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

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Thou shalt not... Thou shalt...

—Exodus 20:3; Matthew 22:37

The Law of God

At Mount Sinai God gave Israel his law. Part of God's law given at Sinai is rooted in his own being and never changes. We call this the *moral law*. It is the decalogue, or the ten commandments. God repeated those commandments many times to Israel. God repeats those commandments many times to us—every Lord's day morning, in fact, when Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5 is read.

Part of God's law given at Sinai is rooted in the truth of Jesus Christ and his church and was expressed in symbolic and typical form in the Old Testament. We call this the *ceremonial law*. It included hundreds of things like the laws of sacrifices, the food laws, and the laws against unequally yoked animals. Jesus Christ fulfilled those laws by his life, death, and resurrection, so that the symbolic part of those laws is accomplished. Those typical ceremonies are abolished among Christians, though the truth and substance of them remains in Jesus Christ (Belgic Confession 25). What does this mean? It means that we do not sacrifice passover lambs, for the truth and substance of that law is Jesus, our passover. It means that we may plow with different animals, but we may not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

At Mount Sinai God gave Israel this great law.

The law of God is holy and lovely. How shall we adequately extol it? God's law is righteous (Ps. 119:7). Wondrous things are found in it (v. 18). God's laws are our delight and our counselors (v. 24). They are good (v. 39). They are our songs in the house of our pilgrimage (v. 54). They teach good judgment and knowledge (v. 66). God's law

is better than thousands of gold and silver (v. 72). All God's commandments are faithful (v. 86). They are settled forever in heaven (v. 89). They are exceeding broad (v. 96). God's law is our meditation all the day (v. 97). It makes us wiser than our enemies, gives us more understanding than all our teachers, and causes us to understand more than the ancients (vv. 98–100). God's laws are sweeter than honey to our mouths (v. 103). His law is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (v. 105). It is the rejoicing of our hearts (v. 111). We love God's commandments above fine gold (v. 127). We pant and long for them (v. 131). God's law is very pure (v. 140). It is the truth (v. 142). Our hearts stand in awe of God's law (v. 161). We rejoice at it as one that findeth great spoil (v. 162).

At Mount Sinai God gave Israel this holy and lovely law.

God spoke the first ten commandments directly to Israel from his holy and consuming fire on Sinai. The people were afraid of God and ran far away from the mountain. After comforting the people, Moses went over the bounds at the bottom of the mountain and drew near unto the thick darkness of the cloud on the top of the mountain (Ex. 20:21). God delivered the rest of his law to Moses, who spoke it to Israel (24:3). Moses also wrote all the words of Jehovah (v. 4). In this way the people of Israel received the law of God by the hand of Moses.

This is another permanent truth revealed in the wilderness. The law of God is delivered to us in the hand of our mediator (Gal. 3:19). In this way the law does not replace God's promise.

Rather, the law in the hand of the mediator exposes us and empties us of ourselves that the mediator might fill us with himself by his gospel

(v. 22). At Sinai God gave Israel his law. At Zion God gave us our Redeemer!

—AL

EDITORIAL

Church Pew Sunday

We last left Rev. Hendrik de Cock and the lowly saints of Ulrum, the Netherlands, in the joyful afterglow of their worship service on Sunday, October 12, 1834. Although their Lord's day had begun under the soul-withering Arminian preaching of Rev. N. Smith, the state church minister; although they had had to don their hats and refuse to participate in the God-dishonoring singing of man's hymns; and although the government authorities had locked them out of their church building in Ulrum, their Lord's day had ended in tremendous joy. For, assembled in the field behind the parsonage, the saints had heard the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ, preached by Rev. H. P. Scholte from a farm wagon. Under the canopy of heaven the saints had sung the blessed psalms of the Lord of heaven. For those hungry and thirsty souls, who had been starved by the Arminian doctrine and man-centered worship of the Dutch Reformed Church, their Lord's day had ended with a spiritual feast.

Today, let us return to Ulrum and see how our spiritual brethren fared after their Farm Wagon Sunday. We will find that the following Lord's day was every bit as stirring for them. For exactly 190 years ago today, on October 19, 1834, God again rained the manna of the gospel upon the downtrodden people of Ulrum through the preaching of their pastor, Rev. Hendrik de Cock. The authorities were still against them, even going so far as to lock the railing leading to the pulpit so that Reverend De Cock could not enter. But standing upon a church pew at the front of the sanctuary, with the king's soldiers looming behind him, Reverend De Cock preached Jesus

Christ to God's people. On this October 19, 2024, then, let us revisit October 19, 1834—Church Pew Sunday.

We pick up our tale the previous weekend, when Reverend Scholte, minister of North Brabant, was still in Ulrum. Scholte's visit to Ulrum, which had culminated in his preaching from a farm wagon in a field, had opened his eyes to just how bad things were for God's people. Scholte soon realized that De Cock and the saints of Ulrum could not remain in the corrupt state church. They were starving! And not only would the Dutch Reformed Church not feed them the gospel, but the church was also doing everything in its power to prevent their pastor, Reverend De Cock, from ever feeding them again. So it was that, during the weekend of Scholte's visit, Scholte and De Cock discussed the idea of the congregation of Ulrum seceding from the state church institute and forming the church institute anew. What discussions those must have been! What struggles of the soul must have found voice in those deliberations: on the one hand, the conviction of faith; on the other, the uncertainty of the flesh. Who can adequately describe the storms of doubt and the harbors of faith in men's hearts when the Lord comes to reform his church?

By the end of the weekend, no decision had been made. There was no clear path. Secession looked inevitable, but who could bear such a thing? Besides, there was always the possibility of making one more appeal (and then another and then another) to the church authorities and to the king to have Reverend De Cock's deposition overturned. The evening of Sunday,

October 12, after preaching from the wagon, Reverend Scholte departed Ulrum to return to North Brabant. Neither he nor De Cock nor anyone but the Lord knew what would unfold mere hours after Scholte's departure. One historian describes the uncertainty of the path as follows:

Now that Scholte had gained firsthand knowledge of the situation, he urged De Cock to consider seceding, and that weekend Scholte and De Cock discussed the idea of seceding from the established church. However, Helenius De Cock, Hendrik De Cock's son, states, "During Rev. Scholte's stay, no decision to secede was made. At his departure he himself did not know but that father would seek another audience with the king and the synodical committee."¹

But what was hidden from men was known to God. On Monday, October 13, 1834, the Lord came to his church suddenly and reformed her. Although on Sunday evening men had not yet known what they should do, by Monday evening God had made it clear to them that there simply was no possibility of remaining in the corrupt state church. Therefore, on Monday evening, less than twenty-four hours after Reverend Scholte had left, the consistory of Ulrum met and signed the Act of Secession or Return. By the officebearers' signatures the consistory officially seceded from the Dutch Reformed Church and formed the church institute anew. Though it was an illegal act according to the laws of the state, the consistory stood upon the higher authority of scripture, as interpreted by the Reformed confessions. The consistory of Ulrum now stood outside the Dutch Reformed Church as a separate church institute. It was the *Afscheiding*—the separation, the secession, the cutting away of the remnant and its re-formation as the church of Jesus Christ.

From every earthly vantage point, the consistory's meeting was pathetic. The consistory was small—a mere two elders, three deacons,

and Reverend De Cock. The room in the church building in which they met was cramped and, lit by lamplight, quickly grew smoky. The document that they signed was only a page long. The author of the document was not highly regarded; today, no one even knows who actually wrote the Act of Secession or Return. The action that the consistory took in seceding was illegal. The act of seceding was also unexpected, even for the seceders, for mere hours earlier, neither Scholte nor De Cock had known for certain whether Ulrum should secede. Ulrum's secession would be unpopular with Dutch society. The saints in Ulrum were already looked down on for their pastor's sharp words against his fellow ministers and for his sharp words against man-made hymns. But the saints in Ulrum would become viciously despised by their fellow Dutchmen for seceding. The secession would not bring acclaim to the people of Ulrum but only hatred. And no one of note would associate with them. The secession would not attract the noble and powerful men of the state church, only the small and the lowly. No matter what earthly point of view one takes, the *Afscheiding* was pathetic.

But to the eye of faith, the *Afscheiding* was a most lovely sight. God came to his people who did not know what to do and saved them. God came to captive Zion and turned her captivity. God came to the bird in the snare and broke the snare. And God freed his people without the cooperation, plotting, organizing, or nose-counting of the people. Rather, God visited his helpless people and set them free. God had been working the reformation in the hearts of his people by causing them to see Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. God had been working the reformation in the hearts of his people by causing them to see the corruption of the state church. And when it was God's time, according to his sovereign counsel, God came to the cramped, smoke-filled room in Ulrum and led those few officebearers out of darkness into the light.

The consistory having signed the Act of Secession or Return on Monday, the members of

¹ Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, *Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 35.

the congregation of Ulrum gathered on Tuesday, October 14, 1834, to pray and to sign the Act of Secession or Return for themselves. Sixty-eight single adults and heads of households—representing approximately 250 men, women, and children—signed the Act of Secession or Return. For the happy saints in Ulrum, the break with the state church was now complete. They were free from man’s tyranny in doctrine and worship. They were free to worship God with the pure gospel of grace and the refreshing songs of the sweet psalmist. How liberating for God’s people! Yes, now they would die a thousand times a day as they suffered the loss of all things for the sake of the gospel. But now they would finally live! Now they could finally breathe! And what breath—inhalation by the Spirit the sweet air of the gospel and exhaling by that same Spirit the sweet psalms of Zion.

After the meeting the consistory noted in its minute book, “The ceremony was closed with the singing of Psalms and prayers of thanksgiving.”²

When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. (Ps. 126:1–3)

Having seceded, the congregation of Ulrum was now in uncharted territory. For hundreds of years there had been only one Reformed church institute in the Netherlands—the state church, the Dutch Reformed Church. Now suddenly there was another Reformed church institute—the *Afscheiding* congregation of Ulrum. There were two implications that had to be worked out immediately. First, what did the *Afscheiding* mean for Reverend De Cock’s status as a minister of the gospel? The state church had deposed De Cock and did not recognize him as a minister. As far as the state church was concerned, *Dominee* (Reverend) De Cock was now *Mijnheer* (Mister)

De Cock. But in its Act of Secession or Return, the congregation of Ulrum called the state church’s deposition unlawful and stated that Ulrum continued to recognize Reverend De Cock as its pastor. It was a significant statement for the *Afscheiding* congregation of Ulrum, for it showed that the congregation would operate according to biblical, Reformed church polity in the matter of its minister’s office. Christ alone calls a man to office through the church. The minister does not make himself a minister. Having been deposed from office by the state church, De Cock could not retain his office by his own private declaration. But by the church of Ulrum’s declaration that it recognized Reverend De Cock as its pastor, De Cock retained his office. It was the Lord Jesus Christ himself maintaining Reverend De Cock’s office through the church in Ulrum.

The second immediate implication of the *Afscheiding* was the matter of the church building in Ulrum. Who owned the building? The members of the congregation assumed that it was theirs. After all, the congregation of Ulrum had worshiped in that building for generations. And it wasn’t as if there were another congregation in Ulrum, for the entire congregation had seceded from the state church, with only a handful of people declining to sign the Act of Secession or Return. Who would even use the church building in Ulrum, if not the *Afscheiding* congregation? But the state church had other ideas. Because all the church’s financial matters were handled through the state, not through the members of the local congregations, the Dutch Reformed Church claimed ownership of all church properties. The Dutch government—which had the soldiers to back up its claim—considered itself the owner of the church building in Ulrum. The matter would come to a head in only a few short days.

Having seceded from the state church on Tuesday, the people of God looked forward eagerly to their first Lord’s day as a congregation. What joyful anticipation must have filled their

² “Acts of the Consistory of Ulrum” in *Van Raalte Papers: 1830–1839*: 19 (https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/vrp_1830s/19).

hearts as Sunday, October 19, 1834, dawned. Free from the control of the state church, they could finally have their own pastor, Reverend De Cock, preach for them. Free from the government regulations that had encroached even into their worship, they could sing the psalms and never open the *Evangelische Gezangen* hymnbook again. How happy they must have been as they tasted their liberty in Christ!

But when the people of God entered the church building that Sunday morning, they found that the government had mobilized its forces against them. The state church had sent one of its own ministers, a Reverend Van der Helm, to lead the services. And King William I had sent his soldiers to see to it that Reverend De Cock did not enter the pulpit. The people were allowed to enter the church building, but the state was making it clear that they entered at the pleasure of the state. The people were allowed to have services, but the state was making it clear that the services would be conducted by the state's chosen man. What bitter disappointment must have threatened to overwhelm the grievously oppressed saints of Ulrum! They had seceded from the state church—what business had the state church harassing them any further? What were they supposed to do now? It was the first of many disappointments and persecutions that the saints in Ulrum would endure. There is no concord between Christ and Belial. Now that Christ had returned his people to himself through the reformation of the *Afscheiding*, Belial would labor to make their lives miserable.

But what is Belial to Christ? Though the state exercised its considerable power against the *Afscheiding* that Sunday, Christ gave his people the balm of the gospel in the face of the authorities. The enemies had made their presence felt, but God prepared a table before his people in the presence of their enemies. For when Reverend Van der Helm moved to ascend the pulpit, the people cried out that not he but Reverend De Cock must preach. The door of the kingdom of heaven had been opened by God through the *Afscheiding*, and those lowly seceders were

storming the kingdom. They could never go back to the gospel and the songs of man but must have the gospel and the songs of Christ. Before such a tide as God had swelled in that church, Van der Helm could not prevail; he turned and left the building.

And now Reverend De Cock must preach! The pulpit in Ulrum in those days stood behind a low wall or railing. Anyone who wished to climb the stairs to the pulpit must first go through a door in the railing. The soldiers had locked the door, and they stood guard before it. When De Cock made his way to the railing to enter the pulpit, the soldiers would not let him pass. So it was that, under the icy glares of the soldiers, Reverend De Cock climbed onto a pew, from which he could be seen and heard, and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to God's hungry and thirsty people. His text was Ephesians 2:8–10, that magnificent summary of the entire apostolic doctrine of salvation: "By grace are ye saved through faith." The gate to the pulpit was closed, but the gates of heaven were opened. The soldiers took De Cock's pulpit from him, but the Lord gave De Cock a pew from which to feed Christ's sheep.

De Cock's sermon from the church pew would be his last in that building. When the morning service was finished and the people had exited the building, the soldiers locked the door for good. Though the humble people of the *Afscheiding* had worshiped there for generations, they would not be allowed to enter again.

That evening, the people of God assembled at the parsonage. From inside his barn, standing upon the hay wagon that Reverend Scholte had used the week before, Reverend De Cock preached Lord's Day 1. How fitting. What comfort could the saints in Ulrum find in their earthly lives; in their grand Dutch society; or in themselves, the offscouring of all the earth? Only one comfort was theirs, as it is the only comfort of God's people, who have been brought through death to life: "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."

Sunday, October 19, 1834, ended as it had begun: with great joy and gratitude for God's work of reformation. Though the saints of the *Afscheiding* had been cast out of their earthly church building, they ended the day with the joy that their God tabernacled with them. God's

pure gospel had sustained them. And God's pure gospel would continue to sustain them, for their suffering was about to become intense.

To be continued...

—AL

FROM THE RAMPARTS

Man's Honor

At this point the question must be asked, "Why did so many leave the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) for the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC)?" I know the reasons that many gave for their exit. The PRC teach false doctrine. The assemblies are broken. The leaders of the denomination are unprincipled and brutal. They persecute those who rebuke them for their errors. The reputation and honor of men is of greater importance than the truth. And so on. But now, with the benefit of time—fast approaching four years—it is evident that the RPC are no different than the PRC. Was the split from the PRC only so certain men could be in charge? Was it all just to give a few the power? Why did so many leave?

The recent classis meeting of the RPC further proves that as is the mother, so is the daughter. I grieve for the members of the denomination. I understand none of them can publicly acknowledge that the daughter walks in the way of the mother because, at this point, the matter of church membership has become for the RPC a matter of my team versus your team. To admit error would allow the other team to score some points. If everyone speaks with one voice and ignores the corruption, error, brutality, and lack of principle, life can continue as it always has. I also understand why it is that so many continue to maintain their memberships in a church that evidences the marks of the false church. When controversy comes to a head and decisions need to be made, there is a calculation that is made.

The member looks around and sees those who are leaving and those who are staying, and the calculation is this: "I have enough family and friends here to make this work." Yes, such members will have to stop reading; yes, they will have to stop speaking of principles; and yes, they will even languish and perish under the preaching; but their earthly lives are better there, so they stay. Some members try to defend their church for a time; but after a while they, like the rest of the members, fall silent, stop reading, and just get on with their earthly lives. My heart grieves for them. They are forced to return to the very vomit they fled from in their previous denomination.

An appeal came to the September meeting of the Reformed Protestant classis. A man was objecting to the theology of his denomination. This man wanted repentance as a prerequisite. Laden with quotes from church fathers, he dumped the load on the desk of the consistory. The consistory answered him, he responded, the consistory responded, and on it went; and, as is so often the case, no progress was made. Standing at an impasse, the man sent his appeal to classis.

The appeal was not compelling. The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ was not in it. The Holy Spirit does not lead his church into confusion, and the appeal was confusing. It appeared to create a new spiritual category alongside the categories of faith and works, which new category was repentance. It was marred by plagiarism, to which the author admitted and about which he was not sorry. The Holy Spirit does not lead a man to pass off

another man's words as his own. Like the PRC and her theologians, the man would instruct others about something that he did not practice. I would prefer to be taught about repentance by someone who practices it. The theology that the man defended was salvation by faith and repentance. It appears that the man was carried along not by scripture and the creeds but by all the quotes he could find from church fathers, which quotes he was convinced supported his position. We have seen that approach before. Hope Protestant Reformed Church wearied itself, and everyone who had to read its writing, to put together a list of quotes from every church father who had ever lived, which quotes they were convinced supported their defense of justification by faith and works. If the approach of Hope and the author of the appeal that went to the Reformed Protestant classis were adopted regarding other theological truths, the true church today would teach justification by faith and works, a covenant of works, the well-meant gospel offer, common grace, and the permissibility of divorce and remarriage, all of which at one point or another were supported by a crushing amount of quotes from church fathers.

The timing of the appeal was odd. The theology of the protestant is nothing new. He believes that in a certain vital sense in man's salvation, man's activity precedes God's activity, and God's activity waits upon that man's activity. But that theology has already been answered. It has been shown to be a denial of justification by faith alone.¹ The appellant didn't like that answer, but it was already answered. This appeal was nothing more than the last gasp of a man on his way back to Rome.² In other words, the appeal was nothing to get excited about. Answer the appeal, and call the man to repent of his error and to believe in Jesus Christ.

But someone did get excited. That someone was Rev. Nathan Langerak, the minister of Second Reformed Protestant Church. The excitement

took shape as a ten-page letter attached to the credentials of Second at the RPC's September classis meeting. The first thing that came to mind watching events unfold were the words of Shakespeare that Reverend Langerak "doth protest too much." The appeal was easily answerable by referring the appellant to the writing of Reverend Lanning in *Sword and Shield*. The letter that came from the consistory of Second was an exercise in overreacting.

More importantly, the letter attached to the credentials was disorderly. It tried to deal with a matter on the agenda not in the order in which it appeared on the agenda but right out of the gate, before the delegates' first cup of coffee had a chance to cool. It waded into the appeal and made many pronouncements about the appeal. It made the case that the appeal should be declared illegal and tossed out. The fact that the advice to declare the appeal illegal was exactly the *modus operandi* of the PRC didn't seem to bother the consistory in the least. Neither did the consistory address in its letter the disorderly nature of the letter that it attached to its credentials. Can you imagine every church attaching verbose letters to its credentials dealing with matters that are to come up on the agenda?

One delegate recognized the disorderly nature of the letter and, to his credit, spoke to it. He said that the matter, including its legality, should be dealt with when it came to the floor according to its place on the agenda.

I am not opposed to it [the letter from Second RPC] being read. I just wonder if it's a little out of order because when this is—when this part on the agenda will be dealt with, we come to legality of the situation, and can it not be addressed in order of the agenda when this is addressed? Why would we get into this matter before we get into the material?

¹ See Andrew Lanning, "Man Before God...Developed," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 15–27.

² For what it's worth, I don't want what I just wrote to be the case. I love the man who brought the appeal. I don't want that man all twisted up in a theology that only the most vaunted of theologians can understand. I want the man to sit under the pure gospel, not to instruct but to be instructed. I want him to take his entire load of man's working and repenting and leave it at the foot of the cross and to take Jesus at his word when he said from the cross, "It is finished."

Our role as a classis is to judge this appeal, but I feel that it should be done in order when it comes to the floor; and that discussion can happen during the legality or declaring it illegal at that time.³

In other words, what was this nonsense of dealing with an item on the agenda by way of credentials? I'm sure every delegate to the classis had an opinion about the appeal and was prepared to speak to it when it came up on the agenda. Some of them perhaps had notes they had taken, which they were ready to use when the matter came up. But this? Dealing with it on the credentials? The delegate was correct. But that was when Reverend Langerak stepped in.

Mr. Chairman, the reason that we are asking that it be read to the entire classis before the material is sent to the committee is that the entire classis can have the substance of our objection before it and not just the committee. This is a weighty document; it's extremely weighty. It doesn't get any more weighty, and the entire classis needs to know before the committee goes into session what we said so they can think about what we said, because they are going to have to vote on it. It needs to be read before it goes into the hands of committee. It's only fair for the delegates of classis.

You can translate that this way: "The classis and the subcommittee need to know what we think about this before it goes into the hands of the committee." But that is no argument. I am sure the delegates knew that was the intent of Second RPC when Second hung the letter on its credentials. What hypocrisy. Imagine that during our time in the PRC, a consistory had done this in response to an appeal or a protest of the doctrine being taught by a church or a minister. Imagine an elder from Hope or Grace Protestant Reformed Church telling the classis that its consistory had a ten-page document on its credentials to read that addressed a matter on the

agenda having to do with its minister. The elder would have been laughed out of the place by those who are now members of the RPC. They would have risen up in holy horror, decrying it. Hierarchy! Lording! Disorderly! And they would have been right; and even though they swallow it now, those charges apply today.

This is also ironic because Second RPC and Reverend Langerak like to charge others with hierarchy and lording when something does not go their way. Even more ironic is that Second's lording letter came to classis only weeks after Second RPC had browbeat First RPC into submission for allegedly being hierarchical and for lording it over Second RPC on another matter. Whatever that may have been, it is lording it over the rest of the delegates to say that your opinion should be read before the matter even comes up on the floor and the rest of the delegates have a chance to speak.

The delegates caved but not because of the strength of Reverend Langerak's argument—there was none. They were persuaded by little more than "Do what we say because we say so." The delegates recognized that Reverend Langerak had his hands around the throat of the denomination; and, not being willing to pry his fingers off their necks, they bent the knee. The letter was classic Reverend Langerak. If ever it appears that he will not get his way, he threatens. He did this at a meeting of classis when there was a question of whether then seminarian Luke Bomers was going to be examined. Reverend Langerak threatened to quit the Minister Training Committee if the vote didn't go his way.⁴ In the letter at the September classis, Reverend Langerak, through the consistory of Second RPC, threatened to give the classis the silent treatment and left the impression that the delegates from Second would, in fact, leave classis if classis did not decide their way.

The delegates of Second RPC have been instructed that, should classis deal with the appeal legally before it, they are not

³ Classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, September 19, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgO9t1TgDZs>.

⁴ See Dewey Engelsma, "Spirit-Led: An Examination (1)," *Reformed Pavilion* 2, no. 18 (August 10, 2024): 7.

to engage in any discussions concerning the appeal at classis. We will not sit down with a man guilty of deception carrying the water of another deceiver who mocks at our doctrine and has shown himself to be an enemy of the truth. If classis will not hear us, the delegates of Second RPC have been instructed to leave this letter as our protest to be included in the agenda of the next classis.

Neither was this the only thing about which Reverend Langerak would bluster and threaten at this meeting of classis. The matter of church visitation came up. Apparently church visitation was to be conducted with Faith Reformed Protestant Church when the meeting of classis ended. However, one of the church visitors appointed by classis was not able to make it to the meeting. Lacking one church visitor, Reverend Langerak asked that the classis name Rev. Tyler Ophoff as an *ad hoc* church visitor.⁵ The delegate from Faith RPC sensed something was wrong about this and, to his credit, said something about it.

I guess I was just wondering about that. We already—classis made a decision on that. In article 44 Church Order it says that classis shall authorize two of her oldest, so I don't know what is the proper order for that.

Finding himself challenged, Reverend Langerak resorted again to a threat. "None of the men are able to come, so either you're not going to have church visitation, or we're going to do an *ad hoc* appointment." Sufficiently cowed, the motion to name Reverend Ophoff as a church visitor passed unanimously.

This type of behavior happened again and again. A delegate would speak; Reverend Langerak's hand would pop up halfway through the other delegate's remarks, and he would slap the other delegate down. Even on unimportant matters Reverend Langerak felt compelled to

smack down first this delegate and then that delegate. Even when delegates were looking to discuss a matter more fully, Reverend Langerak wouldn't have it. He would dismiss the delegates' comments or requests and then go on to speak at length to the matter and give his opinion on it. Even about minutiae Reverend Langerak had to have the last word. One delegate was looking for more information on the finance report, and even on that Reverend Langerak had to shut the delegate down: "If you're including something random in your number, that's your problem; that's not my problem."

Do as I say or else. The tyranny at the meeting was impossible to miss. There was no velvet glove to conceal the iron fist. Let's be clear: if the leaders of the RPC are unaware that Reverend Langerak has his hands around the throat of the denomination, they have no business being on the walls as watchmen. And if they are aware but choose to do nothing, it would be better for them if they had never been placed on the walls in the first place (see Ezek. 33:6).

The letter from Second RPC did more than just threaten and bluster. It waxed eloquent about the debate over repentance and forgiveness brought up in the appeal and that had played out on the pages of *Sword and Shield* in the early days of the RPC. It quoted selectively from Reverend Langerak to try to burnish his name and reputation as a fierce defender of the truth that repentance was no prerequisite to forgiveness. This was odd. The appellant had supported his appeal by quoting Reverend Langerak and stating that he *stood with and agreed with* what Reverend Langerak had written.

I stand with Rev. Nathan Langerak in 2018 when he taught in his Blog post "That life of repentance is rightly and properly called the necessary way of fellowship with God in the covenant, the necessary way of life in the covenant, or the necessary way of the experience of fellowship with God in the covenant. In

⁵ I had to be reminded that this was not the first time we have seen the addition of *ad hoc* church visitors. See Dewey Engelsma, "Bullied," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), March 4, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/03/04/bullied/>.

short, the experience of fellowship with God is repentance. Our fellowship with God is *in way of repentance* because it consists in that activity.⁶

About that quote and others like it, the letter from Second RPC was strangely quiet. Second never addressed those quotes. And that was the whole point of the long, blustery, threatening letter that the consistory pinned to its credentials. Second RPC did not want to see that appeal make it to the floor because then those quotes might be brought up. The letter on the credentials was intended to save Reverend Langerak's honor, and the way to save his honor was by not allowing that protest to see the light of day. If it did, questions about his former writing might come to the floor. It is not just my judgment that this had to do with his honor. Second RPC said as much. "[Appellant] casts aspersions on the honor and good character of the brother." This is almost word for word the argument that came out on the floor of Classis East whenever a minister's reputation was at stake due to his false doctrine's being exposed. "We must save Reverend So-and-so's honor and reputation!" "We must preserve his good character!" The request of Second RPC was Protestant Reformed. "Declare the appeal illegal. A minister's honor is at stake." What vanity.

Classis bent the knee. It read the letter, received it into its minutes, and did as the letter demanded. Not only that, but the letter also became the core of the committee's advice. For good measure the letter was sent to First Reformed Protestant Church to educate it on how a church ought to behave. All First's work in responding to the appellant was simply swept away and discarded; and now, like unruly children, they have been given strict orders on how to proceed. The elders of First RPC are in the impossible position—of their own making and for which they have only themselves to

blame but impossible nonetheless—of forever having to bow the knee to Reverend Langerak. This has happened twice now in only a few months. The elders are not able to function without the specter of him slapping them down.

Although many claimed to have left the PRC for the RPC because of ecclesiastical disorder in the PRC, this recent meeting of classis exposes the hypocrisy of that claim. Even the PRC would blush to do what Second RPC did by bringing on its credentials its entire argument about an item on the agenda and demanding that the classis hear the letter before classis has even begun. It was the height of disorder.

Neither can it be the case that members left the PRC because of poor preaching or because the gospel was corrupted. Sermons and lectures of the RPC have been examined, and they are a mess. The RPC does not have the gospel. It has tyrannical, brutal, and violent men who see theological formulations only as clubs with which to beat others. The gospel does not shape men in this way. As John Calvin said, "the true knowledge of God renders men gentle, so ignorance makes them ferocious and savage."⁷ Instead, this will be the character of the man bringing the gospel: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (II Tim. 2:24–25).

Members couldn't have left because of a lack of principle in the PRC. Their membership in the RPC shows that principle matters not. For the RPC have none. Consider that their principle on singing has gone this way and that way, from *sing the psalms almost exclusively to sing praises* to many others along the way. The RPC has left principle behind.

I know the score by now. This article will be read by only a few in the RPC, and those few

⁶ Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, September 19, 2024, 106–7. See also Nathan Langerak, "The Question of the Necessity of Good Works (10): In the Way of Repentance," *Reformed Free Publishing Association* (blog), February 21, 2018, https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/the-question-of-the-necessity-of-good-works-10-in-the-way-of-repentance?__pos=11&__sid=7c31bc5e3&__ss=r; emphasis is Langerak's.

⁷ John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 4 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 9.

who read it will harden themselves against it. Their team cannot show weakness, after all. But there is one who is stronger than a stubborn man determined to save his life. I know that from experience. Blessed experience.

So I send this article out with the prayer that the Lord will use it to awaken those who are in bondage in the RPC and cause them to see that this is not “my team versus their team.” This is about the pure gospel and the preaching and teaching of that pure gospel, which pure gospel takes a violent man and renders him gentle. It is about the emptiness of the glory and honor of man, which is no glory and which is no honor. This is about the glory of God. This, then, is my prayer regarding those who have lingered and who, apart from God’s grace, would stay there, saving their lives until the ends of their lives, when they would then hear those dreadful words, “Depart from me; I never knew you”:

O Lord, draw out thy people from these churches that have profaned thy name. Sanctify thy great name, which they have profaned, and do so for thy sake and for thy holy name’s sake. Then shall the

heathen know that thou art the LORD, when they shall be sanctified in thy sight. Take them out, LORD, from among the heathen, and gather them from all countries and lands, and bring them into their own land. Sprinkle clean water upon them, and cleanse them from all their filthiness and their idols; so thou wilt cleanse them. Give them a new heart, LORD, and take away the stony heart out of their flesh. Put thy Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in thy statutes so they keep thy judgments and do them. Then they shall remember their evil ways and their doings that were not good, and they shall loathe themselves in thy sight and the sight of all men for their iniquities and their abominations. Do all of this, LORD, not for their sakes—for they ought only to be ashamed and confounded for their own ways—but for thy sake do all of these things. Then shall the heathen know that thou hast done it, and all men shall know that thou art the LORD.⁸

—DE



⁸ See Ezekiel 36:21–38.

Answer to a Question: Why Don't We Sing the Lord's Prayer in Official Worship?

A question has been repeatedly placed in front of those who believe that God—according to the second commandment and according to what is known as the regulative principle—requires exclusive psalmody in official worship. The regulative principle is that God must be worshiped in no other way than he has commanded in his word. In other words, just being “not forbidden” is not enough when it comes to worship. God’s worship must consist of only what he has positively commanded. Those who hold to exclusive psalmody in worship believe that God has commanded us to sing his psalms in worship. That means, therefore, that only his psalms may be sung in worship because that is all that he has positively commanded to be sung in worship.

Those who have a problem with that position of exclusive psalmody have come up with a question that they suppose—or at least hope—undermines the whole position of exclusive psalmody. Where does exclusive psalmody leave the words of the Lord’s prayer? Mayn’t the Lord’s prayer be sung as a song in worship? We can speak those words in worship. We can preach on those words and do so wherever the Heidelberg Catechism is preached. The words of this prayer are the words of Christ himself in the Bible, after all! How is it even possible that those words are not included as a song in our list of songs for worship to God?

The question is designed to make the exclusive psalmody look quite foolish. Who would

ever forbid such a thing? There are beautiful tunes out there that accompany those words. Why not sing them? But the question is also designed to hit a deeper target. What is sung in worship outside of God’s command to be sung, according to the second commandment and according to the regulative principle, must be called image worship (which has often been called idolatry by our accusers).¹ The second commandment forbids idolatry in the worship of Jehovah. So now the questioner would want to know if we will call the Lord’s prayer, or any other text in scripture that is sung in worship besides the psalms, idolatry. If the exclusive psalmody can call singing the Lord’s prayer in church idolatry, then the exclusive psalmody can appear to be not just foolish but blasphemous as well. Now a portion of the word of God is being called idolatry! The question is fully loaded, whether the questioner intends it to be or not.

Nevertheless, this question can be answered if the questioner can answer another question first. That question is this: why do you want to sing the Lord’s prayer in worship? Why do you insist on singing the Lord’s prayer in worship? And do you sing it in worship? Do you sing it regularly? You see, I’ve seen the Lord’s prayer chosen as a song for worship in order to “smite legalism on the nose.”² The trouble is, it cannot be denied that such choices in reality would also smite the consciences of those of God’s people who believe that God is pleased to hear only his

¹ Technically, a violation of the first commandment is called idolatry, while a violation of the second commandment is called image worship. Although the two are very closely related (see Lord’s Day 30, Q&A 80), they are distinct (compare Lord’s Day 34, Q&A 95 with Lord’s Day 35, Q&A 96). Some opponents of exclusive psalmody have spoken and written as if *idolatry* and *image worship* are interchangeable in questions of the regulative principle, which is how the opponents arrive at their conclusion that an exclusive psalmody must call a portion of God’s word idolatry. In this article we will speak the language of the opponents and use the term *idolatry* in order that we can focus on their argument without debating over terms.

² Nathan Langerak, “The Indwelling Word,” sermon preached on March 19, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.

psalms in worship. The matter is indeed deadly serious. So the question also is, is it idolatry to set up a song in worship merely in order to use it to make a point, a point that will inevitably spite at least some of God's people? Tell me that, and I will tell you if it constitutes idolatry to sing that same song out of a pure and perfect motive to glorify God and obey his commandments.

What is an idol to be worshiped to one person may be nothing but a statue to another. What was a beautiful teaching symbol of salvation to Israel in the wilderness became an ugly snare and idol to later generations of Israelites. When King Hezekiah had to destroy the brazen serpent, the brazen serpent was not the problem. What the people did with it was the problem. They had been worshiping it. So it is in this controversy. No word of God is idolatrous, no more than the brazen serpent was an idol when Moses set it up in the wilderness, according to God's instruction. But men may make an idol out of anything, even a brazen serpent and even a song—or psalm—from scripture. When men set up their own will in worship outside of God's command, they serve God with a graven image. That is what is forbidden in the second commandment. The only one at fault in that case is the idolater. When an idolater makes an idol, do not blame the wood and stone that he used to make it. Nor any word of God.

Understand that the opponents of exclusive psalmody are not merely disappointed that they might be kept from singing a certain pretty song in worship. If that were the only issue, they could be consoled, and then we all could move on. That is not the issue. Along with the question about singing the Lord's prayer comes a doctrinal accusation against the exclusive psalmist of legalism. You sing psalms exclusively in worship because you think that is how you get Jesus to sing with you in worship. That is a man-made law and a condition to fellowship, and that's legalism!

The accusation is patently false. And that brings up another important *why* question. Why,

indeed, do we sing psalms exclusively in worship? Why do we think that such is necessary and commanded? Are we trying to garner some favor of God by this kind of holy singing? God forbid. The true reason is no different from the Heidelberg Catechism's answer to "But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?" See here where antinomianism and legalism are in reality the best of friends on the theological shelf, as much as they might seem to lie in opposite ditches. Doesn't the doctrine of exclusive psalmody make you a legalist? Doesn't the doctrine of exclusive faith (meaning the doctrine of faith contained in the doctrine of justification by faith alone) make you an antinomian? By no means. God forbid. And now note this: the answer to both of those questions, or accusations—one answering a charge of legalism and the other answering a charge of antinomianism—is the same. We are talking about fruits of thankfulness in both cases. Thankfulness explains exclusive psalmody, even as thankfulness explains the presence of good works in a child of God who believes in justification by faith alone. In neither case is the child of God trying to get something from God.

"But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane? By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (Lord's Day 24, Q&A 64). To fully and truly see and understand the doctrines of absolutely free grace will only leave one striving to swim in the good works that constitute thankfulness and gratitude to God and will not leave one careless toward sin. Obedience out of gratitude is the only real obedience there is to begin with. God in his mercy gives us abundant reason to be thankful. The totally depraved old man of sin within us will always choose to be careless and profane, regardless of circumstances. But that is not the point. The point is to ask why we would want to try to obey God and to fight against our sinful natures in the first place. Why? The reason, the only acceptable reason and the only real reason, is thankfulness. The enemies of grace don't understand that. They

think that if there is not something in it for me, then I won't do it. But they do not understand gratitude. Gratitude is the only genuine motive there is to obey God, not because I am going to get something from God but because I've already gotten it. Anything else is an attempt to manipulate God.³

The answer to the question about why we sing psalms exclusively in praise to God has that same genuine reason behind it. Gratitude. When I see and understand the doctrine that resides under and in and over the psalms, what else do I want to do but to sing them out of great joy and thankfulness? To be given the psalms to sing is nothing short of the profoundest of privileges. These are the words of Christ! How dare I sing them at all, except God gives them to me to sing?

And how do we know that he gave them to us to sing? Because he has made it known that it is his will for us to sing his psalms in worship. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms" (Ps. 95:2). That will of God is significant in this issue. No one would argue that it is not his will for us to sing psalms in worship. Proof texts for singing psalms of praise to God are myriad. Some would argue, however, that God's will for worship is not *exclusively* psalms. And there the problem lies.

That exclusive particle is always the problem, isn't it? Even Rome can agree that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ—if one does not add the word *alone*. But salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is anathema to Rome. The opponents of exclusive psalmody claim that to sing psalms in worship is fine with them, and psalms should even be given "pride of place" in the singing, to quote Rev. Nathan Langerak in his sermon "The Indwelling Word." "I could be content for the rest of my life

in my home and at my school and in my worship service singing nothing but the psalter. I could be very content with that."⁴ So where is the problem? The problem is in the exclusive particle. To say that it is God's will that we sing *only* psalms in official worship is anathema to them. One can be deposed and excommunicated for believing and teaching such a notion. But it is no mere notion. It is God's command, and it is God's command with good reason.

We can ask this question regarding all of God's commands: Why does he command this? Why does he command that? There is a reason, a good and holy and righteous reason, behind every one of his commands. They all teach us something about God. This part of the second commandment does as well. If the doctrine about God's salvation is exclusive—*only* God saves—the command about the worship of his name is going to be just as exclusive. *Only* God is to be praised. Everyone would agree with that. *Only* God knows what that praise is supposed to consist of; and he must, therefore, reveal that praise to us. Not everyone would agree with that. Yet that is how simple this is. Does any man know better than God how God's name should be spoken of and praised?

When God commands us to sing psalms in praise to his name, meaning to sing *only* the psalms that he has infallibly included in his holy Bible, there is a *why* that lies behind the *what*. God is telling us something with that *why*: he is telling us the gospel. Again, we can go through all the commandments this way. When we discover the reason behind the first commandment, we find the gospel in that reason.⁵ Worship no other gods—because I am God alone, and as God alone I alone save you. That is the gospel. Bear no false witness—because I bear no false witness; and because I bear no false

³ See Belgic Confession 24. True love of God, or thankfulness, rules out all other motives for doing good works, which false motives can be summed up as "self-love or fear of damnation."

⁴ This is a concluding statement near the end of Langerak, "The Indwelling Word."

⁵ This is not to be confused with the false teaching that the law is the gospel, meaning that our obedience to the law is what would save us or at least contribute to our salvation. What the law says about God is gospel, as Jesus demonstrated his own righteousness and goodness in fulfilling it and imputes that righteousness to us. What the law says about us is sheer misery, as we can never obey it perfectly in ourselves. Except for God's redemption of us in Jesus Christ, all the law itself can do regarding us is condemn us.

witness, my promises to you are always true. That is the gospel. In the second commandment he is telling us to worship him only as he has commanded, including singing only the psalms—because he has infallibly put the whole and complete truth of his name and his salvation in those psalms as Christ's words and because he wants us to take his words of truth and salvation upon our lips as our own, too, in Christ Jesus. That is the gospel!

Take note that the issue here is the gospel; and the gospel, therefore, is being denied. But the gospel is not being denied on the part of those who would insist on singing exclusively the psalms in official worship. There is no legalism in obeying the second commandment by singing psalms exclusively. On the contrary, there is sheer privilege and gratitude in obeying it. One would hope that all of God's laws would be thus obeyed. That kind of obedience comes from knowing the gospel. To deny one of God's laws, however, is not only to disobey that law, but it is also to reject the truth of God that is taught by that law. The issue is indeed serious.

To make all of this clear, one more *why* question ought to be asked. Why would anyone want to sing anything else in worship than the whole, complete, inspired, infallible book of songs that God has provided for his official worship in the 150 psalms? What is missing in them? What is lacking? What is not in the psalms that we still need to sing about? The Lord's prayer? Is that what is lacking? Perhaps it is the song of Mary or of Simeon? Those are beautiful texts in scripture. The 150 psalms are not enough?

Apparently not, not nearly enough. The *entire* word of God must be sung, according to the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). That point was emphatically made in the sermon

“The Indwelling Word.”⁶ One might wonder, though, how the RPC intend to obey that command. Where are their songs that are taken from Genesis, Judges, Acts, and Romans? Should not their songbook expand to be several inches thick? They need to versify the whole Bible! But here is where things get messy and murky, intentionally so. The psalms are not enough to sing, on the one hand, for the RPC;⁷ but, on the other hand, they are content to sing only the psalms.⁸ Is that not a contradiction? It is. Their concern about singing the psalms or any other songs is disingenuous, to put it courteously. The RPC agree that the psalms encapsulate the whole truth of scripture. In fact, in Reverend Langerak's sermon he said it would be “a waste of time” to versify more texts because the whole truth is already in the psalms. So how can one put these things together? The psalms are enough, but the psalms are also not enough? Confusion and contradiction often accompany what is false, and this case is no exception.

Whether or not the psalms are sung in worship is of little concern to the RPC in the end. Hymns may be sung (true hymns, of course) and other scripture songs. They are “not forbidden.”⁹ What is of great concern to the RPC, however, is by whose will any of those songs are sung. Singing only psalms is not the issue in the end. Who decides what is sung is the issue. Does God decide? Or does man decide? If man decides to sing only psalms because he wants to sing only psalms, then it is okay with the RPC. If God decides that only psalms must be sung for his glory, then it is legalism, according to the RPC.

Singing the Lord's prayer is not the issue. If we as exclusive psalmodists would include the Lord's prayer with the 150 psalms in our songs for worship, would that make anyone happy? The next question would be, what about the

⁶ “The principle of the text is this: let the word of God dwell richly in your heart. That's why you sing...You know what the word of Christ is. The word of Christ, we can simply say, is the entire scripture. The entire scripture.”

⁷ “When the Reformed faith was setting down the summary of the word of Christ, they didn't say you must only sing psalms. They didn't. They set down the word of Christ, which was *sing the word*” (Langerak, “The Indwelling Word”).

⁸ “I could be very content with that [singing nothing but the psalter]” (Langerak, “The Indwelling Word”).

⁹ Langerak, “The Indwelling Word.”

song of Mary? Or the song of the Lamb? Or... Thomas Ken's doxology? One very sad thing is that every time a song that is not a psalm is sung in worship, a psalm has not been sung. A psalm has been replaced and therefore silenced. A psalm specifically designated and written by God himself for the worship of his holy name, which he alone fully knows in truth, is silenced. Another very sad thing is that every time a song that is not a psalm is sung in worship (and this is especially true with man-made hymns), a child of God is not singing the words of Christ as they have been infallibly set down in the psalms to express Christ's innermost heart and soul as the Son of God come in our flesh to save us. That connection to Christ in the psalms has been severed.

That separation, replacement, and silence is egregious enough; but all of this lifts a cover off a deeper issue still. Galatians 2:4 exposes what is also going on here. It is the exclusive psalmist's liberty in Jesus Christ to sing psalms exclusively in worship. As was stated earlier, singing psalms is sheer privilege. That fact is significant and may not be overlooked. Galatians 2:4 speaks of "false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage." Bondage for us would be, and was, to be coerced to sing a man-made hymn in official worship. That happened for a time. But it is our freedom to sing psalms. It is our liberty, granted to us by Jesus Christ, to sing in him (as he is the head and we are the body)

and therefore with him (as his Spirit resides in our souls) his words of praise to God, which he composed. We are not singing psalms in order to make that connection to Christ happen. Even if we tried, that would not make any such connection happen. Who can draw Christ to himself by what he does? The accusation that we think to make ourselves sing with Jesus or to make Jesus sing with us if we sing the psalms is nonsensical, as well as untrue. But worse, it is an attack on our liberty. To sing the words of Christ, the words of the Lord of lords and King of kings, as they have been set down in supremely divine and sublime poetry for mortal worms such as we are to sing on this earth is nothing short of the astounding miracle of grace and mercy that salvation is. To sing the psalms of David in worship is no burden of the law. It is pure gift, privilege, liberty, and freedom to have that law to do, just like the sum of the law to love God does not present to us a heavy burden but the greatest blessing and privilege that can be bestowed on a man. Those who accuse us would steal that liberty from us if they could. By the grace of God, we will not let that precious, God-given freedom go, "no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5).

Why can't we sing the Lord's prayer in official worship? Why would we want to? What is lacking in God's divinely inspired songbook of psalms? When the lack in that songbook can be pointed out, perhaps a reason to sing the Lord's prayer can be found. In the meantime let us sing in the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free.

—Connie L. Meyer



REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

OCTOBER 31, 2024 | 7:30PM

Jesus is “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:6).

Jesus is “made unto us...righteousness” (I Cor. 1:30).

Jesus is “Christ our righteousness” (Belgic Confession 22).

But what can it mean that Jesus is our righteousness? Certainly it means that Jesus himself is righteous, and how glorious is his righteousness! When the law said, “Do,” Jesus did. When the law said, “Don’t,” Jesus didn’t. Jesus stood under all the strict commandments of the righteous God’s holy law, and Jesus perfectly obeyed. Oh, yes, Jesus is righteous!

But Jesus is *our* righteousness? What can it mean? Listen to this lovely explanation: “Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits and so many holy works which he has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness” (Belgic Confession 22).

How wonderful! How unexpected! It is the language of substitution. It is the language of one’s doing something instead of another and for another. Jesus stood in the place of us ungodly sinners and obeyed God’s law “for us and in our stead”!

And the result of Jesus’ substitutionary obedience? We are righteous before God! Not because we obeyed a single commandment but because Jesus obeyed every single commandment for us. Yes, we are righteous before God! Because Jesus is our righteousness.

We call Jesus’ substitutionary obedience for us his *active obedience*. This Reformation Day, come hear the glorious gospel and blessed comfort of Jesus’ active obedience. Come rejoice in the wonderful news that Jesus is our righteousness!

HOST

Remnant Reformed
Church

SPEAKER

Rev. Andrew Lanning

FORMAT

Lecture followed by
Q&A and Refreshments

VENUE

Pavilion Christian School, 9181 Kenowa Avenue Southwest, Grand Rapids, MI 49534

lawgospel.com

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

We came to the conclusion that in His eternal counsel God willed to form a people for Himself and realize with them His covenant and establish His Kingdom in Christ Jesus, and that all other things must be conceived as logically subservient to this eternal will of God. If the question is asked us, whether in that counsel election and reprobation follow sin and the fall, or whether the latter must be conceived as serving the realization of the former, we answer: the latter of these two conceptions is the correct one. The positive line of God's counsel is always that He wants to glorify Himself in the realization of His Kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is from this point of view no mistake in history, no turning backward. History is the constant realization of what God willed from all eternity. And though to us it seems as if sin at least temporarily thwarts the counsel of God, in reality this is not true. It is exactly through the deeper way of sin and grace that God willed to manifest the highest realization of His covenant and kingdom.

If we follow, now, this positive line we come first of all to the fact that God created this kingdom.

It is, of course, not our intention to discuss the fact once more in detail that God actually did create His world a kingdom. In one of our earliest articles we elaborated upon this thought. We then did call your attention to the fact that in the broadest sense of the word the kingdom-idea is as all-inclusive as the world. It embraces all creation, the spiritual and the material world. The world in all its fulness, with all it contains, with all its different spheres, with all its powers and elements, hidden or revealed, that world

with all its life and riches we are thinking of when we speak of the kingdom God created. We have called your attention to the fact that the king of this kingdom in the absolute sense is God, the Sovereign in the supreme sense. But at the same time we then emphasized that man was to be king under God, and that he might have dominion over all the world. Man is king. In a sense, we said, this kingship was exactly the central idea of his being created after the image of God. To all this we called your attention, and we do not intend to review this material in detail.

Historically we found the matter is thus, that the first king that was ordained, the head and root of the human race, arose in rebellion against his rightful sovereign, and that hence he fell. He became the enemy of God, the friend of the devil, and his kingdom became through his fall and rebellion a veritable kingdom of satan, the kingdom of darkness. We followed the development of this kingdom of darkness, the negative line of reprobation, through the history of the world, and we came to the conclusion that along this line we ultimately arrive at the kingdom of anti-christ that will exist for a while but will be consumed by the breath of Christ's mouth. And if we would follow this historical line in speaking of the new king and his kingdom, we would not have to refer to creation again. All that would be necessary is to discuss the fact that this fallen kingdom is saved again in Christ Jesus.

The kingdom is created under Adam as king.

The king and the kingdom fall through his rebellion and sin.

That same and entire kingdom is saved in Christ Jesus.

Such is the historical line of development. And here we wish to call your attention to the very obvious fact that history is thoroughly *infra*. This is so self-evident, so very obvious, that it might almost seem foolish to call the attention to it. And yet, we sometimes have the impression that in the controversy between the *supralapsarians* and the *infralapsarians* in the past, this obvious fact has been too often ignored or overlooked. The line of history is: Creation, Fall, Redemption. Historically speaking, election and reprobation could not but follow the fall. Always according to the rule that what is first in God's counsel is last in its historical realization.

For that same reason Scripture, which in its revelation so largely follows the historical line, is predominately *soteriological* in character. The Word of God does not begin to reveal that God intended from all eternity to establish a kingdom in Christ Jesus and to realize His covenant in His only begotten Son, in order then to continue by showing how sin and Satan from the very beginning must serve the realization of that purpose. It is not most often that Scripture presents the Christ in this *supra-light*, as the eternally Anointed, for whom all things are created, to whom from before the foundation of the world a people and a kingdom are given, and to the realization of whose kingdom sin and evil are subservient. On the contrary, most often Scripture follows the historical line and relates, reveals things in their historical order and significance. That God created the world and man, that the world with man fell into darkness, and now God sends a Savior into the world, whose purpose is to save that which is lost, who Himself expresses it that He has come to seek and save that which is lost, — that is the dominating thought, the most frequent presentation in the Word of God. It cannot be denied that Scripture is obviously *soteriological* in presentation. The redemptive idea, the message of salvation appears emphatically on the foreground. And we do not even hesitate to state that just because Scripture follows largely the historical line, which is *soteriological*, it is far easier to quote texts that favor the *infra-conception* than to

appeal to separate texts for the *supra-representation*. This is so strong that it may even be stated without much fear of contradiction that this *Christological-soteriological* character of Scripture objectively guided the Church in selecting the books that now constitute the Canon. If the question is asked: What was it that guided the church in the past, before the Canon was closed, to select exactly the Scriptures that now form the Word of God for us, and to reject others that also presented themselves to the Church? the answer is a pretty safe one, that while the Church was subjectively guided by the Spirit of her Redeemer, she selected those books in which she discovered an organic element of the plan of salvation. However this may be, certain it is that history is naturally *infra* and that the Word of God often follows this *infra* line of development.

This, however, does not mean that Scripture does not shed the light of God's eternal counsel over this historical development of the plan of salvation. It does not mean that we are obliged to rest in this historical development and that we may not struggle till we have caught a glimpse of the glory of God as He realizes His eternal counsel in the history of the world. It does by no means imply that the *supra-view* is to be condemned. On the contrary, very often Scripture affords us a glimpse of this higher conception and allows us to see the whole of history in the glorious light of His counsel. Already in the Old Testament this higher light appears more than once. The positive line that must culminate in the Great Messiah, the Anointed of God, is plainly revealed, and it becomes more evident as time goes on that all history is subservient to the coming of this Messiah. Psalm 2, which pictures the enemies as vainly raging against the eternally Anointed to whom the ends of the earth are given for a heritage, can be most clearly understood only when viewed in this higher light. And the giant among the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah, plainly reveals the thought that all history concentrates around the Beloved of Jehovah, the Servant of God and His people. But especially when we come to the New Testament this higher

light is often revealed, and the eternal thoughts of God are revealed as a commentary upon the historical development of the Kingdom. It is there that we clearly find the revelation of the mystery of God's will, according to which He purposed to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth. Eph. 1:10. It is there that we receive the information that in Christ our Redeemer, the Son of God's love into whose kingdom we are translated, all things are created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things that are visible and things that are invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, — all have been created through Him, but also unto Him. Col. 1:16. It is there above all that the supra-light of God's counsel is abundantly shed upon the infra-historical development of the kingdom of glory!

It is in that higher light that we now wish to follow the historical line of development of the New King and His Kingdom. And if we make a study of history in this higher light we will come to the conclusion that it was, indeed, all adapted to the Christ of God and that the stream of history irresistibly, without turning back to its source for even once, moves onward toward the realization of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to God's eternal counsel.

The kingdom of the world, then, was created unto Him. It was created with the positive end in view that He, Christ Jesus, should ultimately be the Head of all things.

It was created so, that it might fall into sin and misery.

It was created so, that the Incarnation of the Son was possible.

It was created so, that it could be saved in case it should fall away from God. The world God created was a savable world. It was in creation adapted to salvation.

This is plain first of all from the fact that man is created in the image of God. True, this does not necessitate the Incarnation, and the thought as if the Incarnation would have become a fact if sin

had never come must be absolutely rejected as unscriptural. But, nevertheless, with it the possibility of the Incarnation was given. The human nature was created after such complete creaturely likeness to the Divine that such close connection between the two as is realized in the Incarnation was possible. And, therefore, to that extent it may safely be said that the creation of man, the king under God of the world, was adapted to the future Incarnation of Christ.

However, as has already been said, this would have been of no avail and in itself would never have led to the Incarnation if sin had not come. And man is created in such a state that the fall was possible. God did not create man sinful. He did not make him imperfect. On the contrary, he was good. He possessed knowledge, righteousness and holiness, — all that was necessary to be the friend-servant of God. Yet, he was created so that he could fall. "Posse non peccare" but also "posse peccare" was applicable to him. Hence, God is not the cause of his fall into sin. But the way remains open, nevertheless, for the Christ to assume His place at the Head of the human race. The possibility is there, and that possibility becomes reality through the willful sin of Adam.

And thirdly, the entire human race is created in one man, who is the head and the root of the race. If God had created the human family like the angels, all its individuals at the same time, without legal solidarity and organic connection, it would have been quite inconceivable that one person, whoever he might be, could have become its Head and Redeemer. Now it is different. The human race is created in Adam. He is its head. He is its root. In him is the human nature. In him the human nature becomes corrupt. And it becomes possible that even as through one man sin entered into the world, so also by One Man can come the resurrection of the dead.

The world in its creation as a kingdom is already adapted to the future King.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.