because he understood that the Scriptures were truth.

The Common Grace Controversy of 1924

Ophoff repudiated the notion of common grace in the following articles, as well as in articles classified under other headings. The interested reader should consult some of his expositions of Old and New Testament texts, particularly of those texts used in defense of the idea of common grace. Also, his Old Testament History writings, especially regarding Noah and Abraham, are to the point.

The Three Points of Synod 1924

“Reply To Professor K. Schoolland: The False View of God to which the Exponents of Common Grace Adhere, Disclosed,” 1.6.16.
Ophoff defended the PRC from Schoolland's charge of rationalism, and exposed Schoolland's false conception of God's grace, love,

and righteousness.

“An Erroneous Conception of Scripture Exposed,” 1.7.15. Ophoff argued that an erroneous conception of Scripture underlies the defense of common grace.

“Prof. Berkhof’s Brochure,” 1.10.16, 1.11.15 (subtitled “The Gunmen and the Stroopop”), 1.12.6, 2.1.15. A detailed response to Berkhof’s “De Drie Punten in Alle Deelen Gereformeerd,” translated as “The Three Points in All Parts Reformed”.

“Prof. Berkhof’s Pelagianism,” 2.2.44, 2.3.81, 2.4.110, 2.5.140, 2.6.179.

“Who Changed?” 3.7.151. Ophoff referred to statements that R. B. Kuiper, Henry Beets, H. Keegstra, and F. Ten Hoor had made several years before the common grace controversy. These statements denied that the works of spiritually dead sinners are truly good. In 1927 these same men defended the third point of common grace.

“Synod’s Scriptural Proof for the Three Points Examined,” 4.15.343, 4.16.367.

Exegetical Methods of Those Who Promote Common Grace

“The Failure of the Adherents of Common Grace to Adhere to Reformed Methods of Exegesis,” 1.8.20. Ophoff interacted with the exegetical methods of Revs. H. Kuiper, D. Zwier, and D. Muyskens.

“The Vessels of Wrath,” 1.9.21. A continuation of the previous.

“Berkhof As Exegete,” 2.8.227, 2.9.248, 2.10.281, 2.11.298, 2.12.329, 2.14.375.

“A Problem Faced and a Solution Offered,” 3.8.190. Ophoff responded to Dr. Pieters’ explanation of John 3:16.

The Conditional Covenant Controversy of 1949-1953

These articles deal with the controversy regarding the conditional/unconditional covenant that occasioned the 1953 schism in the PRC. For several months before Rev. Ophoff’s first contribution, Rev. Hoeksema had been addressing the matter in his editorials. Rev. Ophoff’s first contribution (25.15.350) is found in the May 1, 1949 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, and was a response to an article that Rev. Andrew Petter wrote in the *Concordia*. One who researches these articles in order fully to understand the controversy should also read the relevant *Concordia* articles.

Events Precipitating and Aggravating the Conditional Covenant Controversy

- “Revs. DeJong and Kok in the Netherlands: A Report,” 25.20.469. In this article, Ophoff published a letter from Prof. Holwerda, who was professor of church history at Kampen. The letter was a response to an immigrant who was attending, though not a member of, the church in Chatham, ON. It reveals something of what J. DeJong and B. Kok were trying to accomplish by their visit to the Netherlands. Whether Ophoff should have published this letter—that is, whether he should have made public a private letter involving parties other than he—is a question; he himself defended his right to do so. However, his publication of this letter was significant in exposing the doctrinal divide in our churches. The entries that immediately follow are a response to Ophoff’s publishing this letter.
- “A Letter From Rev. Hofman,” 25.21.498. Ophoff simply quoted the letter from Rev. Hofman, and indicated that he would respond to it in the next issue. Others also sent letters to the *Standard Bearer* regarding Ophoff’s publication of the letter of Prof. Holwerda.
- “Open Confession to the Brethren Rev. Kok and DeJong,” 25.22.522.
- “Please Take Notice,” 25.22.523.
- “A Word to You, Rev. Hofman,” 26.1.13.
- “Reply to Prof. Veenhof,” 26.1.16.
- “Reply to Prof. K. Schilder,” 26.3.61.
- “Reply to Dr. K. Schilder (conclusion),” 26.4.85.
- “Correspondence,” 26.9.207, 26.10.233, 26.11.257. This is Ophoff’s reply to a letter from Rev. J. Howerzyl.
- “Another Assault,” 30.14.318, 30.15.341.

Conditions in Scripture

- “Open Letter to Rev. Andrew Petter,” 25.15.350, 25.16.376. This was the first article from Ophoff regarding the covenant controversy in the PRC; it appears in the May 1, 1949 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.
- “Rev. Petter Replies,” 25.17.398, continued in “Reply to Rev. Petter,” 25.18.420. Ophoff reproduced Rev. Petter’s reply and inserted his comments. The meaning of the word “condition” was still the issue.
- “The ‘If’ Sentences in Deuteronomy,” 25.18.423. Ophoff demonstrated that the use of the Hebrew word “im” in Deuteronomy does not

suggest that we must fulfill a condition in order for God to bless us, but does often indicate an inseparable connection between obedience and blessing, and disobedience and cursing. The Hebrew word “ki” does the same, emphasizing that Israel experiences blessing “when” she obeys, that is, in the way of her obedience.

“Reply to Rev. Petter,” 25.19.442.

“The Fathers Regarding Conditions,” 25.20.466.

“Rev. Petter Replies,” 25.21.493.

“Comments on Rev. Petter’s Article,” 26.2.40.

“On Breaking the Covenant,” 26.15.351. A positive explanation of Deuteronomy 31:16.

“Reply to Rev. Petter,” 26.16.375.

“Once More—the Promise,” 27.16.375, 27.17.395, 27.18.425. Ophoff noted that God does not make promises by using “if . . . then” clauses.

“The Article of Rev. J. D. DeJong,” 28.9.201.

“Rev. B. Kok—His Untruths,” 28.18.427. In this and following articles, Ophoff began a response to Rev. Kok. In an article in the *Concordia*, Kok tried to prove that those who opposed the idea of a conditional covenant (Hoeksema and Ophoff, in particular), and who opposed the use of the word “condition” as it was then being used, had in fact used that very word often in the last decades.

“An Open Letter to Rev. B. Kok,” 28.20.474.

“My Statements on Esau: Reply to Rev. B. Kok,” 28.21.498.

“Strange Reasonings (Reply to Rev. B. Kok - Conclusion),” 28.21.501, 28.22.519.

“The Gospel and the Command,” 29.1.23. Ophoff noted that God’s grace is always the cause of our obedience to His commands.

The Declaration of Principles

“Rev. Petter Has Arrived,” 27.3.62. A. Petter had announced his intent to examine the “Declaration of Principles.” Doing so, he would defend his conditional covenant view. In this article Ophoff indicated his readiness to respond to Petter in a spirit of seeking truth, not exalting persons. Ophoff also remarked that the controversy could be ended immediately if both sides would agree that the Canons of Dordt speak decisively to the matter of conditions in the covenant.

“Rev. Petter on Right Attitude in Controversy,” 27.4.88.

“The Declaration of Principles (Rev. Petter on Church Factions),” 27.5.111.

“Rev. Petter’s Fourth Installment,” 27.6.135.

“The Rest of Brother TenElshof’s Article,” 27.7.161. George TenElshof had submitted a contribution regarding the Declaration of Principles (27.5.120), Ophoff began a response to it in “Rev. Petter’s Fourth Installment,” 27.6.135.

“Rev. Petter’s Fifth Installment,” 27.7.162.

“Rev. Petter’s Sixth Installment,” 27.8.182.

“Rev. Petter’s Sixth and Seventh Installments,” 27.9.206, 27.10.234.

“Rev. Petter Replies,” 27.11.254.

“Rev. Petter Repeats Still Another of His Accusations,” 27.12.278.

The Conditional Covenant View of the Liberated and of Prof. Heyns

“Questions for Prof. Dr. Schilder,” 26.13.302.

“More Questions for Prof. Schilder,” 26.14.328.

“Prof. K. Schilder Replies,” 26.20.473.

Comments on Prof. Holwerda’s speech regarding the reunion of the Liberated and Synodicals

“Prof. B. Holwerda’s Address,” 26.5.112. Concluding the article, Ophoff said he will expand on these matters in a following article. Where this following article is remains a mystery.

Church Political Aspects of the Conditional Covenant Controversy

“My (Ophoff’s) Reply to Kok,” 30.12.273. Ophoff responded to Kok’s quotes of Ophoff regarding Church Order Article 31.

“How Rev. Kok Continues to Operate,” 31.10.237.

Doctrinal/Ethical

Because most of these articles were Ophoff’s response to what others wrote in other magazines, they touch on a variety of topics. To subcategorize them by topic indicates their general subject. However, this subcategorization is subjective and not precise. Some articles could be classified in more than one category. An exception to this are those articles that are written versions of Ophoff’s speeches.

Within each category, the articles appear chronologically, not alphabetically.

Afscheiding–True Reformation

“The Sect and the Sectarian,” 11.14.333. An article by Rev. I. Vanden Dellen touched on the CRC’s adoption of its 1934 Psalter Hymnal and on the American Revised Version of the Bible, relating these to the *Afscheiding* of 1834. Responding to this, Ophoff developed the point that all true reformation finds its origin in God.

Antithesis, Christianity, and Culture

“Light and Darkness,” 5.24.570. Ophoff responded to this statement from the pen of Rev. Ghysels in *The Banner*: “The elect have so many faults and the reprobate so many virtues that they are not easy to distinguish.”

“Conquering for Christ,” 5.24.576. A response to Abraham Kuyper’s idea that the Christian must conquer every field of endeavor for Christ.

“Socrates Memory to Be Cherished?” 6.20.479, 6.21.49

“Questions,” 7.19.454. The article to which Ophoff responded dealt with the relationship between Christianity and culture throughout history.

“Calvin College, or Jerusalem and Athens,” 10.2.43. Ophoff responded to Dr. Ralph Stob’s inaugural lecture.

“Otherworldliness and Our Earthly Tasks,” 10.7.152. This article is not a response to another article, but to the charge that one who denies common grace will flee the world. In it Ophoff set forth positively that the Christian, as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, will busy himself fulfilling the earthly callings God has given.

“Discovered, A Great Mind,” 10.11.260. Ophoff responded to this statement of Rev. H. J. Kuiper: “There is no conflict between the doctrine of the antithesis and that of common grace.” But, said Kuiper, only great minds can see that there is no conflict; small minds see a conflict where it is not.

“Rev. H. J. Kuiper’s Reply to J. Borst,” 10.15.356. J. Borst had countered Kuiper’s statement regarding the denial of common grace being anabaptistic, and Kuiper responded. Ophoff commented

on Kuiper's response. The line of thinking in this article follows from that in the previous two entries.

"The Achievement of Mighty Thinkers," 10.22.527. Ophoff responded to the idea that "Calvinism" (that is, the Kuyperian attempt to find the proper relationship between Christianity and culture) provides a higher motivation for education than other Christians previously had.

"Is There Christian Philosophy? If So, What Is It?" 12.20.468. Kuyper and Bavinck advocated a Christian philosophy. Ophoff responded that this philosophy was rationalism, not a philosophy at all. The article ends "to be continued," but where it is continued is not apparent.

Baptism and Covenant

"Dr. M. De Haan on Baptism and the Covenants," 7.16.368, 7.17.404.

De Haan left the RCA to found Calvary Udenominational Church of Grand Rapids. He rejected infant baptism, claiming it was based on a misunderstanding of the covenant of grace. Ophoff responded.

"Why Not Come Out With the Truth?" 7.20.478. A continuation of the previous.

"A Correction," 7.22.497. Regarding the previous.

Book Reviews

Kuiper, R. B., *As To Being Reformed*, 2.16.429, 3.1.9, 3.2.38, 3.3.68, 3.5.108.

DeKorne, John C., *Chinese Altars to the Unknown God*, 3.6.137, 3.7.163, and "Relative Good," 3.10.235.

Boettner, Loraine, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 10.13.295, 10.14.319, 10.15.346, 10.16.381, 10.17.393, 10.18.416, "Calvin and Revolution," 10.19.439, 10.20.462, "Calvin and Republicanism," 10.21.487.

"Dr. Henry Beets' Comment on Ds. Hoek's Review," 10.17.402. This article also related to Boettner's theology.

Christ the Only Mediator

"Christ and Grace," 6.7.158. Ophoff showed that all blessings come to us through and from Christ alone. How then can there be a blessing

for the reprobate wicked?

“De Middelaar, Christus Jezus,” 12.18.418. This is Ophoff’s only *Standard Bearer* contribution that is written entirely in Dutch without being occasioned by a question to him written in Dutch. Apparently this is the written form of a speech, for Ophoff gave his divisions. Ophoff addressed the idea of Christ as Mediator, His work as Mediator, the fact that He is an everlasting Mediator, and the significance (“*waarom,*” or *why*) of His being Mediator.

Christian Reformed Church

“Failing,” 7.16.382. Ophoff responded to an article of Rev. H. J. Kuiper regarding the state of morality in the CRC.

“A Eulogy,” 9.1.21. Rev. P. Hoekstra gave twelve reasons why he was a member of the CRC. Ophoff responded to them.

“A Mistaken Notion,” 10.10.236. Rev. De Korne suggested that reformation would require the reunion of various Reformed denominations. Ophoff showed why it could not be so, particularly regarding the PRC and CRC.

“A Strange Doing,” 12.2.44. The CRC had adopted a new, or at least expanded, form for public profession of faith. Ophoff questioned some of its wording and theology.

Church Attendance

“Loopers,” 16.3.72, 16.4.94. Related are the articles “Communication and Reply,” 16.5.113, 16.6.142. A “looper,” or “walker,” is one who attends worship services regularly in a congregation other than his own because he has objections to the minister or preaching in his congregation. Ophoff argued that “loopers” are sinning by so doing, and therefore cannot receive a blessing under the preaching in another congregation.

Church Government

“Prof. Volbeda Jubilant,” 14.7.163. This article regarded discussion within the CRC and the Netherlands on whether the authority of the synod over classis and classis over the consistory is the same as the authority of consistory over congregation.

Civil Government/Law/Politics

- “Should The Testimony of an Atheist Be Believed?” 6.7.161. Ophoff responded to a news item regarding a criminal law case that drew national attention.
- “The Church and Politics,” 6.16.380. Ophoff responded to an articles in which the author defended the idea that church membership is an integral part of social order, so that one cannot separate one’s church membership from one’s earthly citizenship.
- “Questions,” 11.15.359, 11.16.368. M. Gritters (a PRC minister at the time) had given a speech on the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of Antichrist. After the speech, questions arose regarding whether Christians may hold political office, and regarding praying for civil government. Ophoff answered these questions.
- “For Hereunto Were Ye Called,” 14.15.355. Although Ophoff refers to 1 Peter 2:23, this article is not an exposition of that passage. Rather, it defends the point that we must submit to our civil rulers, and it denies that we may refuse submission to them if they become tyrannical.
- “What Divine Duty Has the Civil Magistrate Toward the First Table of the Law?” 15.6.143, 15.9.215. At a speech at the League of Men’s Societies, Ophoff argued that the civil magistrates are bound to maintain both tables of God’s law, even though they may not establish a state church.

Clergy

- “Misrepresentation,” 6.3.61. Ophoff responded to M. R. De Haan’s warning against the perils of an unregenerated clergy.

Common Grace (including Total Depravity and Limited Atonement; see also Grace–Sovereign and Particular and Material Prosperity)

- “What Scriptures Teach Concerning Fallen Man,” 1.3.23. This article regards man’s total depravity.
- “Total Depravity,” 1.4.25, 1.5.21. Opposing Kuyper’s view, these articles set forth the Biblical doctrine of total depravity.
- “The General Offer Of Grace,” 5.12.279.
- “Misrepresentation,” 5.23.537. Ophoff responded to the idea that to deny common grace is to be Anabaptistic.

- “One Example,” 7.22.500. Ophoff pointed to comments of Rev. J. VanderMey to demonstrate that the world and life view that common grace promotes is unscriptural and antichristian.
- “Reply to J. Vander Mey,” 8.1.21. This is a continuation of the previous entry.
- “Strange Reasonings,” 8.6.142. This regards man’s total depravity.
- “Rev. H. J. Kuiper’s Reply to J. Borst,” 10.15.356. Ophoff opposed the idea that the denial of common grace is Anabaptistic.
- “More Strange Reasonings,” 11.6.126. Ophoff responded to Rev. J. K. Van Baalen’s comments regarding the influence the Christian must strive to have on and in the world.
- “More Strange Reasonings,” 11.7.150. Ophoff responded to two articles. One regarded whether children are totally depraved; the other regarded Rev. Ghysels’ meditation on John 3:16.
- “More Strange Reasonings,” 11.10.238. Ophoff responded to an article regarding the attempt to find in Calvinism an answer to our social and political problems.
- “Just So,” 11.22.527. The question is: Is every deed of the unregenerated sin in God’s sight?
- “What Will the Brethren Do About It? Nothing At All!” 13.5.113. In 1936, Rev. Ghysels wrote that humans are spiritually dead before conversion. Yet H. J. Kuiper and L. Berkhof argued that the unregenerate could do good works. Ophoff pointed out the contradiction, and predicted that despite this contradiction Kuiper and Berkhof would continue to defend Ghysels and oppose Hoeksema and Ophoff.
- “Not Noble,” 14.7.167, 14.8.184, 14.9.210. Rev. H. J. Kuiper faulted the Boy Scout movement because of the oath it requires. To this some in the CRC responded. Ophoff commented on their response.
- “Those Single-Track Minds,” 14.12.287. Some asserted that those who deny common grace have a single track mind; they can see doctrine only from one perspective, and they try to explain paradoxes that are inexplicable. Ophoff responded to this.

Covenant

- “Strange Reasonings,” 11.3.55. Ophoff responded to an article by Rev. H. J. Kuiper regarding the right and wrong use of the covenant.

“The Old and New Covenant,” 21.21.477, 21.22.502. This is the written version of a paper that Ophoff submitted to an officebearers conference.

Drama

“Dr. Martin Luther on the Stage Under the Auspices of Chr. Refd. Y.M. Societies,” 4.9.197.

Economics

“Our Brother’s Keepers,” 6.15.357. Ophoff quoted at length from a speech given by a philanthropist, and commented briefly. The article ends with the words “(To be continued).” Where this was continued is not apparent.

“Misplaced Zeal,” 6.21.504. Ophoff commented on an article in the *Grand Rapids Press* regarding a philanthropist.

Ecumenism

“The Miracle of the Year (?)” 6.9.197. Ophoff responded to a news item regarding an ecumenical meeting of Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews.

Education (see also some articles classified under “Church Polity” in the April 2018 issue).

“Dr. Clarence Bouma’s New Platform,” 3.3.62, 3.4.80, 3.5.117. Ophoff took issue with Bouma’s idea that Christians from all orthodox (read “historically Christian”) denominations and backgrounds should join together to sponsor Christian schools.

“A. Dykstra, The Bible, and the Public School,” 3.24.568.

“The Christian School,” 16.6.137. In this written version of an address delivered to friends of Christian education in Byron Center, Ophoff argued that God requires us to provide our children a distinctly Christian education, in distinction from the secular education that the government provides at public schools.

“The Christian School as A Seat of True Culture,” 19.22.506.

“Teaching Citizenship,” 32.14.333. The written version of an address that Ophoff gave to the teachers of Hope and Adams Schools.

Emotions, Religious

“Emotions,” 6.5.119, 6.6.142. Ophoff commented on an article in which M. R. De Haan underscored the need for an emotional response to the gospel.

“Spiritual Experience and Expression,” 12.14.324. This article comments on the Oxford Group Movement.

Family

“The Menace of Childless Homes,” 6.21.500. This article deals with childlessness, not in the church but in the world, and not on account of God not giving children to those who desire them, but on account of the ungodly choosing not to have children. A Supreme Court Justice had said that childless homes were the cause of divorce; Ophoff debunked that idea.

“The Causes of the Disintegration of the Christian Home,” 17.6.141. This is the written version of a speech Ophoff gave to the Men’s League. In it he suggested various causes for the disintegration of the Christian home. His promise of a following article appears to be unfulfilled.

Family Visitation

“New Method of Family Visiting,” 16.7.161. Ophoff pointed out the dangers of the suggestion (made by a minister in another denomination) that family visits be carried out by the pastor, unaccompanied by an elder. Essentially, these would be spontaneous pastoral visits.

God’s Counsel (see also *Predestination*)

“God’s Counsel and Prayer,” 2.16.415.

“From the Point of View of God,” 2.17.449.

“True Liberty,” 5.24.560. These were republished in “True Liberty,” 16.18.429, 16.19.452.

“The Liberty of God,” 6.1.18. An abbreviated version is found in “God’s Freedom,” 16.17.405.

“God’s Point of View,” 7.11.257.

“God, the Knowing One,” 8.10.238. This was republished in 16.20.479.

“God’s Counsel and Human Freedom,” 20.18.410, 20.19.418. Ophoff explained that humans, apart from grace, are morally in bondage to

sin. Also, by virtue of being creatures, humans are metaphysically bound by God's counsel. Yet humans are able to make choices, for which reason God can and does hold them accountable.

Grace–Sovereign and Particular (see also Common Grace and Predestination)

“The Doctrine of Sovereign Grace in History,” 12.21.497, 12.22.519.

This is the written version of a speech Ophoff gave at the 1936 Grand Rapids PR area field day.

“God Blesses His People Only,” 16.13.305. Ophoff appealed to many passages to show that God's blessing is only for His own, His elect; in the Old Testament, God blessed *Israel*.

“The Promise of God is Only to the Elect, Historically the Believers,” 32.2.46, 32.3.69. This is the printed version of Ophoff's speech at the 1955 PRYP convention.

Hell

“Do the Reprobated Sin in Hell?” 21.14.318, 21.15.342. Ophoff said that in hell God will put an end to the rebellion, defiance, and pride of the wicked. The wicked in hell will be filled with despair, anguish, pain, and distress, and will decry their sinfulness. They will remain rational, moral creatures; but being entirely passive, they will not add to their sin.

Historical (World) Events

“The Plague of Locusts,” 6.18.428.

“Corruption In High Places,” 6.21.497.

“The Naval Limitation Pact,” 6.22.524.

Hymns

“Comment on the Report of the Committee on the Question of Introducing Hymns,” 7.3.69.

“Comment on the Report of the Introduction of Hymns,” 7.4.89, 7.6.128.

“Reply to A. Voss,” 8.13.307.

“The Hymn Question (Reply to Wilfred G. Rottschafer),” 8.14.333, 8.16.369.

Lord's Supper

“The Lord’s Supper,” 24.1.10, 24.2.40. This is the published version of a paper that Ophoff gave at a minister’s conference in 1947. It regards Christ’s presence and sacramental working in the Lord’s Supper.

Image of God

“The Image of God (Reply to Rev. D. Zwier),” 15.16.390, 15.17.409. Zwier commented critically on Herman Hoeksema’s distinction of the image of God in the formal and material sense, rather than in the broader and narrower sense. Ophoff responded to Zwier. “Rev. Zwier’s Reply,” 15.18.434. Follows from the previous.

Material Prosperity (the Great Depression era began during the sixth volume year)

“Prosperity and the Wicked,” 2.15.399, 2.16.421, 2.17.441, 3.1.18, 3.2.31.
“Rain and Sunshine,” 5.21.492.
“Can It Be?” 6.8.190. Ophoff responded to the idea that the world is becoming a better place to live.
“Prosperity and the Wicked,” 7.11.247.
“Prosperity and Expansion,” 7.18.429.
“Will Material Conditions Improve?” 8.11.258.
“Thoughts on Prayer,” 8.12.274, 8.15.360. These relate to the question of praying for material prosperity.
“Petitioning President Hoover for a National Day of Prayer,” 7.7.154.
“Israel and the Nations,” 7.8.179.
“Prosperity and the Wicked,” 7.11.247.
“Think on This!” 7.11.255.
“Reply to Rev. H. J. Kuiper,” 7.12.281.
“The Heartless Attitude (?) Our Theology Begets,” 7.13.296.
“Prosperity and Expansion,” 7.18.429.
“Will Material Conditions Improve?” 8.11.258.
“Thoughts on Prayer,” 8.12.274, 8.15.360.
“More Strange Reasonings,” 11.8.173.

Miracles

“Rev. Van Baalen on the Miracles,” 9.12.284.

“The Miracles,” 14.2.43.

Missions

“Doomed to Extinction,” 6.14.327.

Persons and Events Recorded in Sacred History

“Rev. Hessel Bouma on Jonah,” 5.17.407. Bouma faulted Jonah for not loving surrounding nations also. Ophoff defended Jonah’s love for Israel exclusively.

“Esau and Common Grace,” 8.17.392. A response to J. K. VanBaalen in the *Banner*.

“Explanation,” 8.19.455, 8.21.496. Continuation of the previous.

“Pharaoh’s Daughter,” 8.21.489. In opposition to J. K. VanBaalen, Ophoff argued that Pharaoh’s daughter’s deliverance of Moses was not a true act of mercy.

“Wrong,” 13.2.47. Ophoff responded to a writer who alleged that Joseph was proud and ambitious.

Preaching of the Gospel, Office of Minister

“The Preaching of the Gospel the Keys of the Kingdom,” 12.18.414. This is the written version of a speech, but the occasion at which the speech was given is not clear. Possibly it was the 1936 seminary commencement speech.

“For Our Nation,” 16.9.214, 16.10.234. In 1939 a CRC announced that it had arranged to broadcast its services on radio. Ophoff responded that unless the Word of God is faithfully preached the such a broadcast will be of no help to the nation.

“The Preaching of the Gospel as Keys of the Kingdom,” 20.18.398. This article is clearly identified as the commencement speech for the 1944 graduation class from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. J. VanWeelden was the only graduate that year. It is a distinct address from that with the same title in 12.18.414.

“The Calling of the Minister of the Gospel,” 22.18.421, 22.19.444. This is the written version of the address given at the 1946 commencement of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, at

which James Howerzyl graduated.

“The Significance of Exegesis for the Preaching of the Gospel,” 28.19.453. This is the written version of the address given at the 1952 commencement of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, at which Herman Mensch graduated.

“The Calling of the Minister of the Gospel,” 33.19.441. This is the written version of the address given at the 1957 commencement of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, at which Alvin Mulder graduated.

Predestination

“Dr. H. Beets on the Doctrine of Election,” 4.12.286, 4.13.295.

“Sovereign Election and Reprobation,” 8.13.311.

“The Doctrine of Sovereign Elective Grace,” 8.15.344.

“Sovereign Election,” 15.8.189. This is an abridgement of the article in 8.13.311.

Protestant Reformed Churches

“Misrepresentation,” 10.21.500. Ophoff responded to Jean Vis, who had warned CRC members in the Sheldon area regarding the formation of a PRC congregation.

“Reply to Rev. Jean Vis,” 10.22.509. A continuation of the previous.

Psalms, Imprecatory

“Dr. Hessel Bouma and the Imprecatory Psalms,” 4.24.571.

Revelation

“Walking In the Light,” 8.24.558. Ophoff taught that natural man is unable to perceive God’s Word.

“In God’s Light We See Light,” 5.2.32. This is a written version of a speech Ophoff gave in the capacity of rector of the theological school.

“Christ, the Light,” 12.15.350. An abridgement of the article in 5.2.32.

Reward of Grace

“The Matter of the Reward of Grace,” 12.8.188, 12.9.205, 12.10.230. Ophoff responded to Abraham Kuyper’s view of the reward of grace.

Sabbath

“Pagan’s Enmity Against the Sabbath,” 5.17.395.

Salvation

“Fellowship with God,” 6.8.192.

Scripture Interpretation, Creedal Authority, Textual Criticism, and Higher Criticism

“Rev. J. K. VanBaalen and Mark 16:9-20,” 4.16.375. VanBaalen asserted that Mark 16:9-20 is not part of the inspired Scriptures. Ophoff explained what higher criticism is in distinction from textual criticism, and that higher criticism leads to a denial of the Scriptures.

“What Next?” 5.19.440, 5.20.469. Ophoff responded to M. R. De Haan regarding the authority of the creeds and teachers.

“A Case of Torturing Scripture in the Interest of a Theory,” 7.12.287. A response to Rev. Ghysels’ *Banner* meditation regarding Psalm 73.

“A Remarkable Example of ‘Inlegkunde,’” 14.22.527. This regards the right understanding of praying for all men, as the Holy Spirit enjoins in 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

“What They Are Doing (Reply to Rev. D. Zwier),” 15.11.258, 15.12.280. Ophoff showed that the proponents of common grace interpret Scripture as though it has actual contradictions.

“No Creed, But Christ (?),” 16.3.70. Ophoff responded to one who defended this slogan.

Societal Problems

“Europe’s Too Many Millions,” 6.11.263.

“Reformatories That Do Not Reform,” 6.12.288.

Science and Scripture/Faith

“More Trouble From Jonah,” 6.10.232.

“The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting,” 6.17.408.

“Religion Tested in the Laboratory,” 6.20.478.

“God or Evolution,” 6.24.576.

War and Peace

“A Marked Difference,” 6.22.526.

“The ‘Religion and Culture’ Men on World-Peace,” 6.23.550.

“War and the Church,” 14.16.382. Ophoff responded to the idea that the church may support war only when it aims at the preservation of life, law, order, peace, and justice.

“Peace on Earth; Good Will to Man,” 16.8.184. A writer decried that this song of the angels is evidently not being fulfilled on earth; Ophoff explained that it is indeed.

Tithing or Freewill Offerings?

“Why Not Tithe?” 17.15.358, 17.16.383, 17.18.430. The title of this article was originally that of a *Banner* article. Finding flaws in the argumentation of the original article, Ophoff argued that we must give to kingdom causes with freewill offerings according to need.

Miscellaneous

“A Declaration,” 1.2.21. This is Ophoff’s first *Standard Bearer* article.

In it he explained why he had cast his lot with those who wrote in and published the *Standard Bearer*: common grace is an error.

“Our Deposition,” 1.6.28. Ophoff informed the *Standard Bearer* readership that Hoeksema, Danhof, and he had been deposed.

“The Way They Work,” 6.5.118. Ophoff related that Rev. VandeKieft, pastor of the Hope CRC, tried to induce catechumens from the Hope PRC to come to him for catechism.

“Report,” 11.15.358. A report of the meeting of the League of Men’s Societies.

“Our Student-Teacher Club,” 25.8.184.

“Rev. Hoeksema’s Anniversary and Our Theological School,” 16.22.514. This is the written version of an address that Ophoff gave in commemoration of Herman Hoeksema’s 25th anniversary of gospel ministry. In it Ophoff recognized the role that Hoeksema played in the seminary.

“Anniversary Address,” 32.1.22. This is the written version of an address that Ophoff gave at a ceremony commemorating Herman Hoeksema’s fortieth anniversary of gospel ministry. In it Ophoff related how he first came into contact with Hoeksema, stated some points regarding the early history of the PRC, and magnified God’s grace in preserving the PRC.

John Calvin Research Bibliography

Compiled by Ronald L. Cammenga

#17: Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things

Related Topics:

- Calvin's amillennial viewpoint and the errors he rejects
- Calvin's view of the death of believers and the intermediate state
- Calvin's teaching of the second coming of Christ
- Calvin's teaching concerning the final resurrection
- Calvin's teaching of heaven and hell

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#18: Calvin's Views on Worship

Related Topics:

The necessity for the restoration of proper worship in the church of Calvin's day

The restoration of the proper motivation for worship

The fundamental principles of proper worship

The centrality of preaching

The role in public worship of:

The congregation

The individual believer

The minister

The consistory

Calvin's view of the Sabbath (Lord's Day)

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Book Reviews

Honey From the Rock: Daily Devotions from Young Kuyper, tr. James A. De Jong. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press and Grand Rapids, MI: Dutch Reformed Translation Society, 2018. Pp. xvii + 741. \$39.99 (hardcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The aptly titled *Honey from the Rock* is a collection of devotional meditations by Abraham Kuyper, translated from the Dutch by James A. De Jong. The meditations are Reformed spirituality at its best. The title is fitting in that the honey of the devotionals flows from the rock of Reformed doctrine by way of sometimes ingenious but invariably sound interpretation of biblical texts. Each devotion is short, about two or three pages. All of the two hundred meditations are based on and drawn from passages of Scripture. With one of them the believer can refresh his or her soul at the beginning of each day and console the soul at the end of the day, even the busy mother faced with the hectic day stretching before her or ending the day, well-nigh exhausted.

Kuyper wrote the short devotionals for his beloved “little people,” not for the theologians. But the theologians will devour them.

This book of spirituality

demonstrates a notable feature of all such genuinely devotional writings. They come from the heart and through the mind of profound, orthodox theologians. The best devotional writings are not those that abandon sound doctrine in order, as the authors claim, to produce “experiential” meditations of sheer feeling. These are shallow and ephemeral. They move the emotions artificially for a brief moment, and then their effects are gone, like the morning mist. Still worse, they leave the emotionally moved reader with the mistaken conviction that he has had a profound, genuine religious experience. All too often, such books advertising themselves noisily as “experiential” are obviously intended, not to apply the sound doctrine of the Word of God to the experience and practice of the reader, but to display the author as quite an extraordinary, spiritual fellow.

The good, and profitable, works of spiritual experience draw their spiritual honey from

the rock of sound doctrine. They do not merely titillate the emotions. But they *teach*. They explain Scripture. They ground Christian experience in the gospel. They do not *aim* at the emotions—they *affect* the emotions, but they do not aim at them; they aim at the regenerated heart and the sanctified mind.

The devotional writings of Herman Hoeksema are such works (see the three volumes published so far by the RFPA sub-titled “Reformed Spirituality”). Such was the naturally experiential writing of John Calvin, for example, chapters 6-10 of Book 3 of the *Institutes*. This is the nature of Kuyper’s volume of meditations. The believing reader will learn. Against a common notion that disparages doctrine, especially with regard to life, practice, and experience, Kuyper himself demonstrates the necessity and power of sound doctrine for healthy, godly living and experience. In his meditation, “Contrary to Sound Doctrine, based on I Timothy 1:10, Kuyper instructs the reader:

Christ possesses this true doctrine. He instructs you in it by his Word. He applies it to you by his Spirit. He stimulates you by it throughout the

course of your life. He develops your proficiency and capacity for living according to it. And like any good teacher, he shapes and qualifies you for this holy and totally glorious work of everlasting and completely blessed living... That kind of doctrine is consistent with what Christ taught. It is suited to people’s actual spiritual needs. It is not static, but it continues to develop. And that development occurs rather naturally. Such doctrine is sound and healthy. Trust it readily. Dare to rely on it freely. Then it will become living doctrine. It will be living in the sense of teaching you the art of living a glorious, godly, and completely blessed life. The result will be a steadfast soul and integrity in God’s eyes. Then already here on earth you will lead your life as a citizen of heaven, and above all, as a child of God (97, 98).

The meditation, “Lovely Thoughts,” based on Proverbs 15:23, identifies the conscience: “Even within ourselves, we are never alone! The thrice-holy God is always right there with us. That presence is our conscience!” In these few clear and compelling words, Kuyper answers the question that has puzzled believers,

including theologians, for centuries, which question many have attempted to answer with pages of complicated reasoning: “What is the conscience?” Kuyper then makes the stirring application:

Through it [the conscience] God continues speaking. So he knows what we know. He hears what we are telling ourselves, and he is listening to what we are deliberating with in the depths of our hearts... Now isn't that a glorious idea? Isn't it glorious to know that you never think or reflect on things alone, but that your God is right there listening to the solitary reflections of your soul? And isn't it also a powerful incentive to have holy desires and pure thoughts, because you know that all your thinking is a form of speaking in God's presence? That what you think is discerned by him? That it is either detested as offensive or loved as lovely thoughts in the heart of the thrice-holy God? (100, 101)

In his meditation on Romans 2:29, “Uncircumcised of Heart,” Kuyper both defines the covenant of grace and makes the warm application of this fundamental truth to the life and experience of the man, woman, or child with whom

God establishes His covenant.

The covenant of grace always conveys that our estranged and lonely hearts get a friend for eternity. This is a friend who locks us into a covenant that will never be broken. It's definitely a covenant that involves substitution. He takes on our obligation; we receive his glory. The exceptional beauty of the Christian faith lies precisely in this fact for us. It always has and always will—forever. This is the mystery of the work of salvation. This is what the soul treasures about the covenant. This is the goodness of salvation for the elect. This is the cup, the overflowing cup, of their peace and salvation. Then you realize that being circumcised [the covenant sign in the Old Testament; baptism means the same in the New Testament] amounts to being rooted in the covenant (118).

Not all of the devotional application of Scripture to the experience and life of the Christian is comforting. Kuyper's understanding of the tactics of Satan is disturbing. Kuyper warns of these tactics in his exposition of Mark 9:33, “Get Behind Me, Satan!”

It's terrible to admit this, but it has to be said: Satan possesses a bewitching power...The result is that the soul caves in to sinning. It falls under its spell. And ultimately it finds itself doing what at first it did not want to do...Sin is not the same thing as Satan! Sin is the goblet of intoxicating wine that passively stands on the table in front of you. It won't do you any damage unless you reach for it and drink from it. But Satan is an overpowering person who with one hand pries open your mouth and with his other brings the goblet to your lips and forces you, despite your resistance, to drink the intoxicating wine from it...Guard your soul carefully, so that you don't regard Satan as some monstrous being, for that's not how he ever approaches God's children. He only approached Jesus man-to-man [in Peter, Jesus' word to whom is the title of this meditation]. He never approaches us in any other way than as concealed in something or someone else. Satan will only be seen in all his horribleness when he is cast into the lake of fire. But now he almost always comes in some totally inoffensive and often in some completely lovable form...Sometimes he does it through something

very loving and tender. Not infrequently it's through your dearest friends and family here on earth. Brothers and sisters, never forget that Satan is very involved with you. He's engaged with everything and everyone that appeals to what you know to be unholy in you...Very often you meet him in the sweet lips and voices that appeal to your humanity and oppose what's godly...And if it gets to the point that Satan talks to you in a friendly way, caresses you with his words, and converses with you warmheartedly, what should you do? Allow yourself to be caressed? Soak up his warmhearted words like nectar? Or will you have the courage to plug your ears and to say: "Get out, you flatterer! Get behind me, Satan! You're inflaming my feelings against God!" (590-3)

The Reformed faith exposes the characteristic Puritan theology of experience, which is the mysticism that the Reformed faith abhors, in these words of Kuyper:

For an individual who is not fanatic but lives out of the Word, confession precedes spiritual experience, as the opening verses of Romans 5 make plain...Whoever begins

with experience and even hesitates to confess his faith prior to having a confirming religious experience opposes the salvation order (149).

Occasionally, Homer nods, as when Kuypers recognizes a “preserving grace that is also at work in unconverted hearts.” But Kuypers at once warns that this “preserving grace” “has nothing at all to do with saving grace.” Kuypers’s “preserving grace” is not the common grace of a well-meant offer of salvation” to all humans that has God desirous of saving all. On the contrary, “preserving grace” for Kuypers “creates room for the existence of the church of Christ” (152, 153).

The translator, James A. De Jong, and the publisher, the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, have done service to Reformed Christians, not only in the matter of genuine, biblical, and Reformed experience and practice, but also in the matter of the sound doctrine, out of which godly practice and experience arise. They have done service to Reformed and non-Reformed Christians alike by bringing to light the Kuypers of sound doctrine and of the genuine Christian, Reformed life. For far too long, this biblical Kuypers has been all but hidden behind the cultural Kuypers of common grace and of the “Christianizing” of the world.

The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation, by Rod Dreher. New York: Sentinel, 2017. Pp. xix + 262. \$25.00 (hardcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

There are any number of reasons why a review of this book in a Reformed journal would be unexpected. The author, himself a devout Roman Catholic, holds up Roman Catholic monasticism as the paradigm for the Christian church’s mode of survival in the present evil days. The Benedict mentioned in the title of the book was the founder of monasti-

cism. In keeping with his fervent Catholicism (although he is as critical of contemporary Roman Catholicism as he is of mainline Protestantism), Dreher emphasizes liturgy as the salvation of the church and her member, rather than the Word. Lacking is the confession that the salvation of the church and her elect members depends upon the grace of God.

There are reasons, nevertheless, why the book can profitably be read by members of Reformed churches, and discussed in Reformed study groups. It succinctly outlines developments in Western, formerly at least nominally, Christian society that have brought the nations of the West to the godless state in which Christians find themselves today. And not only godless. Also aggressively anti-Christian.

Dreher warns that the Western nations, very much including the United States and Canada, are about to break out in overt persecution of Christianity and Christian. The hatred of the nations of the West for Christianity is palpable. The challenge for the Christian church is not today (if ever it was), how to influence ungodly society. But the challenge, or calling, is, how to be, and remain, the faithful church of Jesus Christ in this hostile world.

Dubiously using monasticism as the paradigm, which monasticism, according to the author, preserved the early church in hard times, Dreher calls on the church to forget about influencing the world and to devote itself to the preservation of itself against seduction and persecution. Influencing the world today is a

lost cause (as though it were ever any different). Rather than “influence,” and even “win,” the world, the mandate—the *urgent* mandate—of the church is simply “be the church.” More than once, Dreher exclaims, “In the world, but not of the world.”

The Reformed reader will recognize Dreher’s insight as the historic Reformed message of the antithesis, although Dreher does not use the term. God preserves His church in AD 2019, as He preserved her in all of history leading up to AD 2019, by calling her to separation—*spiritual* separation, but separation—from an ungodly and hostile world. The urgent calling of the church today, as always, is not that she *win* the world, but that she *resist* the world.

How the churches and professing Christians need to hear and take to heart this presentation of the calling of the church! The prevailing conception of the calling of the church and of the individual Christian is that they must influence the culture; win the cultural war; convert the kingdoms of man into the kingdom of God; and many more similar slogans that, in fact, open up the churches to the thinking and behavior of the world of the

ungodly. In Reformed circles, this kind of thinking about the relation of church and world is encouraged by the unbiblical, but sacrosanct, theory of a common grace of God at work in the world. This fictitious grace supposedly renders the world susceptible to becoming “Christianized.” In reality, it enables the world to influence the church, including today the approval of sodomite “marriage.”

A second element of Dreher’s urgent message is the sovereignty of God, although neither does the author use this phrase. Modern man in the West does not acknowledge and honor reality as established by the Creator. But modern man thinks to create reality himself. He is sovereign. The outstanding instance of this dethroning of God and enthroning of himself is the homosexual movement. God created the “order” of humanity as male and female, an order forcefully imprinted upon the very biological and psychological natures of the two divisions of humanity. This order is fundamental to marriage and family, which are themselves essential to the life and continuation of the human race. Modern man in the West rebels against the sovereignty of God in this

creation of reality and creates (as best he can) a new and different reality for humanity with all the implications of this new reality for the fundamental institutions of marriage and family. Man determines reality for himself. This sovereign determination of his or her sex by humans themselves ignores the will of God as revealed both in nature and in Scripture and bases itself on *feeling*.

For Christians, the meaning of sexuality has always depended on its relationship to the created order and to eschatology—the ultimate end of man...The legitimacy of our sexual desire is limited by the givenness of nature. The facts of our biology are not incidental to our personhood. Marriage has to be sexually complementary because only the male-female pair mirrors the generativity of the divine order. “Male and female he made them,” says Genesis, revealing that complementarity is written into the nature of reality. Easy divorce stretches the sacred bond of matrimony to the breaking point, but it does not deny complementarity. Gay marriage does. Similarly, transgenderism doesn’t merely bend but breaks the biological and metaphysical

reality of male and female. Everything in this debate (and many others between traditional Christianity and modernity) turns on how we answer the question: Is the natural world and its limits a given, or are we free to do with it whatsoever we desire? (200, 201)

The issue in what the author calls the “sexual revolution” is, who is sovereign, God or man? And this is to ask, who is God? Contemporary western society has made its choice. It genuflects to Man, that is, to itself. It is ready to persecute the infidels who worship the (to them) false god of Christianity. Indeed, as the author points out, the persecution has already begun. Decline to bake a cake for a “sodomite wedding,” or express publicly that homosexual activity is sin, and the punitive power of the state is unleashed against the otherwise law-abiding citizen or organization, including the Christian school.

[The] Sexual Revolution... has been nothing short of catastrophic for Christianity. It struck near the core of biblical teaching on sex and the human person and has demolished the fundamental Christian conception of society, of families,

and of the nature of human beings...As the Sexual Revolution advances, Christianity must retreat—and it has, faster than most people would have thought possible (202).

Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy proclaimed the godlike sovereignty of Western humanity in his explanation of the Supreme Court decree approving as a right the murder of unborn babies (abortion): “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life” (44). A high priest of old Baal could not have rejected the sovereignty of the God of Israel more clearly and defiantly.

Dreher urges specific actions upon Christians in our fateful time in history. One is the honoring of marriage *for life*, with its nurture, protection, and instruction of the children.

The other is the instruction of the children in good, Christian schools. Christian parents, who desire not only the salvation of the children, but also the preservation of the church in those children, must remove the children from the public schools forthwith. Not only is the spiritual welfare of the children at stake, but also

their receiving a good education. Public schools do not educate. No financial sacrifice is too much. “It is time for all Christians to pull their children out of the public school system” (155).

The book concludes with warning against two contemporary movements in Western society. The first is the “Sexual Revolution.” This revolution is destructive of family. It is destructive of society. It is destructive of Christianity.

The other movement Dreher describes is that of “Technology.” Because this reviewer has not a technological hair on his head and intends to live and die without so much as a cell phone, some of Dreher’s obviously hair-raising warnings escape him. For example, “technology itself is a kind of liturgy that teaches us to frame our experiences in the world in certain ways and that, if we aren’t careful, profoundly distorts our relationship to God, to other people, and to the material world—and even our self-understanding” (220).

But every Christian can understand Dreher’s admonition to “take smartphones away from kids,” among other reasons to keep them from “hardcore porn” (229).

When parents hand their children small portable computers with virtually unlimited access to the Internet, they should not be surprised when their kids—especially their sons—dive into pornography. Unfortunately, with boys at least, it’s in the nature of the hormone-jacked beast. Moms and dads who would never leave their kids unattended in a room full of pornographic DVDs think nothing of handing them smartphones. This is morally insane (229).

The Reformed Christian committed to the sovereignty of a holy God and to the antithesis as the way of life of the church of this holy God in a totally depraved world can read the book with benefit, the Roman Catholicism notwithstanding.

Knowing his own weakness and failures in carrying out his calling and commitment regarding the apostolic injunction, “keep [yourself] unspotted from the world” (“in the world, but not of the world” is much easier to say than to practice), while at the same time relying upon the faithfulness of God to him and his children, he will appreciate the quotation of the poet, W. H. Auden, with which the book concludes: “stagger onward rejoicing” (241).

Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dordt, by W. Robert Godfrey. Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019. Pp. xiv + 265. \$19.00 (hardcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

W. Robert Godfrey of the United Reformed Churches (URC) and their seminary, Westminster Seminary California, adds his voice to the chorus of Reformed celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt, 1618/1619. For the most part, his voice is on pitch and pleasing. Godfrey soundly explains and vigorously defends Dordt's Canons, the Reformed creed that confesses the gospel of salvation by sovereign, particular grace, while exposing and condemning the heresy of salvation by the will of the sinner.

Indeed, to render Dordt's doctrine clearer, Godfrey offers a new, fresh, simpler translation of the creed from the original Latin.

The value and bulk of the book are its succinct explanation of the Canons, with pointed reference along the way to the false doctrine of Arminianism that the Canons is gainsaying. For example, in treating of Canons, I.7, the main article on election, Godfrey observes that the Arminians taught election "of classes of people or of conditions for salva-

tion," rather than "of particular persons" (90).

Again and again, Godfrey sharpens understanding of fundamental issues in the Reformed/Arminian controversy by incisive analysis. Explaining Canons, 1.9, Godfrey declares that "election does not flow from faith or holiness, but rather faith and holiness flow from election" (92). His explanation of Canons I, Rejection of Errors 3 penetrates to the very heart of the controversy that the Reformed faith has with Arminianism: "Faith is not a work, but a looking away from oneself and all one's good works to Christ alone" (105).

There is more to the book, its worth, and its appeal, however, than only the new translation of the creed and the explanation of its articles, positive and negative. There is a fine presentation of the historical and theological background, or setting, of the synod. In this chapter, we learn that the orthodox, fiery Gomarus challenged the doctrinally weak Martinus of Bremen to a duel (26), understandable, but hardly

the way to settle doctrinal controversy. Cooler heads prevailed, and Gomarus apologized. Whatever else this incident may reveal about the synod and its mentality, it surely indicates that the godly, orthodox theologians took doctrinal soundness (and error!) seriously.

The book also includes several valuable appendices. The most interesting among them is the first—a short re-examination of the person, life, and ecclesiastical conduct of Arminius, in light of recent attempts to portray him as a misunderstood and abused, but fundamentally sound minister of the gospel (185-227). Because Arminius did not publish much, this case can be, and has been, made, especially in the biography of Arminius by Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*. Godfrey demonstrates that Arminius was a heretic (although Godfrey does not call him a heretic) and that, as is invariably the case with heretics, he was clever and deceitful both in disguising his errors and in disseminating them.

Godfrey concludes that Arminius was a “dissembler” (226) and that Abraham Kuyper was right in describing Arminius as “a crafty fox” (227).

Unfortunately, Godfrey’s voice singing the praises of Dordt falls silent at places in the chorus celebrating Dordt where it ought to sound fortissimo. In general, the account of Dordt, its doctrines, and its polemics says nothing concerning contemporary attacks upon, and deviations from, the gospel of grace confessed by Dordt, especially in the churches that have the Canons as their creed. Surely, the “saving [of] the Reformation” in 1618/1619 calls on the sons of Dordt to preserve Dordt’s salvation in 2019, and then in the very Reformed churches that claim the Canons as their creed.

Why does Godfrey’s voice fall silent concerning Harold Dekker’s open promotion of universal atonement, in opposition to the second head of the Canons, in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), of which church Godfrey was a member at the time? Why in explanation and defense of the first head of doctrine of the Canons is there no mention of Harry Boer’s denial of predestination and of the CRC’s acquiescence in this denial? Why is there not so much as mention of the heresy of the Federal Vision, which denies the Canons in its entirety, even though the heresy has appeared

in virtually all the “conservative” Reformed churches in North America, including Godfrey’s own, the URC?

Did the Canons save the Reformation in 1618/1619 only for the benefit of Reformed churches in 1618/1619? Is it today only of historical interest? Does it no longer function on behalf of the preservation of the Reformation, that is, the gospel of grace and, thus, on behalf of the true churches of Christ?

And why, I may ask, although I know the answer to the question, when Godfrey is elucidating the glorious “tradition” of Dordt, including “Augustine against Pelagius” and “Luther against Erasmus,” does he omit Hoeksema against the CRC of 1924? As a learned church historian, Godfrey is well aware that the CRC embraced the “well meant offer of the gospel,” the doctrine of a saving grace of God that is universal and ineffectual and in which doctrine were the seeds of Harold Dekker’s universal atonement (as Dekker publicly acknowledged) and of Harry Boer’s denial of reprobation (as Boer publicly stated). As for the heresy of the Federal Vision, and its rejection of the Canons *en toto*, its root is the theology of a well

meant offer in the specific form of a universal, conditional, resistible covenant of grace, as the men of the federal vision themselves loudly broadcast.

Godfrey’s voice is noticeably muted in his explanation of Canons, 1.15, the article on reprobation, which article is fundamental to the whole of Dordt’s defense of grace. Godfrey’s commentary on the article includes one line of explanation—*one* short line. Immediately, Godfrey asserts that “the critical point the article wants to make is that there is nothing unjust about God’s leaving sinners in their sin.” The assertion is patently false. Although there is at the very end of the article a brief denial that reprobation makes God the author of sin, the “critical point” of Article 15 is the strong confession, clear explanation, and sturdy defense of the doctrine of predestination with regard to the sovereign, eternal decree of reprobation. Nothing of this appears in Godfrey’s commentary. Every one may read the article for himself.

As his voice falls strangely silent on occasion in the chorus commemorating Dordt, so at times is it disconcertingly off pitch. One such time is his criticism of Prince Maurits’ imprisonment of

the political foe of the Reformed churches, Jan van Oldenbarnevelt (19). There is good reason to believe that the imprisonment and later execution of Oldenbarnevelt were not religiously motivated, a case of the Reformed church persecuting its doctrinal foes. Oldenbarnevelt's fault was not religious, but political. He was a politician. His politics at the time was treasonous. He raised a personal army to contend with the national army headed by Maurits. In addition, Oldenbarnevelt entered into secret negotiations with Spain, the avowed foe of the Netherlands, and concluded a secret treaty with that cruel oppressor of the Netherlands. One may legitimately differ with Godfrey's charge against Maurits and the Reformed churches that the arrest of Oldenbarnevelt "was a shameful act against a Dutch patriot and one of the low points for Dutch Calvinists" (19).

More serious is Godfrey's facile and false treatment of "common grace" in Canons III/IV, Rejection of Errors 5. This is the sole mention in all three Reformed confessions of the doctrine that has become exceedingly popular in Reformed churches today—the doctrine of a common grace of God. Significantly, the

Canons attributes the doctrine of common grace to the Arminians. Godfrey is quick to deny that the common grace condemned by the Canons is "at all related to Abraham Kuyper's teaching about common grace" (148). Thus, of course, he distinguishes the common grace of the Arminians, the common grace condemned by the Canons, not only from that of Kuyper, but also from that of the URC, which is, in fact, that of the CRC.

But Godfrey is mistaken, and misleading. The common grace of the Arminians, as described in Canons III/IV, Rejection of Errors 5 is very much the same as that of Abraham Kuyper and much more the same as that of the CRC and its spiritual daughter, the URC.

The common grace of the Arminians, as clearly described by the Canons, is a grace, or favor, of God to "corrupt, natural man," indeed reprobate man. This grace is shown first in things natural. It progresses to the possibility of "evangelical and saving grace and salvation itself." So, the Canons, in condemnation of this universal grace.

Such also is the common grace of the CRC and of the URC. Developing Kuyper's common grace in (to quote the Canons)

“gifts remaining after the fall,” which gifts moderate, that is, negate, total depravity, which is the doctrine of the second and third points of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924, the CRC and the URC advanced to a saving grace to all humans in the well meant offer of the gospel, as confessed in the first point of common grace of 1924. Now, according to Arminianism, and according to the CRC and the URC as well, in the language of the Canons, “God for His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ to all.”

The common grace of the CRC and URC is identical to that of the Arminians as condemned by the Canons 3-4, Rejection of Errors 5. It is identical in content: common grace as an “evangelical or saving grace” which has God showing Himself “ready to reveal Christ unto all men, since

He applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion,” namely the well meant offer of the gospel. It is identical in development: a common grace consisting of a favor in natural, earthly life, including gracious gifts that compromise total depravity, which favor becomes a “saving grace” in the well meant offer of the gospel. It is identical in its conflict with the Canons of Dordt.

Against the doctrine of common grace, as confessed by the CRC, by the URC, and evidently by Robert Godfrey, the Canons quote Psalm 147:19, 20; Acts 14:16; and Acts 16:6, 7.

Happily, the discordant sounds, in Godfrey’s book, are few and isolated, although ominous. The Reformed man or woman will enjoy, and profit from, Godfrey’s remembrance and celebration of Dordt.

The Reformation and the Irrepressible Word of God: Interpretation, Theology, and Practice, ed. Scott M. Manetsch. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2019. Pp. viii + 244. \$30.00 (softcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Volumes consisting of individual essays by a number of authors seldom make a good book, even though the essays, or most of them, may be good. The reason is that the volumes are individual

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essays by a number of authors. This is such a volume. The best, if not the only, way to review such a volume is to comment on each essay, or on those that stand out.

What holds the volume to-

gether, if indeed it is held together, is the Reformation's confession of the importance and power of the Word of God, Holy Scripture, for the salvation of sinners and for the existence itself of the church. Running through all the articles, demonstrating this theme, are apt, compelling quotations of the Reformers, especially Martin Luther.

The editor has divided the volume into four main sections: "Biblical interpretation in the Reformation"; "The Preaching and Pastoral Care in the Reformation"; "Justification and the Reformation"; and "The Christian Life in the Reformation." The editor provides an introduction. Timothy George adds an afterword.

The editor proposes that the Protestant martyrs witnessed to the irrepressible Word of God simply by their willing death on behalf of that Word. From jail, a Flemish martyr, wrote: "Let them burn; let them strangle; let them kill and murder, by fire, nooses, the sword, and water as much as they want, the Word of God still remains and will remain eternally" (31).

With appeal to Luther, David Dockery contends for the "Christological principle" of the interpretation of the Bible: refer all Scripture to Christ.

The preaching of Hugh Latimer is the subject of the essay by Michael Haykin. Latimer urged preachers to give the people "meat, not strawberries." Latimer praised preaching that is a "nipping sermon, a pinching sermon, a biting sermon" (74). He noted that one of the marks of a true servant of God is "suffering persecution" (73).

Ronald Rittgers argues, rightly, that the Protestant Reformation regarded preaching as a means of grace. Preaching replaced the various superstitions of the Roman Church that were supposed to bring the bewitched people into contact with God. Disconcerting is the suggestion that preaching for Protestantism is the "enchantment" that Rome avows by its many superstitions, as though preaching is an enchantment: "I think we are dealing with an especially important evangelical version of sacrality, even enchantment" (99). Rittgers is right to explain the belief of the Reformers as holding that Christ is present in the preaching of the gospel (100). Rittgers distinguishes himself among the various authors in emphasizing that the saving power of the Word is not the simple reading of the Bible, but the *preaching* of the Bible.

Michael Horton argues that the Reformation doctrine of jus-

tification by faith was presaged in some of the church fathers, notably Chrysostom. Chrysostom was also Calvin's "favorite patristic commentator" (118). Regarding the gospel-truth of justification, Horton observes, correctly, quoting Calvin, that the "gospel" of Rome is: "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (125).

A large, and compelling, part of the essay of Kevin DeYoung is his analysis of contemporary society as burdening itself with a heavy sense of guilt, over such things as racism and environmentalism, while ruling out all possibility of pardon, inasmuch as for contemporary society there is no God, who can pardon. Referring to the members of the secular society of the West, "we are a people loaded with guilt," while at the same time we "completely reject any traditional notions of sin and salvation" (137). Thus, DeYoung indicts the modern culture, exposing its folly and hopelessness. He concludes his piece with a clear, sound statement of biblical justification. Justification is not mercy without justice, but the satisfaction of justice.

If one essay stands out to this reviewer, it is Thomas McCall's treatment of "The Bible and Sanc-

tification" (147ff.). The author demonstrates from the writings of Luther that, contrary to the judgment of certain prominent Lutheran theologians, Luther did full justice to the reality and importance, indeed necessity, of Christ's saving work of sanctification. Luther himself was in agreement with the Reformed doctrine of the "third use of the law" as the authoritative rule of the Christian life. For Luther, good works *follow* faith and forgiveness. Good works demonstrate faith.

Calvin taught that sanctification has such importance that it is the goal and purpose of justification: "Do we not see that the Lord freely justifies his own in order that he may at the same time restore them to true righteousness and sanctification by his Spirit?" (154).

McCall contends that union with Christ makes justification and sanctification inseparable gifts to the believer. He denies that the "doctrine of justification is the only or the ultimate teaching of the Reformation" (166, 167).

David J. Luy explores what Luther had in mind with the priesthood of all believers. He had far more in mind than only polemics against the Roman doctrine of the priesthood of a caste

of men with magical powers.

In his afterword, George quotes Roland Bainton's analysis of church history as the struggle between a mind of conquering the world and a mind of fleeing from the world (200). Apparently, Bainton did not, at least in this

quotation, propose the truth of the matter: in the world but not of the world.

Volumes of essays by different writers on one, general topic have their worth—and their interest.

The Man of God: His Calling and Godly Life, Pastoral Theology, Volume 1, by Albert N. Martin. Montville, NJ: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2018. Pp. lvi + 456. \$26.00 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Barrett L. Gritters.]

My first acquaintance with Pastor Martin was in the mid-1980s when this capable speaker preached in Grand Rapids at a Banner of Truth Conference held on the campus of Calvin College. Pastor Martin spoke on the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit on the preacher in the act of preaching, a speech/sermon I considered transformative in the way I thought about making and delivering sermons. Almost twenty years later, Pastor Martin presented a similar speech, this time expanded into two parts. Because its content is so good and easily accessible on Sermonaudio, I require all my advanced homiletics students to listen to and be prepared to discuss Martin's doctrine of how the Holy Spirit works in and upon the preacher in the *act* of preaching. And few

ministers of my generation are unaware of all the recorded sermons and lectures of Pastor Martin and Trinity Baptist's tape ministry. It is understandable, then, that when I heard Martin's volumes on Pastoral Theology were coming out, I was eager to read and review them.

Pastor Martin's long experience as a preacher (46 years at Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, NJ) and at the same time a teacher of preachers (20 years in the Trinity Ministerial Academy) qualifies him to write three thick volumes (over 400 pages in each) on all the aspects of a preacher's life and work. *Man of God* is the first of the three planned volumes. As the subtitle indicates, the first covers the minister's calling and qualifications for the office. Volume two, recently

published, covers the minister's preaching and teaching labors. Volume three, soon-to-be published, gives instruction on his "shepherding, evangelizing, and counseling labors." All three are little more than transcripts (albeit carefully edited) of his eight-unit, four-year seminary course, which he taught and recorded one last time in order to bring them into book-ready form. But rather than diminishing the value, the spoken style adds value because it reveals clearly Pastor Martin's method of teaching, itself instructive to a preacher and interesting to readers. I expected the spoken style put directly into writing to be somewhat tedious; instead, it drew me in so that I read every word.

After an interesting 35-page biography, Pastor Martin treats two main subjects—Part One is "The Call of the Man of God" and Part Two "The Life of the Man of God." Actually, the book treats three or four main subjects. In connection with the minister's call, he focusses on the requisite qualifications; and in connection with his life, he emphasizes his relationship to God first of all.

Intriguing is Martin's suggestion that, in evaluating a young man's qualifications for the ministry, his peers know better than

his profs what are his weaknesses (67). Difficult as it would be, students would do well to invite their peers to point out in what areas he needs to grow or be corrected.

Martin emphasizes the qualification of "Christian experience." He does not mean a *mystical* experience by which a man comes to know his Christianity by a vision, but *life* experience in every dimension (chapters 6,7). In a rare criticism, I would suggest that Pastor Martin somewhat overstates the case when he forbids any man to serve in the ministry who has not experienced personally the highs and lows of the Christian life (92). Nevertheless, his emphasis on maturity of Christian experience is important for young men to read who might imagine that, just because they have memorized a great deal of Scripture and theology, they are prepared for the gospel ministry. Martin's four qualifications of Christian experience are love for Christ, faith in the great unseen realities, acquaintance with sin and grace, and humility and self-distrust. These are so important that I wish I had read them forty years ago when I first aspired to the ministry, and will make them required reading for future students in our seminary.

When Martin treats the qual-

ifications of speaking and leadership (chapters 9,10), he points out that a man may have the gift of speaking and thus be perceived as gifted for the ministry; but without corresponding *leadership* abilities may not be given office. It is very difficult for a seminary to test leadership abilities. Besides observing the government of his home (if he is married), the best observation must be during an internship, which gives heavy responsibility to a host church and pastor.

To this reviewer, one of the most powerful and important sections of the book was Martin's righteous railing against all subjectivism in determining a man's call and qualifications for the ministry. He urges two lines of defense to ensure that unqualified men do not enter the office of Christ: the elders of the church (that is, not merely the seminary professors), and a 'cross-section' of believers who will frankly assess the man's ability and character. Martin says that we must "dismantle this wretched system in which a man's subjective sense of call, based on his own personal assessment alone, puts him into the pipeline to be a pastor" (205). Note well, that Pastor Martin is advising that the frank assessment

of a ministerial aspirant by many believers be made *before* the man enters theological training—"into the pipeline." From many perspectives, attempting to make this assessment in the late years of a man's training may well be too late.

Space forbids my exclamations of praise for Martin's sound advice regarding a man's relationship to God—his personal, devotional life; his relationship to the people—not only *that* he loves them, but that they *know* how he loves them; his need for exercise and rest and eating well (those who know Pastor Martin are not surprised at this advice). But this should be enough for the reader to know that this reviewer gives the book highest recommendation.

Before concluding, however, I want to mention four dimensions of Pastor Martin's book that, combined, put the book in a class by itself.

First, Pastor Martin draws extensively from his own personal experience. The book is not full of, but it is sprinkled with, anecdotes from his own life and ministry. Older men are more inclined to this, and sometimes it may incline a reader to judge it to be lack of modesty and proper self-effacement. But for the most

part, this is a strength of the book.

Second, the book is full of exegesis. Indeed, it is *topical* treatment of dozens of particular aspects of the ministry; but that does not mean it lacks in careful and sound *exegesis* of Scripture. In chapter after chapter, it is a model of good exegesis.

Third, the book is suffused with quotations from older writers—lengthy quotations. Thus, by reading Martin you *get* Blaikie, and Candlish, and Dabney, Owen and Broadus, Miller and Fairbairn, Bridges and Marcel, Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones (and more). Of course, preachers will want to read these other works eventually; Martin's appeal is that he gives the preacher an appetizer of each in significantly lengthy quotations.

Finally, there is a clarity of thought and method in the book that is a model for young preachers (and old). The manner in which Pastor Martin treats every subject is even a model for mak-

ing and developing concepts in a sermon. He begins with a carefully (pre-) thought-out thesis statement in which every word counts, and then 'exegetes' the statement in a manner that enables him to repeat and restate his thesis. By the time the section is ended, the reader has as good as memorized his thesis and is well primed for substantiation of the thesis from history, from the older writers.

One may disagree with Pastor Martin on a few matters of opinion and an occasional doctrinal or exegetical point. But these differences diminish the value of the book so little they are hardly worth mentioning. What is worth mentioning is this reviewer's judgment that the three volumes that will make up this series not only *ought* to be, but in a generation *will be* on the bookshelves of every Reformed and Presbyterian preacher (and others) who is serious about serving the Lord Jesus Christ in the ministry.

Grace and Assurance: The Message of the Canons of Dordt, by Martyn McGeown. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association. Pp. xiv + 369. \$31.95 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19. Though not its only

achievement, the Canons of Dordt were without question the greatest achievement of the Great Synod.

The Reformed Free Publishing Association and the Reverend Martyn McGeown are to be commended for this fine work, which explains article by article the contents of the Canons of Dordt.

The book is written by a pastor for his parishioners. It is written with the man or woman in the pew in mind. It is written in such a way as to make the Canons of Dordt accessible even to young people and to novices in the Reformed faith. The language throughout is clear and colorful. The thoughts are well organized. The style is direct and personal. Most importantly, the arguments are straight-forward and easy to follow. These features make the book an excellent choice for a study group, as well as for catechetical instruction for older teens or young couples in the church.

The book begins with two introductory sections. The first is entitled “A Historical Introduction to the Synod of Dordt.” In this section, the author traces the history of the Arminian controversy during the lifetime of James Arminius, the progress of the controversy following Arminius’ death, and the resolution of the controversy at the Synod of Dordt. In this historical overview,

he discloses the “dishonest and manipulative” shenanigans of Arminius and the Arminians—ever the mark of those who are intent on schismatic behavior in the church (4).

The second preliminary section discusses “The Importance of Creeds” in the church. The Canons of Dordt are an important part of the creedal heritage of Reformed churches world-wide. The Canons, along with the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, constitute the Three Forms of Unity. But are creeds necessary? What are the perennial objections raised against creeds? Do not creeds divide the church rather promote unity? What role ought the creeds to play in the life of a church and denomination of churches? What are the distinctive characteristics of the Canons of Dordt? These questions and more beside are answered in this introductory section of *Grace and Assurance*. Pastor McGeown does an outstanding job of pointing out how God has and does still today use the creeds profitably in the life of His church.

The actual chapters of the book follow the organization of the Canons of Dordt. All 58 articles are explained, along with

the 34 articles in the “Rejection of Errors” section that follows each of the heads, or chapters, of the Canons of Dordt. That is a total of 92 articles—the whole of the Canons of Dordt—that are explained. Each article and each “Error and Rejection” are titled. The titles are extremely helpful and provide excellent summaries of the contents of the individual articles in the Canons, as well as the errors that are rejected. This is one of the praiseworthy features of *Grace and Assurance*.

Chapter one deals with the first head of doctrine of the Canons, which treats sovereign predestination. The second chapter covers the truth concerning the death of Christ and the saving efficacy of His death. Chapter three treats the combined third and fourth heads of the Canons, which treat the fall of man, total depravity, original sin, and the grace of God in the sinner’s conversion. The fourth chapter develops the fifth head of the Canons, which deals with the perseverance and preservation of the saints. Each chapter provides an explanation of the contents of each of the articles in that head or chapter of the Canons successively.

Those who are familiar with the Canons of Dordt are aware of

the fact that at the end of the heads of doctrine, there is a section entitled “Rejection of Errors.” The articles in this section are concerned with the false teachings of the Arminians, which are opposed to the truths set forth positively in the preceding section of that head, as well as various Arminian distortions of the truth that the fathers of Dordt were concerned to reject. In *Grace and Assurance*, the errors are treated *immediately following* the chapter in which the positive teaching of the Canons is set forth, rather than after consideration of all the articles in each of the heads of doctrine. The result of this organizational structure is that the truths positively confessed in the Canons are placed directly alongside the negative—the errors that militate against the truth. In the estimation of this reviewer, this arrangement is altogether beneficial and is one of the strengths of *Grace and Assurance*.

Chapter five of the book treats “The Conclusion to the Canons.” As important as the Conclusion is to the Canons, so important is this last chapter to the commentary on the Canons, which *Grace and Assurance* provides. In the Conclusion to the Canons, the fathers of Dordt summarized and rejected

the main errors of the Arminians, repudiated their slanderous accusations against the orthodox, and rebuked the behavior of the Arminians. One of the slanders rejected in the Conclusion was that the Reformed faith is destructive to piety and morality: “an opiate administered by the flesh and the devil” (Conclusion to the Canons). Another slander was that the Reformed faith makes God unjust, a horrible monster, and the author of sin. And, third, in the Conclusion the fathers rejected the Arminian appeal to human emotion, rather than to the Word of God. The Arminians caricatured the orthodox as teaching that “many children of the faithful are torn, guiltless, from their mothers’ breasts, and tyrannically plunged into hell” (Conclusion to the Canons). This, most emphatically is not the teaching of the Reformed faith. And finally, the synod urged all whether “in discourse [preaching], as in writing, [to handle the doctrines of sovereign grace] to the glory of the Divine Name, to holiness of life, and to the consolation of afflicted souls.” The synod called upon the ministers, professors, and teachers “to regulate, by the Scripture, according to the analogy of faith, not only their sentiments, but also

their language” (Conclusion to the Canons).

Each of the chapters in the book is followed by a list of discussion questions, which are intended to provoke discussion, as well as prompt other questions. Following the discussion questions, is a list of proof texts for that particular head of doctrine. After the chapter in which the articles of the second head are treated, not only are there proof texts provided, but all the biblical texts that speak of “atonement, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, satisfaction and washing.” In this same section, texts of Scripture at listed that speak of “all men” and “world,” in order to demonstrate that “all men,” “world,” “all, every, anyone” cannot mean “the entire human race.” He also demonstrates that we use the words “all, every, and world” in our every day conversation, and we do not mean “every human being.” He cites expressions like: “The whole world looked in horror as the Twin Towers crumbled to the ground.” “Everyone is invited to the youth center for pizza after the meeting.” Denial that these words and expressions refer to every single human being is not far-fetched. For some strange reason, these sets of discussion

questions and lists of proof texts are not included in the table of contents of *Grace and Assurance*. In this reviewer's judgment, they ought to be. This is a matter for the publisher to note and revisit if there are future editions of the book published.

There are three valuable appendices included at the end of the book. "Appendix One" is "The Remonstrance of 1610." "Appendix Two" is "The Opinions of the Remonstrants of 1618." And "Appendix Three" is "The Judgment of the Synod of Dort Concerning the Five Articles of the Arminians." These three appendices are valuable, not only from a historical viewpoint, but also for a thorough understanding of the Arminian controversy.

In the judgment of this reviewer, *Grace and Assurance* lives up to its title. Lives up to its title splendidly! Pastor McGeown makes clear over and over again that it was grace, the very gospel of grace, which was at stake at the Synod of Dort. What was at stake was the gospel truth that sinners are saved by free and sovereign grace, the grace of God, and not at all on account of their own works, will, or worth. God is God! And God alone is able to and does save lost sinners. The

free-willism of Arminianism is the ungodly God. "Freewill theology make man omnipotent.... What blasphemy against the omnipotent God" (254). God's grace is on display in salvation inasmuch as fallen, guilty, damnable sinners are the objects of God's predestination and salvation.

In the first head, grace is on display inasmuch as fallen, guilty, damnable sinners are shown to be the objects of predestination and salvation. In the second head, God's grace is shown to be a grace that is in and on the basis of the cross of Christ. In the third and fourth heads, God's grace is shown to be the power that brings men (the elect) to faith and conversion. And in the fifth head, God's grace is the power that enables the saints to persevere unto the end. It is all of grace, and nothing of man.

"Beware of Arminian deceivers who would draw you away from the grace of God" (79). The teaching of Arminianism is that "God's grace or mercy is... not decisive to the question of whether one receives the benefits of the cross or not" (172). "Biblical grace is effectual and irresistible.... According to Arminianism, the grace of God

cannot and may not be effectual, lest the abilities of man should be insulted. Far be it from man that he should be so depraved that only effectual grace can save him” (248). “The fathers at Dordt objected that Arminianism denies ‘all the efficiency [efficacy] of God’s grace in our conversion.’ In other words, Arminianism denies God’s power, making the Almighty depend on finite creatures” (252). “God’s salvation is entirely gracious, for God is under obligation to confer this grace upon anyone. God is, therefore, under no obligation to elect anyone, to redeem anyone, or to regenerate anyone” (256). “The power of God’s grace overcomes [His people’s] sins, so that their sinful flesh can never ultimately prevail against them” (285).

McGeown underscores the fact that Arminian theology is *conditional* theology. All conditional theology is inherently Arminian in nature. “The Arminians gutted election of any essential meaning. For the Arminians, God’s decree did not concern persons but conditions. God has determined to save all those who fulfill certain conditions....” (56). Article 9 of the first head “is a very important article because it condemns the concept and the

word *condition*. The Arminians used that word and championed that concept, but the fathers of Dordt refused to use it. We would be wise to avoid it also” (63). “This is not to deny that faith is the necessary means of salvation, nor is it to deny that unbelievers perish.... But this is to deny that faith is the condition that the sinner must fulfill in order to receive salvation or even to be elected” (65). “The Arminians love conditions....” (68). “In contrast, Arminianism teaches that faith is the *condition that man must fulfill* in order to receive salvation, for faith is supposedly man’s part or contribution to salvation” (153). “Remember that this article [2.8] was framed with the conditional covenant of Arminianism in mind, which was a covenant with all men on condition of faith” (176). “Arminianism, therefore, severs the cross from God’s eternal decree. The Arminians did not believe in a certain and definite decree, but in an indefinite and a conditional decree” (180). “The crux of Arminianism is this—any profitableness depends on man. Christ merited redemption for all, but the application of redemption depends on faith, man’s faith, which is the condition that he fulfills” (181-2). “Arminianism

teaches conditional salvation, conditional election, conditional redemption, conditional regeneration, and, you should not be surprised, conditional perseverance” (271-2).

This is one of the outstanding features of Arminianism, its reliance upon conditional theology. At the same time, this is a marker of Arminian influence on much of what passes today for “Reformed” theology. Conditions and man’s fulfillment of conditions is always an indication of the influence of Arminian thinking. Those in Reformed churches and denominations where there is embrace of conditional theology, are guilty of allowing the nose of the Arminian camel into the tent. And where his nose is, the whole camel is soon to follow.

Throughout the book, McGeown underscores the saving efficacy of Christ’s death, that by His death He accomplished everything that His death was intended to accomplish. It was real redemption, reconciliation, atonement, and propitiation. This, in the end, as he consistently points out, is the issue that divides the Reformed from the Arminians, in the days of Dordt and still today. The issue in the end is not numbers, the Arminians

claiming that Christ died for every human being, while the Reformed claim that Christ died for some only, for the elect. But the issue between them is the very nature of the atonement itself. The Arminian teaches that the efficacy of the atonement depends on man, exercising the power of his free will. He must accept Jesus Christ, “close” with Christ, open his heart to Jesus as Savior. The result is that many, even the majority of those for whom Christ died, although he died for them, go lost and perish everlastingly. That is blasphemous, altogether blasphemous! On the contrary, the clear teaching of Scripture is that all for whom Christ died are actually and effectively saved by His death. His death was not in vain for any for whom He died. “God intends the sacrifice [of Christ] to expiate the sins of only the elect” (162). “[A]rticle 8 teaches us the *particularity* of the cross. God did not intend, will, desire, or purpose to save any but the elect by the death of Christ. It is God’s purpose that the benefits purchased on the cross should ‘extend to all the elect.’ (Matt. 1:21)” 174).

Pastor McGeown is to be commended for his bold defense of Dordt’s robust doctrine of

double predestination, that is, both election and reprobation. “This decree is not the invention of speculative theologians, but declare the Canons, it is ‘that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God’ (45). “Reprobation occurs because of God’s good pleasure, for God is pleased to reject the reprobate wicked in order to glorify himself in the exercise of his just wrath” (107). McGeown does not shy away from, walk delicately around, or water down the truth of sovereign reprobation. And, he contends, the truth of reprobation must be preached. To be sure, it must be handled (preached) with care. But it must be preached. “Article 16 [of the first head] presupposes that reprobation is being preached, for it speaks of ‘the mention of reprobation.’ This is a condemnation of many preachers and churches where the doctrine of reprobation is buried in guilty, cowardly silence” (113).

It is in connection with his treatment of reprobation in Canons 1:15 that McGeown explains the difference between infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism. The interested reader should confer pages 104-106 of *Grace and Assurance*. For any who are interested in a concise

and helpful treatment of what for some, at least, is a puzzling distinction, it would be a help to read these pages and this discussion.

Of special note is McGeown’s consideration of Canons 3-4, 4 (216-22). In this chapter, he explains the “glimmerings of natural light,” to which the fathers of Dortd referred. He carefully and properly explains this article and demonstrates that the use made of this article by the Christian Reformed Church Synod of 1924 in its defense of the doctrine of common grace was altogether improper.

This reviewer very much appreciated the careful and pastoral treatment of Canon 1, 17.

Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

McGeown makes very clear that it is neither biblical nor Reformed to teach that all children who

die in infancy go to heaven. He is also adamant in maintaining that election and reprobation cut right through the generations of believers. At the same time, on the basis of Scripture, such as II Samuel 12:22-23, Reformed parents “have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children.” On the basis of this article, McGeown writes: “Nevertheless, article 17 stands firm, for God does not call reprobate children of believers out of this life in their infancy. God causes reprobate seed to grow to maturity, so that they can fill up the cup of iniquity and so that God can be justified in their destruction” (124). I might also add to this, that this is true because God has ordained that the reprobate must serve the elect. That can hardly be said if they die as infants. If the reprobate *in the sphere of the covenant* must serve the elect, it would seem that that would demand that they grow up, at least to some age.

One last strength of *Grace and Assurance*, which I wish to point out, is its extensive treatment of the preaching of the gospel, both as to its content and its use by God as the chief means of grace and salvation. Throughout the book, McGeown exalts the of-

fice of preaching, both as a means to work faith and to strengthen faith. Also in connection with the assurance of election and the assurance of preservation, God is pleased to use the means of the preaching of the gospel. At the same time, the truth of the preaching of the gospel stands opposed to the view of the preaching as a well-meant offer of the gospel.

I have one criticism of the book. This is not a criticism of the author, but of the publisher, the Reformed Free Publishing Association. I have voiced this criticism in connection with other RFPA books that I have reviewed. There are no indices in the back of the book—no textual index, and more especially a subject index. There is no good reason for this deficiency in a book that is published in the twenty-first century. Such indices would greatly enhance the enduring value of *Grace and Assurance*. With a subject index, the book would be consulted time and time again; without such an index the book is not nearly as likely to be used as a reference work. The RFPA would be well served by seeing to it that its future publications contain such helpful indices.

I heartily recommend *Grace and Assurance*, whether for per-

sonal profit, use as a basis for church discussion groups, or for catechetical instruction. Pastor McGeown has done Reformed churches the world over, who love and defend the doctrines of sovereign grace, a great service in writing this fine exposition of the Canons of Dordt. Our readers could do little better in observing the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt than to purchase and read this fine book explaining its Canons.

Pastor Martyn McGeown is a native of Northern Ireland. He

grew up in County Tyrone. He is a graduate of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Wyoming, Michigan. He is currently laboring as the missionary-pastor of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship in Limerick, Republic of Ireland, where he and his wife, Larisa, worship. He is the author of *Called to Watch for Christ's Return, Micah: Proclaiming the Incomparable God*, and is a contributor to *Here We Stand: Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation*.

The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice, by Keith D. Stanglin. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. xiv + 274. \$26.99. (softcover) [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles by which believers, and particularly preachers, ought to interpret the Scriptures. This book is a survey of the history of hermeneutics, examining the hermeneutical principles and practices of prominent church leaders throughout New Testament history.

Books in this discipline have already been written, but another is welcome. The principles by which we ought to interpret Scripture must not change, but scholars

may discover more about the development of these principles throughout history, or may make fresh observations about that history. In addition, they may have new insights into the application of the principles.

The Book's Main Section: A Summary

In his introductory chapter, Stanglin explains the necessity and benefits of studying the history of biblical interpretation. For one thing, precise Bible interpre-

tation is not just a matter of saying what *I think* the passage means, and proper application of a passage is not a matter of how *I feel* it applies to me. Our interpretation of Scripture must not be individualistic; we must understand how the church in the past and present interprets a specific passage. Because the church in the past has used different hermeneutical principles than are commonly used today, we must understand those principles and evaluate the church's past interpretation of Scripture. So "this book is a short history of biblical interpretation that describes the shift from pre-modern to modern exegesis and then assesses the implications of this shift for reading, interpreting, and applying the Scriptures" (8).

In chapter two Stanglin demonstrates that the earliest Christian exegetes had a high view of Scripture. Believing it was inspired, they were concerned to find Christ in it. They also promoted the "rule of faith," that Scripture could teach only that which accorded with basic Christian doctrine and could not contradict the gospel of salvation for sinners in Jesus Christ. That these early Christian exegetes were quick to find an allegorical meaning in a text, in addition to

its plain meaning, Stanglin notes. He uses the author of the *Epistle to Barnabas* and Irenaus of Lyons as examples.

The church father Origen (living in the third century) did not invent the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, but he did develop it into a system (chapter three). Origen's goal was to find Christ everywhere in Scripture that he possibly could; this desire led him to find Christ where Christ is not to be found—which essentially is allegorizing. Responding to Origen were the men associated with the School in Antioch, who emphasized that a text's spiritual interpretation must follow from its literal sense, but must not be allegorical.

An overview of exegesis in the medieval period is the burden of chapter four. During this period the "quadriga," the idea that every biblical text has a fourfold sense, developed. The exegete was taught to find what a passage means on the surface, what it teaches us to believe, what it teaches us to do, and for what it teaches us to hope. A greater emphasis on the literal-grammatical sense developed later in the period. The later medieval period was also the era of scholasticism; during it the church fathers were

more concerned to use Scripture as the foundation for systematizing doctrine, and were more ready to question wrong interpretations of a passage. This affected their hermeneutical method.

Chapter five surveys the era of the Renaissance and Reformation. Stanglin refers to the contributions of Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin, as well as of some Romish theologians and Radical Reformers. Two developments during this period were increasing skepticism regarding Rome's historic interpretation of the Scriptures, and increasing concern to ask what the original human writer of a passage (Moses, David, Paul, John, etc.) meant.

With chapter six the reader comes to the modern era, beginning already in the eighteenth century. During this era arose the modern approach to exegesis, the historical-critical approach. Those taking this approach argued that the Bible's assertions must not be taken at face value. The exegete can discover what the Bible means—indeed, what really is the Bible—by human reason, scientific methods, and historical reconstruction. This modern development alleges that what the original author intended has no relevance for us today, because

the Bible is not inspired, and because it has no abiding spiritual meaning for the church in every place and era. Therefore, the Bible can mean for you what you want it to mean, and I can apply it to my life as I feel.

Early in each chapter Stanglin focuses on the hermeneutical method of several representatives of that era. At the end of each chapter he draws conclusions regarding how the principles and practices of hermeneutics developed during that era. These concluding summaries were very helpful.

Striking is Stanglin's attention to the role that the Remonstrants played in laying the foundation for modern historical-critical hermeneutics (156-160). The Remonstrants stressed that the Scriptures were clear; however, they understood the Scriptures to be clear to every human, by virtue of God giving every human intellectual gifts and the ability to use reason rightly (aka "common grace," Canons of Dordt 3-4, RE 5). The Remonstrants also emphasized the need to understand Scripture's literal sense, but to the exclusion of finding spiritual meaning in the text. The Remonstrants desired to promote unity among Christians by agreeing that

the plain, literal meaning of Scripture was all that we must know—in other words, no confessions! Stanglin is a noted Remonstrant scholar, so his contribution on this point bears weight.

The Book's Approach: Finding Continuities

One of Stanglin's purposes in relating this history is to demonstrate that all hermeneutical development from the second century until the time of the Reformation has an essential continuity. From the outset exegetes understood Scripture passages to have two meanings—the literal and the spiritual, or the “letter” and the “spirit” (the book's title is borrowed from 2 Cor. 3:6). In each era exegetes understood the need to interpret a passage literally and spiritually; the development of each successive era through the time of the Reformation was in the area of understanding what spiritual interpretation involved.

In two ways Stanglin makes theme prominent. First, in the concluding summary of each chapter he notes the developments and continuities of that era to the preceding. Second, in each chapter he includes a graphic representation of the development of hermeneutical methods up to

that point. The graph in every chapter is essentially the same as the previous chapter, but adds something to represent the main development of hermeneutics in the era of which the chapter speaks. To make this apparent to the reader, I have included the graph for chapter six. (Cf. attachment at end of review.)

Stanglin is not to be faulted for finding continuities *per se*. However, he presses the continuity theme to an extreme. Were the differences between the Alexandrian school (of which Origen was a representative) and the Antiochian school (which opposed Origen's allegorizing) truly nothing more than “negligible” (67)? And was Origen's allegorical method and the resulting fourfold interpretation of Scripture *really* a development of what Paul intended by the spiritual interpretation of Scripture? One could argue (I would be one of them) that these were not instances of genuine continuity, but troubling departure from the meaning of Paul and from the guidance Scripture gives regarding its own interpretation.

The Book's Concern: Avoid the Extremes

Another of Stanglin's purposes in relating this history is to guide the reader to know what

to retain from past hermeneutical methods, and what to avoid. His evaluation appears in chapter seven: avoid both unbridled allegory (it completely ignores the literal sense) and unbridled historical criticism (it completely ignore the spiritual sense). To have allegory within limits, and a historical-critical approach within limits, is ideal. In chapter eight Stanglin outlines his view of how literal-spiritual exegesis should be carried out, and presents exegesis of six passages as case studies.

Here two questions come to the fore: does Stanglin pull back from both extremes *far enough*? And, in the end, does he avoid the use of allegory which results from reading *into* the text (eisegesis) rather than drawing a doctrine and application *out* of the text (exegetis)? About this, three comments.

First, Stanglin does pull back from one extreme—the abuse of historical criticism—because this approach undermines the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, and presupposes that the events recorded in Scripture did not really happen. He advocates understanding what the human writer meant, and developing the spiritual meaning of the text based on that “literal sense.” For this reason, Stanglin pulls back only from

the *abuse* of historical criticism, not from all historical criticism as such. For him a proper “historical criticism” is an understanding of the text in its historical context, not an attempt to reconstruct the history in order to prove that the Bible is genuine.

Second, on one crucial point regarding understanding the text’s meaning, Stanglin never touches. In the final analysis, the real question is not what the human writer meant, but what the Spirit of Christ who was in them (I Peter 1:11) meant. The true meaning of the text, even the *literal* meaning, often goes far beyond what the human writer intended. How many Old Testament prophets, speaking of the coming of the Messiah, understood that he would come not once, but twice?

Third, more troubling is Stanglin’s promotion of the use of allegory in explaining a text. Although warning against the abuses of allegory, he does not reject all allegory. To be fair, his idea of allegory is so broad as to include typology; in other words, Stanglin would say that we also are allegorical in finding types in the Old Testament. But Stanglin goes far beyond this. For him, to be allegorical is to be spiritual, and is to find Christ. Nowhere

does this come out more clearly than in his six case studies, with which he ends the book. According to Stanglin, Genesis 1:16 can be understood to teach that Christ is the sun and we, his people, are the moon (229). Genesis 1 does not refer to literal, twenty-four hour days, and therefore does not teach us exactly how God created the universe; rather, its purpose is to teach us theological lessons about God's transcendence, power, love, and goodness, so that we might the better worship him (231). The imprecatory Psalms, particularly Psalm 137, are to be read spiritually, not literally (234). Isaiah's prophecy of a virgin who would conceive (7:14) was not fulfilled only in Jesus, but had a historical fulfillment in Ahaz's day (236). The petition for daily bread regards not only those things necessary for the body but also spiritual sustenance (239)—which is not the same as praying for the spiritual graces of trust and contentment, as our Heidelberg

Catechism explains the petition.

Stanglin goes wrong in these particular instances, because he goes wrong in his idea of the validity of allegory. To allegorize a text is not the same as finding Christ in the text, or bringing out its doctrinal teachings. A right hermeneutical approach *excludes* allegory as the early church practiced it, as Origen developed it, and as the fourfold interpretation which was common during the Middle Ages demanded it.

This permissiveness and encouragement of allegory as a legitimate aspect of textual interpretation is the book's fundamental weakness. Because of this weakness, if the book were a textbook on biblical interpretation, I would not recommend it. However, it is not a textbook on biblical interpretation; it is a survey of the history of the interpretation of Scripture. As such, much in the book is valuable and can be read with profit.

Figure 6.1

Paul:	Letter	Spirit		
		/ \		
Origen:	Body	Soul	Spirit	
			/ \	
Quadruga:	Literal	Tropological	Allegorical	Anagogical
Alternative Order:	Literal	Allegorical	Tropological	Anagogical
	(history)	(faith)	(love)	(hope)
Early Modern Protestant:	Literal (with typological and christological meaning and spiritual application)			
Modern Historical-Critical:	Literal (authorial intent)			

The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture, by Cornelis Van Dam. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009. Pp. xiii + 304. \$19.99 (paperback). [Reviewed by Jacob Maatman.]

In *The Elder*, Cornelis Van Dam surveys the teaching of the Bible on the office of elder, from which he distills the principles of that office for today. The book belongs to the series *Explorations in Biblical Theology*, and, as is the custom of the series, the author follows the biblical-theological approach. Whereas a systematic approach divides the material more along logical lines, logical subdivisions of the subject (the name of the office, the nature of the office, the qualifications for the office, etc.), the approach of biblical theology tracks through the Bible, from beginning to end, and progressively gleans the data on the subject along the way in the history of revelation. The idea is not to impose a system on the subject, but to let the Bible speak for itself. It is almost as if the biblical theologian puts the blinders on to what he knows is coming next, so as to see the subject unfold, instead of starting out with it systematized.

This approach gives a fresh perspective to the office of elder. Van Dam presents Old Testament teaching in such a way that we are

put into the shoes of the Israelites. We get a sense of what the office of elder meant for them, and how it functioned as a regular part of life in the covenant community. The approach furnishes details that otherwise might have remained uncovered, such as the system of courts in place in Israel, and the connection of the office of elder with the age of thirty. It is enjoyable to see the abiding principles of the office arise out of the author's candid exegesis.

I do wonder, however, whether the biblical-theological approach somewhat disadvantages Van Dam's thought-provoking treatment of the interplay between the elders of Israel and the king, when the latter office became established in Israel. With the king, says Van Dam, we see centralization, whereas the elders "tended to diffuse political authority and to be antihierarchical. Ideally, the king was not to be an absolute monarch, but needed to respect the place and authority of the elders (1 Sam. 15:30)" (58). But, even though Israel's original request for a king was evil, God had had plans for a king (and

a kingdom organization) well before their request. Seen in the scope of God's counsel, the office of king was to be a bright type of the kingship of Christ, but biblical theology runs the risk of handcuffing itself when it comes to seeing things in light of God's beginning-to-end counsel. And then, generally speaking, centralization and hierarchy (we are not talking about hierarchy in the New Testament church, now) are not bad in themselves, but insofar as the person wielding the power fails to rule according to God's law.

Perhaps most importantly as regards approach, Van Dam demonstrates the continuity of the office of elder. It was not a surprise for the Jewish Christians to have elders in the church; they had known elders in the synagogue (as an aside, so with the deacons; cf. P. Y. De Jong's *Ministry of Mercy*), which was a continuation of the office that Israel had had for most, if not all, of her history. At the same time, as Van Dam points out, there is discontinuity between the testaments as regards the office of elder. Excommunication, for instance, has continued from the Old Testament into the New, but the manner is different, being no longer death

by stoning. So we see Van Dam's Reformed understanding of the Old and New Testaments. And, although he does not start with the Reformed creeds, liturgical forms, and church order (which is to be expected in light of his approach), his results show that the Reformed understanding of the office of elder is thoroughly biblical.

Regarding the office of elder, Van Dam gives a fine summary: "One could sum up the task of the office of elder as preserving and nurturing life in covenant with God" (8). This serves somewhat as a theme for his treatment that follows.

First, he considers the office of elder in the Old Testament, especially considering the elders as leaders and as judges. "As spiritual leaders, the elders represented the people before God as necessary." So, for example, "when they laid their hands on the bull of the sin offering," symbolizing the guilt of the whole people being imputed to the offering. But, the elders also "represented God before the people." They were called to read the law to and to teach the people of Israel, although "the duty of teaching rested primarily with the priests" (59).

The elders of Israel also served as judges. In this capacity, too, they represented God, and were called to reflect the truth, justice, and wisdom of God. So really did the elders represent God that an Israelite's "going to court or to the judges is literally described as appearing 'before God,' which in the context means 'before the judges' (Ex. 22:8)." At the same time, Van Dam maintains that, as judges, too, the elders represented the people of Israel. His description of the "involvement and responsibility of the people" (68) with respect to the elders yields a wealth of application for the congregation today.

One thing that the Old Testament (we think of the minor prophets, especially) makes clear is God's insistence on judgment, or justice. Consider the first item in Micah 6:8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Justice was so important! But what does it mean? Van Dam explains that doing justice does not in the first place, or even mainly, mean sentencing punishment. Rather, it has to do with the "relationship of peace

and rightness with God and with each other that Israel's elders had to safeguard and promote" (77). That is doing justice. To judge is "to restore the disturbed order and relationships of a community to peace" (78). With respect to righteousness, it is not to be understood legalistically. "Rather, righteousness and justice always include the idea of promoting fellowship and communion—be it between humans or between God and his people" (79). Thus, righteousness is bound up with love and mercy, both with respect to the attitude of the judge and the administration of justice. Van Dam does well in showing that the Old Testament administration of justice was not some cold, heartless enforcing of the letter of the law, but quite the contrary.

The third part of the book, which considers the New Testament, is aptly titled "Continuity and Transformation." The office of elder, as regards position and work, has continued into the New Testament, although the reason for the office is not in the first place simply because it was already there and naturally continued in the Christian congregation but because "Christ has given his authority to this office." "This appointment by Christ's Spirit [me-

diated through the apostles] legitimized the office of elder and not its pedigree as such” (100). Van Dam follows the biblical ruling/teaching elder distinction, but emphasizes the overlap and equality in this distinction. Ruling elders rule and teach, and teaching elders teach and rule which means, for one, that both must know God’s word. Such distinction and overlap between the offices is already evident in the Old Testament, in which elders, priests, Levites, and prophets participated, in greater or lesser capacity, in teaching God’s people. As to the equality between the ruling and teaching elder, consider that the hands were laid on the elders, too. Van Dam marks in the Reformed tradition “a certain inconsistency in using the laying on of hands with the teaching elder and not the ruling elder,” although in a footnote he says this “probably relates to the ruling elder being chosen and ordained for a certain term only” (135).

When it comes to identifying the offices of the New with the offices of the Old Testament, we often speak of the minister in connection with the office of prophet, but Van Dam shows, convincingly, a close connection with the office of priest. To them,

primarily, belonged the task of teaching, as with ministers today. As the priests of the Old functioned in the ministry of reconciliation (consider the sacrifices, e.g.), so “ministers of the gospel, the teaching elders, may function in the *fulfilled* ministry of reconciliation as spokesmen for God (2 Cor. 5:18 – 20). Paul speaks of the “‘priestly duty [*ierourgounta*] of proclaiming the gospel of God’ (Rom. 15:16, NIV). What all this tells us is that the offices of the church are not so neatly distinguished as we might think. Each office shares in each other office. There is distinction that must be maintained, as Van Dam points out, but let us not make things stricter than they are. In both testaments, there is overlap in the offices.

Chapter seven contains a freshening description of the keys of the kingdom. Van Dam connects the idea of the keys with Isaiah 22 and the office of steward. The keys “[open] the way to the kingdom and its treasures” (125). The section is worth reading, so as to liven up our own understanding of the keys. Interestingly, Van Dam says that the congregation, too, exercises the keys of the kingdom. “As that gospel is ministered by members of the

congregation in admonishing, exhorting, and encouraging one another in mutual oversight and Christian discipline (Col. 3:16), the keys of the kingdom are being used.” “The elders have special leadership...but the congregation is also fully engaged” (136).

In the fourth part of the book, Van Dam considers the work of the elders “as preservers and nurturers of life in the covenant community” (137). First, he treats the elders as those “ruling and having authority” (139), which is to say again what he says earlier about elders in the Old Testament: they are leaders. To them has been entrusted the gospel, and the elders are called to supervise the preaching of the gospel, and to administer the gospel by their words and walk. When visiting “the homes of church members”, for example, “they can not only administer the forgiveness of sins where such are confessed, but can also exhort the flock according to God’s Word” (164). As shepherds, they are called to lead, gather, and nurture the flock, all by the word. When the sheep hear the word, they hear the voice of the Great Shepherd. And, that word is their bread.

As elders in the Old Testament served as judges, so elders in the New Testament are called to

discipline. That begins with “the elders’ self-watch” (159). Again, in this chapter, Van Dam stresses that the whole congregation participates in church discipline, as Matthew 18 makes clear. In fact, Van Dam says, “This instruction of the Lord Jesus places the primary responsibility for what we call church discipline with the members of the congregation” (168). In Matthew 18, Jesus says that if reconciliation is not happening in private, “Tell it unto the church,” and we might too quickly say, “That means the elders,” when the word Jesus used is “church” (this supports Van Dam’s point that the elders represent the church). When it comes to the church, “in one way or another the congregation as a whole is to be mobilized for the spiritual health of the sinner” (170). As to the work of the elders in discipline, Van Dam recalls the judges of the Old Testament—their work, its purpose, and the spirit in which they were to do it—and applies that teaching to New Testament elders. Discipline is not to be legalistic, but conducted in love, with a sincere desire for the good of the one under discipline, and, among other aims, with the aim of restoration (justice and righteousness, remember, have to do with

a right relationship).

In the closing chapters, Van Dam considers two current issues with respect to the eldership: the matter of female elders, and the matter of the elder's term. Concerning the former, he defeats attempts to culturalize certain passages of Scripture that speak against women in office, and makes plain that the prohibition is grounded, not in the culture of the day, but in creation. "If Scripture is the final authority, there is no justification for the ordaining of women elders" (217). Concerning the term of the elder, he cites some practical reasons for a limited term, but seems to incline toward a lifetime term: "This factor, along with some of the arguments mentioned above, could indicate that indefinite term eldership is the closest to the biblical ideal." But, he says, "one must be careful not to force the issue" (225). In the final chapter, Van Dam speaks of the privilege and blessing that both elders and congregation enjoy in the office of elder, and exhorts the flock to honor, obey, and respect them, as does Scripture.

Three things by way of conclusion: First, although, our review of *The Elder* has been somewhat broad, bringing out some

of the overarching principles and themes of the book, Van Dam does get into particulars, and the book is valuable in that respect, too. In chapter five, for instance, he discusses the distinction of sin in the Old Testament, which has application for today as well. And then, for another example, there is a good, although brief, section on family visitation in chapter nine. Second, although in approach biblical-theological, the book satisfies what we read of in the introduction to the series of which this book is part: "Each book seeks to be solidly Reformed in orientation" (ix).

Finally, when it comes to the office of elder, perhaps the most important picture to study and imbibe is the picture of a shepherd. Right away, after the first chapter overview, Van Dam goes to this image in a chapter entitled "The Shepherd and His Flock." If elders drink in who our Great Shepherd is, how faithful He is, to what depths He has gone and to what lengths He even now goes for His sheep, how much He loves them—if they have this in heart as they go about their work, then it will be well. Let our attitude toward the congregation be Christ's attitude, who loved His sheep so much that He laid

down His life for them. Let us view the flock as blood-bought and beloved of God. Just think what sinful passions are ever ready to surge forth when an elder (teaching or ruling) labors with a wayward, recalcitrant member; how tempting it is to respond in kind, or simply to be done with

him and offer less resistance than the elder ought when the member asks for his papers. But then we remember the Shepherd who left the comforts of home and plunged into the wilderness to rescue that one lost sheep, even when it meant the cross.



Contributors for this issue are:

Ronald L. Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Garrett J. Eriks, pastor of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

David J. Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Barrett L. Gritters, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Douglas J. Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Jacob Maatman, 2019 graduate from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland.