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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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If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

—Exodus 21:2

Liberty to the Captives

The first judgment that God delivered to Israel through Moses was the civil law concerning the seventh year, the year of release. Therefore, the first judgment was the blessed gospel of our liberty in Christ.

Liberty! Freedom!

Can we picture the scene? There is a Hebrew man, who found himself in such straits of poverty that he had no choice but to sell himself into slavery to his Hebrew neighbor, or who had stolen from his Hebrew neighbor and could only repay his theft by selling himself. For six years he would toil in his master's house and field. For six years he would give the strength of his body, the work of his hands, and the knowledge of his experience to the master. For six years his life would not be his own. For six years his days and his nights, his waking and his sleeping, his sweat and his blood would belong to another. When the master said, "Labor," he would labor. When the master said, "Sleep," he would sleep. When the master said, "Eat," he would eat.

And then came the seventh year. The Hebrew master would wake his Hebrew slave on the first morning of the seventh year and would proclaim to him, "Go out free for nothing!"

Liberty! Freedom!

Indeed, so great would be the slave's new freedom that it would not be the slave who would pay the master to buy his freedom but the master who would lavish his goods on the slave. "And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of

thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him" (Deut. 15:13–14).

Liberty! Freedom!

In her unbelief Israel would come to mock the year of release. Hebrew masters would set their Hebrew slaves free for a moment, only to recapture them and bring them back under bondage again (Jer. 34:12–22). But in spite of Israel's hard heart, God maintained the law of release. The slaves must go free; and the captors would, in turn, be taken captive.

Liberty! Freedom!

And what was the reason that the slave must be set free? Do not seek the reason in social justice or social grievance or social redress, as so many do. Do not be carried away with the vapid imaginations of the hymnwriters that Jesus came to set earthly relationships right: "Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother; and in his name all oppression shall cease." No, there is no food for the soul in those empty explanations of the seventh year of release.

Rather, the reason that the slave must be set free the seventh year is because it was the gospel of our liberty in Jesus Christ. In the civil law of release, God proclaimed the good news of salvation that we slaves to sin and death are made free in Jesus Christ. In the law of release, God proclaimed the good news of salvation that we slaves are sent out from our bondage absolutely freely, without any payment or merit of our own, because of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ and his cross. Indeed, in the law of release, God

proclaimed the good news of salvation that we slaves are lavished with the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day” (Deut. 15:15).

Liberty! Freedom!

The very first of the judgments that God gave to Moses to set before the children of Israel was the gospel of our liberty in our savior. How merciful is the God of our redemption, who has given us Jesus Christ to proclaim liberty to us captives!

—AL

FROM THE RAMPARTS

Good and Necessary Consequence

Have you ever been in a theological argument where someone demanded, “Give me a verse!”? The challenge is clear: either you provide a Bible verse that explicitly states the position you are defending, or the one with whom you are arguing is not going to be convinced. Perhaps it was the case that the position for which you were arguing had no explicit verse. How did that make you feel? Did you wish you had a verse to give? Did you think that perhaps the other person was justified in demanding a verse? Was it your judgment that your position was weaker because you did not have a verse to give? Does it appear that certain biblical positions are stronger than others for the simple reason that for some positions you can cite chapter and verse where the truth is taught explicitly, and for others you can’t?

That demand, “Give me a verse!” came up recently in two controversies in the church where I was a member. The first controversy centered on whether the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. The second was over worship, specifically, whether God demands the singing of exclusively psalms in worship. Although the subject matter was different, the unspoken charge was the same. “You don’t have a verse to provide that explicitly teaches the truth you are defending, which allows us to discard it out of hand.” This demand—and charge—carried weight with many.

What about that demand for a verse? Is it a fair demand? Does it settle the matter if no verse is forthcoming? Let me put it differently and start with something we can all agree on. In a discussion about theology, we ought to argue scripturally. In other words, the word of God should be our guide. But what does it mean to say, “My position is based on the word of God”? Does it mean you have an explicit text that you can use to support your position? If not, then what?

I will address these questions in this article by considering one aspect of what theologians call *hermeneutics* or what we could call the guidelines or rules by which we interpret scripture. I will discuss how many biblical truths are known through logical deduction rather than explicit references to specific verses.

It is my hope that, in addition to helping us grow in our understanding of the interpretation of God’s word, this article will also strengthen the hands of God’s people who have found themselves under attack by the “show me a verse” demand and who have felt themselves at a disadvantage when there was no explicit verse to give.

Nothing New

The argument that a specific text must support a biblical position is nothing new. In the mid-1600s, about the time of the Westminster

Assembly, Richard Hooker and others in the Anglican church pushed back against those who sought to reform the polity and worship of the church.¹ Some opposed the “popish” practices in the Anglican church. Such men wanted a reform of the church that would refocus the church’s attention on preaching; that would do away with the hierarchical structure of the Anglican church; and that would look to the scriptures alone to govern worship and the polity of the church, as opposed to simply looking to tradition. Hooker defended the Anglican church; and when it came to those seeking reform, he demanded a specific text from them to justify their reforms.

And we may boldly deny, that of all those things which at this day are with so great necessity urged upon this church under the name of reformed church-discipline, there is any one which their books hitherto have made manifest to be contained in Scripture. Let them if they can allege but one properly belonging to their cause, and not common to them and us, and shew the deduction thereof out of Scripture to be necessary.²

Hooker believed that scripture addressed central doctrines by consequence but was silent on most other matters. This limited view of scripture required explicit textual support for beliefs beyond those key doctrines. He was not alone.

Besides Hooker and the Anglican Church, the Socinians also held the belief that biblical authority must be limited to its literal statements, leaving no room for

authoritative scriptural deductions. The Anabaptists pointed to the lack of any explicit biblical statement on pedobaptism. Roman Catholicism, particularly within the content of the Council of Trent (1545–63), also left the Reformed church with a greater need to fortify and elucidate certain points of its theology and its methods for arriving at them.³

This was also the position of the Arminians, who allowed for no proofs from scripture except those that were plain and explicit, such that they would be universally agreed upon by all who possessed reason (“*rationis compos*”) and which interpretation would be agreed upon by all (“*nulli non obvice*”).⁴ However, granting this position would mean that many truths of the gospel would necessarily fall.

We must renounce many necessary truths which the reformed churches hold against the Arians, Antitrinitarians, Socinians, Papists, because the consequences and arguments from Scripture brought to prove them are not admitted as good by the adversaries.⁵

The position of the Socinians, which also reflects the stance of others who demand explicit textual support, was that doctrines must be built “upon plain texts of Scripture, without any consequences.”⁶ You can hear the arguments now from the Socinians: “You believe in the Trinity? Prove it from scripture! And not by inference but with a specific text!” You can hear that same argument from the Baptists. “Baptism of infants? Can you point to

¹ C. J. Williams, “Good and Necessary Consequence in the Westminster Confession,” in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spear*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 172–73. I recommend this essay to those who wish to read a more thorough treatment of the biblical hermeneutic discussed in this article and that by a man eminently more qualified to write it.

² Richard Hooker, quoted in Williams, “Good and Necessary Consequence,” 173 (emphasis added).

³ Williams, “Good and Necessary Consequence,” 173.

⁴ George Gillespie, “A Treatise of Miscellany Questions,” as cited in Williams, “Good and Necessary Consequence,” 175.

⁵ Gillespie, “A Treatise of Miscellany Questions,” 175.

⁶ Faustus Socinus, *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818), Introduction, accessed 11/8/2024, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A91721.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

a New Testament text that records a child being baptized? Just one verse is all we need.” These denials of cardinal truths of God’s word all have this in common: they all demand an explicit text from scripture and reject any position that relies on “consequence”—a conclusion reached through deduction or inference.

The Use...

This raises the question, what is the proper method of biblical interpretation? May the child of God argue for a position for which no specific Bible verse can be found? The answer is yes. A truth may be taught in a text explicitly, or a truth may be drawn from scripture by inference or logical deduction.⁷ Both are firm foundations on which the child of God may stand. Neither is this an apologetic “well, you have me at a disadvantage on this one because I have no explicit text, which I realize makes my position inherently weak” affirmation. The child of God, in defending the truth of God, can stand as firmly and confidently on a truth of God that is drawn out of God’s word by consequence as he can stand on a truth for which an explicit text can be found. Jesus certainly did.

In a well-known passage on this topic, Matthew 22 recounts how Jesus was challenged by the Sadducees. The question they posed was merely a pretense to challenge Jesus about a truth they denied, the resurrection of the dead. Before we look at Jesus’ response to their challenge, let’s ask ourselves how we might have proved to the Sadducees the resurrection of the dead. We undoubtedly would have cited one of the many Old Testament passages that explicitly affirm the truth the Sadducees were known to deny, such as Daniel 12:2: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

We would have quoted this text, felt ourselves on the most solid ground possible (an explicit text from scripture), and considered the matter closed. And then, when the Sadducees would have inevitably responded that they would only accept as proof a text from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), we would have rebuked them for their unbelief and for not receiving the whole counsel of God’s word. But that was not Jesus’ response. He did not quote from Daniel or any other passage that explicitly taught the truth of the resurrection. Instead, he quoted Exodus 3:6 and presented evidence directly from the Torah.

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Matt. 22:31–32)

Jesus taught that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while at the same time affirming that God is the God of the living, not the dead. How could this have been, if these patriarchs had been dead by this time for close to two thousand years? The truth taught here by inference is that these fathers are living, which is explained by the reality of the resurrection of the dead. Jesus used a text that taught the truth of the resurrection by inference, rather than explicitly, which left the people “astonished at his doctrine” (Matt. 22:33). As one man put it, Jesus proved his argument based on verb tense.⁸

Today’s Christianity would not have fared well in Jesus’ day. Jesus’ answer was not to explicitly give a text that taught the resurrection, even though such texts existed. He made an argument based on inference, which required thought and discernment. Many Christians today would hear that argument, belittle it for

⁷The Westminster Confession of Faith states this truth in Article 1.6. “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (emphasis added).

⁸J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 88.

not including a text that taught the truth explicitly, and walk away unconvinced.⁹ We Christians today are not interested in hearing an argument that may take time and thought. We want our theology, like we want our tweets, to be brief.

However, many truths of God's word are based not on explicit texts but on "good and necessary consequence" (to quote the Westminster Confession of Faith). Neither are these truths relegated to second-class status, so that the truths derived from consequence are take-it-or-leave-it truths. Infant baptism is a cardinal truth of the New Testament church. It touches one of the marks of the true church (see Belgic Confession 29). Yet there is no explicit text that teaches, "You must baptize infants," and that to the confounding of Baptists the world over.¹⁰ Yet it is God's truth, nonetheless, that can distinguish a true from a false church. The truth of the Trinity is another truth not found explicitly in scripture, as any Jehovah's Witness would be eager to tell you.¹¹ If you were challenged as to why it is that you worship on Sunday, you would look in vain for a text that teaches, "Thou shalt worship on the first day of the week."¹² Other truths that are known by inference are the truth of the Christian school as a demand of the covenant and the truth that only psalms are to be sung in the church's corporate worship. No explicit texts prove any of

the above truths, yet they are truths of God, as firm and sure as is any command in the Bible that begins with "Thou shalt." In commenting on the Westminster Assembly's adoption of Article 1.6, C. J. Williams writes,

There is no varying level of authority that depends on the method by which we comprehend a certain truth of Scripture; good and necessary deductions have the same authority as the "thou shalt" of the law. Because God is the Author of Scripture, he is also the Author of the implications of Scripture. As B. B. Warfield put it, "It is the Reformed contention, reflected here by the Confession, that the sense of Scripture is Scripture, and that men are bound by its whole sense in all its implications."¹³

Not to accept that many truths of God are known by inference would be to deny many cardinal truths of scripture.¹⁴

What does drawing a truth from God's word based on logical inference or deduction mean? It means arriving at a conclusion from various passages of scripture such that the truth aligns with the analogy of faith. The analogy of faith is the fact that scripture is one and cannot be broken, that scripture agrees with itself, and

⁹ Actually, unbelief is found in every age. When Paul "reasoned" with the people (see Acts 17:2 and 18:4) and "shewed" (see v. 28) from the Old Testament that Jesus, who was never explicitly named, was the Christ, the response of many was to reject the instruction and blaspheme the name of God (see 17:5; 18:6; and many others).

¹⁰ When giving a list of five reasons that he rejects infant baptism, John MacArthur, long-time pastor of Grace Community Church in California, gives this as his number one reason: "Number one, infant baptism is not in Scripture. Against this fact, there is no clear evidence. Scripture nowhere advocates, commands or records a single infant baptism. It is therefore impossible to directly prove or support this rite from the Bible" (John MacArthur, "Case for Believer's Baptism: The Credo-Baptist Position," *Grace to You*, accessed November 18, 2024, <https://www.gty.org/library/Articles/A360/Case-for-Believers-Baptism-The-Credo-Baptist-Position>).

¹¹ In the Jehovah's Witnesses' attempt at refuting the truth of the Trinity, they write, "For one thing, the Bible does not mention the word 'Trinity'" (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, accessed November 12, 2024, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201308/trinity/>).

¹² This from Ellen White, a cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in explaining why those churches continued to worship on the seventh day of the week and not the first: "They began to examine the reasons for observing the first day of the week instead of the day which God had sanctified. They could find no evidence in the Scriptures that the fourth commandment had been abolished, or that the Sabbath had been changed; the blessing which first hallowed the seventh day had never been removed" (Ellen Gould White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 434.3, <https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p132.1967&index=0>).

¹³ Williams, "Good and Necessary Consequence," 178.

¹⁴ To see a recent example of good and necessary consequence applied in a sermon that addressed the much-maligned truth of passive faith, see Andrew Lanning, "Whence this Faith?," sermon preached on January 20, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL9d8-LIOQE>.

that scripture interprets scripture. To draw a conclusion in line with the analogy of faith means that the inferred truth does not contradict any other truths in scripture but, rather, fits harmoniously with the entirety of God's word. It does not place reason above the word of God but involves reading and applying various passages of scripture to maintain their unity and coherence.

In this respect, it is important to understand what the divines, and later Warfield, argue; namely the issue of a good and necessary consequence is not a matter of placing Scripture and reason in the balance and producing a conclusion. Instead, the principle involves collating and comparing various passages of Scripture, which is evident in Gillespie's language of *collecting* teachings from Scripture, and explaining how they all fit together.¹⁵

In other words, knowing something by logical inference means arriving at a truth by comparing spiritual things with spiritual (I Cor. 2:13).

...and the Misuse

This doctrine can be misused. An example of this misuse is drawing a false conclusion from inference, such as the so-called prosperity gospel or health and wealth gospel.¹⁶ A man might—and many do—say that, based on the following passages, God's will for our lives is that we be wealthy and healthy.

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. (III John 1:2)

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

Those who insist on a purely literal reading of a text (biblicism) might claim, based on those

passages and a few others, that the prosperity gospel is the truth of scripture. They would point to the fact that it is explicitly stated in scripture and is, therefore, an irrefutable truth. The texts they quote are indeed true; their interpretation is not.

The test, then, is to see whether this teaching accords with the analogy of faith. Does this teaching fit with the rest of scripture? It does not take long to see that the prosperity gospel is a false gospel. The child of God is taught *not* to lay up treasures on this earth (Matt. 6:19–21), that his life does not consist in his abundance of things (Luke 12:15), and that a love of money brings many sorrows (I Tim. 6:9–10). Life for the child of God in this world will involve tribulation (John 16:33), persecution (II Tim. 3:12), and loss (Luke 14:33). The child of God *will* prosper in this world and *will* have life more abundantly, but it will be a prosperity and abundance of which the world knows nothing (Eph. 1:3).

An example of a man in the past who abused the principle of good and necessary consequence was Harold Camping, who made speculative predictions for the date of Christ's return based on his interpretations of books like Daniel and Revelation. A faithful deduction from the word of God will not violate other teachings of scripture, as Camping certainly did (see Matt. 24:36); and it will be a necessary deduction from the *entire* word of God, not just from one passage or other.

Another test to use when judging whether a position is valid when presented as a truth derived from logical reason is to ask if it has been taught before and to compare it with the conclusions of other theologians.¹⁷ The Reformed faith abhors theological novelty, much like nature (along with most husbands) abhors a vacuum. The question is not whether something is new to our generation or even our father's

¹⁵ J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, 90.

¹⁶ Others would include salvation by works (where appeal is made to James 2:24) and universalism (where appeal is made to II Pet. 3:9).

¹⁷ "Like any method of biblical interpretation, the drawing of implications can be abused. One method used by the authors of the [Westminster Confession] to prevent this abuse was comparing their conclusions with other theologians" (John Allen Delivuk, "Biblical Authority in the Westminster Confession and Its Twentieth Century Contextualization in the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony of 1980" [Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 1987], 151, as cited in Williams, "Good and Necessary Consequence," 181).

generation but whether it is completely new to the Reformed faith.

So, for example, when reformation comes to a church and the Holy Spirit restores exclusive psalmody to that church, many reject it. The fact that many say that they find such truths to be “strange things to our ears” is nothing new (Acts 17:20). A certain element of the church will respond, “I have never been taught that! Since the days of our fathers, we have been singing hymns!” Although that is undoubtedly true, that is not the question. The key issue to consider is this: “Where are the old paths?” which paths are to be understood by answering the question, what does God demand according to his word? (See Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96.) A return to exclusive psalmody isn’t a novel idea; it aligns with scripture and has deep roots in church history, while hymn-singing is the modern innovation.

Similarly, the Christian school as a covenantal responsibility can be traced back to the Synod of Dort, which explicitly taught this in Church Order 21. The work of the Spirit in a church often involves recovering what has been lost through the church’s apostasy.

Logical Deduction and the Reformed Faith

The entire system of thought known as the Reformed faith can be seen as a mining of God’s word and drawing out by logical inference the treasures (truths) of God found therein.¹⁸ That explains the beauty and richness and depth of the Reformed faith, which are nothing more and nothing less than the richness and depth and beauty of God’s word itself. How cold and sterile must be the faith of so many, who refuse to go beyond a surface reading of this text or that!

A few examples will illustrate the Reformed faith’s approach to drawing out truths by good

and necessary consequence. The Reformed faith teaches that making a representation or picture of Jesus violates the second commandment. However, even a cursory glance at the so-called Christian books published today shows many of them with representations of Jesus on the covers. How would you go about showing a non-Reformed man that this is a sin against the most high God and a violation of the second commandment? Would you take him to Deuteronomy 4:15: “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire”? Or perhaps Isaiah 46:5: “To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?” There are others like that, but none of them explicitly state, “Make no representations of Jesus.” A man who requires an explicit passage condemning the representation of Jesus will find your argument lacking. Yet the Reformed faith has no trouble with including this in its explanation of the second commandment.

Or take the Reformed faith’s explanation of the third commandment, that there is no sin more provoking to God than to take his name in vain. Yet many professing Christians today take God’s name on their lips by saying, “Oh my ____” or by using the name of our savior to express surprise (or revulsion) at something or other. What verse would you bring them to prove that this is blasphemy? Maybe you would bring them Leviticus 5:1: “And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.” You can hear the response calling into question that verse as a proof text, given its location in the Old Testament. You will not find an explicit text condemning this, as the truth is understood by inference—a reality

¹⁸ Herman Bavinck teaches this when he states that it is the duty of the dogmatician to show the “unity and interconnectedness of dogmatics” and in this way to “furnish an exposition of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ and revealed in Scripture” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. John Bolt and John Vriend [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003], 94–95). On a personal note, this is the testimony of members of the church where I am a member, who have witnessed “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” flourish in ways we never could have imagined, particularly regarding the Christian school and the singing of psalms in worship. Truly, God has been our pavilion, preserving us from trouble and surrounding us with the songs of Jesus Christ, the sweet psalmist of Israel (see Ps. 32:7).

the Reformed faith readily embraces in its interpretation of the third commandment.

Another example would be the requirement for church membership. The Belgic Confession teaches that everyone is duty-bound to join himself to the true church and that there is no salvation out of that true church (article 28). But what is taught explicitly in the Belgic Confession is taught by inference in scripture. The obligation to join oneself to a true church is drawn not from one or two explicit texts but from the consistent teaching of scripture, as understood by good and necessary consequence. The church is described as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22–23), for which he died (Acts 20:28). We are members of his body (I Cor. 12:27) and members one of another (Rom. 12:4–5), and we are called to gather together for worship (Heb. 10:24–25). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15), over which officebearers are appointed overseers (Acts 20:28). These passages, and many others, teach that the child of God is not to live in isolation but is called to active membership in a true church, where he participates in worship, submits to godly oversight, and knows “it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 55).

Examples could be multiplied. Even the article of the standing and falling church has been attacked for not finding explicit expression in scripture.¹⁹ The point here is that even though there are no explicit texts to prove certain truths

(and commands) of God, they are nonetheless truths (and commands) of God. This means that, although discussing topics such as the Christian school as a covenantal demand or the obligation to sing only the 150 psalms of David in worship (as upheld by article 69 of the Church Order of Dordt) with a non-Reformed man may require time and effort to explain, these truths stand just as firmly as doctrines supported by explicit scriptural texts.²⁰

The Reformed faith frequently uses the method of biblical interpretation that understands that many truths of God are understood not by appealing to any explicit reference in scripture but by drawing the truth from good and necessary consequence. In other words, in a controversy, no man, and especially no Reformed man, should ever demand, “Give me an explicit text!”

Endless Questions

Opposition to conclusions drawn by good and necessary consequence can make the child of God discouraged. The child of God can become discouraged when, after carefully laying out an argument based on good and necessary consequence, the demand still comes, “Give me a verse!” Or there are endless questions about the truth taught by consequence. There are a few things to remember. First, not all questions are born of faith. Jesus faced many questions that were asked simply as traps. So, too, today. When an argument has been made and shown to be in accordance with scripture, so that it would also

¹⁸ Herman Bavinck teaches this when he states that it is the duty of the dogmatician to show the “unity and interconnectedness of dogmatics” and in this way to “furnish an exposition of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ and revealed in Scripture” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. John Bolt and John Vriend [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003], 94–95). On a personal note, this is the testimony of members of the church where I am a member, who have witnessed “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” flourish in ways we never could have imagined, particularly regarding the Christian school and the singing of psalms in worship. Truly, God has been our pavilion, preserving us from trouble and surrounding us with the songs of Jesus Christ, the sweet psalmist of Israel (see Ps. 32:7).

¹⁹ In a swipe at the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Norman Shepherd points out that the phrase *justification by faith alone* is never explicitly stated in scripture. He writes, “Use of that particular formula, however, cannot be made a litmus test for orthodoxy. If it were, both Scripture and the Westminster Confession would fail the test” (Norman Shepherd, “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 11, no. 2 [Spring 2002]: 5).

²⁰ To see an explanation of the truth of the Christian school as a demand of the covenant, see the five-part series “The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant” by Rev. Andrew Lanning in volume 2 of *Sword and Shield*. For a defense of exclusive psalmody, see this magazine since its inception.

then be faithful to the history of the church at its strongest, we should not be surprised when the questions keep coming. Many of them are not born of faith. Perhaps they are posed to appease the conscience of the one asking. Or the questioner hopes to trip you up. This should not surprise us. The servant is not greater than his master. Jesus faced a never-ending stream of such questions. If the questions are not born of faith, no answer you give will satisfy. Natural reason cannot come to the proper conclusion but only “reason captivated and subdued to the obedience of Christ.”²¹ Many go on asking their questions and will continue to do so until Jesus returns and finally says, “Enough.” So, weary defender of the faith, do not be discouraged by the lack of fruit you see on your efforts. The fault is not found in a weakness in your argument that is born of good and necessary consequence. The fault is the hardness of men’s hearts. This should evoke gratitude in your heart: the only reason you are not in that position is because of the tender mercies of your Lord. It should also evoke patience. Has God been long-suffering with you? Has he been merciful beyond measure? Show that, then, to others, even to your enemies; for when you were yet an enemy of God, Christ died for you.

Second, consider this: many men and women are not convinced even *when* a specific text of scripture teaches some truth. Consider how many churches allow women to serve in the special offices, despite the clear and unmistakable instruction of the New Testament. Is Paul unclear in I Corinthians 14:34–35 and I Timothy 2:11–12? Yet millions of people gather week after week for worship in churches that are led or overseen by women serving in the offices forbidden them by God.

What about divorce and remarriage? Many supposed conservative churches would be aghast at the thought of allowing a homosexual to join

their church (a topic Jesus did not explicitly mention). Yet these same so-called conservative churches are filled with those who are divorced and remarried, which is something *expressly condemned* by scripture and far more so than homosexuality.

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. (Rom. 7:2–3)

The instruction of the word of God on this subject is explicit. Yet almost every church on the planet allows for remarriage after divorce.

To think that someone would be convinced if you “only had a verse” is contrary to our everyday experience. Even an explicit text from scripture will prove to be no hindrance to people and churches that are determined to rule according to their own will and not God’s will.

Conclusion

It is also possible that the (teachable) child of God has difficulty understanding a truth drawn from scripture not by appeal to a specific verse or verses but by logical deduction. Maybe that is the truth taught by the Synod of Dordt that God demands the Christian school as part of covenant life. Or perhaps someone grew up singing hymns and cannot wrap his head around the idea that God’s will for corporate worship is that his people sing only the 150 psalms of David. After all, doesn’t Colossians 3:16 speak of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs?²²

Do these saints need to lay off studying their Bibles for a while and pick up a book of logic?

²¹ George Gillespie, quoted in Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 55.

²² For an answer to this question, see Andrew Lanning, “Colossians 3:16,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 18 (August 12, 2023): 4–11, and Andrew Lanning, “Spiritual Psalm Singing,” sermon preached on May 26, 2024, <https://www.remnantreformedchurch.org/podcasts/media/2024-05-26-spiritual-psalm-singing>.

Does the explanation in this article leave all of us relying on the strength of our reason or our powers of deduction? Not at all. Knowing any part of God’s word is unnatural to any man. How do we learn the things of God? How can we read and understand his word? The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ has come, and he now guides his church into all truth (John 16:13). This is intensely humbling. There is a wisdom of the wise and an understanding of the prudent, both of which God will destroy (I Cor. 1:19). God does not reveal the truths of his word to the mighty, the wise, or the prudent; he reveals them unto babes (Matt. 11:25). Do you lack understanding? Do you lack wisdom? Go to the source. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

God reveals the truth of scripture to his people, whether taught explicitly or by deduction, and he does it “by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:10). To be taught of the Spirit the things of God—which the natural man cannot

and will not comprehend—is pure joy for the child of God. He has no claim on this knowledge or understanding. His plea is simple: “Lord, I know nothing! Fill me with knowledge and understanding of thy word!” Rather than be discouraged by the slowness of our understanding, we ought to stand in amazement at the mercy of God that he makes *any* of his truth known to us.

Our faith does not stand “in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (I Cor. 2:5). It is God from start to finish. Now we see through a glass darkly (13:12), so that we do not immediately grasp some truths; and other truths must be continually recovered to the church by God on account of the repeated apostasy of the church. But God is faithful. His truth will never fail, and he will continue to guide his church and his people into all truth, whether that is a truth taught by an explicit passage of scripture or understood by good and necessary consequence.

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. (Ps. 36:9)

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Article XCIV. The New King and His Kingdom: The Covenant with Noah (continued)

Thus far we contended that the covenant as revealed to Noah is essentially no other covenant than the covenant of grace. We expressed our belief that Dr. A. Kuyper struck a wrong road and led us in the wrong direction when he explained the covenant as established immediately after the flood as being a covenant of common grace, connected indeed with the covenant of grace and having some significance indirectly for the development of that covenant, but nevertheless not being the covenant of grace itself. Over against this we maintained that the covenant with Noah is the same covenant of grace that is revealed throughout Scripture, but that passes through different forms of historical development. As such the covenant with Noah has not only temporal, but eternal significance. As such it reveals to us the covenant in its all-comprehensive significance, as embracing not only the soul of man, not only a few separate elect, but the entire organism of the elect race, and in connection with that race of the elect all the works of God, that ultimately shall be theirs, and over which they shall once reign in glory in Christ, when the eternal covenant and kingdom of glory shall have been realized. And we explained that the rainbow, as a token of this covenant, does not merely purpose to instill rest and peace in the minds of all men, seeing that it testifies that there shall be flood no more, but that it is a sign of that all-comprehensive covenant of grace in which all creation as the eternal kingdom shall once be glorified.

This last idea we find corroborated in Scripture whenever there is mention of the rainbow. We find mention of the bow in the heavens as a

sign of God's covenant of grace in three different passages of the Word of God, namely, in Ezek. 1, Rev. 4 and Rev. 10.

In Ezek. 1:4–28 we meet with the description of the vision Ezekiel receives at the occasion of his calling as a prophet of the glory of Jehovah. The nature of the vision stands in close relation to the contents of the message the prophet shall be called to deliver to God's people. Briefly stated, Ezekiel is called to prophesy of the fact that the old dispensational form of the kingdom and covenant as it was revealed in Israel shall be dissolved, and that the covenant and kingdom of grace shall become cosmic rather than national in its manifestation and significance. Heretofore Jehovah had dwelled in a temple made with hands, in a particular city as the God of a particular nation. But all these external forms shall be taken away. The temple shall be rebuilt, indeed, but as the spiritual temple of the new covenant, and the kingdom shall be re-established, or rather, shall again appear in glory after the captivity, but not as a national kingdom with the literal throne of David, but as embracing all nations, yea, all the world. Such is, in brief, the burden of the message the prophet must bring. Accordingly he receives the vision of the glory of Jehovah seated above the cherubim, but turning in all the world as the Lord God of his kingdom and covenant.

Ezekiel beholds in the vision that with a strong wind a great cloud is driven towards him from the north, with a fire, the center of which appeared like glowing metal in the midst of the cloud, spreading its brightness round about upon the cloud. Then out of the midst of the

cloud there appear the four cherubims, every one with four faces and four wings, with the likeness of a man, an eagle, an ox and a lion. They moved and ran, like the appearance of a flash of lightning, every one of them straight-forward, not turning as they went, which evidently indicates that they moved in all four directions, east and west and north and south. Corresponding to these four cherubim the prophet beholds four wheels, each beside one of the living creatures, or cherubim, moving upon the earth. They appeared as a wheel within a wheel, the meaning evidently being that they formed right angles. Each wheel consisted of two wheels placed within each other in such a way that they formed right angles. Their felloes were full of eyes, and as the spirit directed them they moved with the cherubim in four directions. And, lastly, upon a firmament like crystal the prophet beholds the throne of Jehovah and upon the throne the Lord in the likeness of a man, clothed with fire and brightness. The picture reminds evidently of Jehovah as He was enthroned above the cherubim in the most holy place, as the covenant God of Israel. The picture is that of Jehovah as the covenant God in all his glory, seated above the cherubim. But instead of revealing himself as the covenant God of Israel as a nation, and as dwelling in the temple of Jerusalem, He here moves with His throne of grace throughout the earth, in every direction. As the constant use of the number four in this vision indicates, it is not the particularly Israelitish form of the covenant and kingdom that is revealed by the vision, but rather that covenant in its significance for all the world, the universal character of the kingdom of glory.

But what is significant for our purpose is that it is exactly in connection with this manifestation of the covenant in its general aspect, in its universal significance, that the rainbow appears as a symbol of God's grace, a token of his covenant. For we read: "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about" (vs. 28). There can be no question of the fact that

the vision has reference to God's covenant of grace with his people. Neither is there any question that the significance of the vision is that it reveals the universal scope of that covenant, over against the particularistic form of it among Israel. And the striking fact is that in this connection we find the rainbow surrounding the God of the covenant of grace.

The same is true of Rev. 9 and 10.

But to leave space to Dr. Jannsen's article we will postpone the discussion of these passages till next week.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

REPLY TO REV. H. HOEKSEMA

In our first article in our reply to Rev. H. Hoeksema we endeavored to do two things: firstly, to look into the methods of our critic, and, secondly, to find out his fundamental theological convictions. In connection with our first point a little study of the facts disclosed, to our regret, that we are dealing with a self-appointed critic, and then, too, that the methods of our critic are of a very questionable character. It was likewise incidentally mentioned that Rev. H. Hoeksema repeatedly insists on not having been actuated by a feeling of animosity or animated by malice. That insistence we confessed we were not quite able to explain. As to the second part of our task, we tried to make clear how exceedingly important it is for one who would properly understand any piece of criticism to know first of all the critic's fundamental ideas. In rendering criticism a critic sets standards, is guided by principles, is influenced by controlling ideas. We of the Reformed persuasion especially attach great value to principles and standards. It is also right that we should. Underlying principles, fundamental conceptions determine the make-up of one's system of thought, of one's theology, of one's view of life, and so much more besides. Convinced, accordingly, of the supreme importance of knowing these things we set out to discover what Rev. Hoeksema's views on some matters fundamental were. Our exceptions were

pitched high, as we stated. Our critic professed to be a good Calvinist, standing four-square on the doctrines of the Reformed faith. We even found him emphasizing for us all the necessity not merely of having the “bias of faith,” but of having very decidedly a “Reformed bias.” Accordingly we set out all the more confidently, assuming that our critic was a good Calvinist, holding with might and main to the important doctrines of the Reformed faith. Thus encouraged we began our voyage, hoping that our discoveries would measure up to our expectations. We were not privileged, however, to progress very far when strange questionings were aroused within us. These were followed up by a complete disillusionment. The consequence was that we were irresistibly forced to abandon our original assumption. It was a shock to us to learn Hoeksema openly denied the doctrine of common grace. The conclusion, therefore, that we were obliged to reach was that we are not dealing with a critic who is a true Calvinist. He denies one of the most important and distinctive doctrines of our Reformed faith. This denial places him, in so far, in the class of the Anabaptists who, to use Dr. Bavinck’s description of them, “verachten de gratia communis (i.e. common grace) en weten van niets dan genade (i.e. grace as it is in Christ Jesus).”¹

In this week’s article I wish particularly to examine Rev. Hoeksema’s denial of common grace more in detail. We want to get a few angles on that denial. For it is an undisputed fact that you can’t break with any important Reformed doctrine and stop there, or be then done with it. The consequences of any important denial extend far and wide. If you tear away a foundation-stone from under a structure, your whole structure will be weakened. So the denial of any essential doctrine of our Reformed faith will affect the whole body of doctrine. It will affect one’s interpretation of Scripture, of sacred history, of revelation, in short, one’s whole theology. Disturb any part of the Reformed system

of thought and you disturb the whole system. Therefore, we want to get the main facts, the main utterances of Rev. Hoeksema once more clearly before us, adding to the utterances already given in our previous article other characteristic passages of his if necessary.

Then, too, we want to get before us the testimony of reliable, representative exponents of our Reformed faith. In our first article we did not go much beyond the mere mentioning of their names. It was a bare outline that we gave, not filled in. We wish now to arrive at somewhat greater completeness. To achieve this we shall consult some larger treatises of our Reformed authorities. We shall summon these faithful Reformed witnesses. After that has been done we shall have a trustworthy standard to apply to Rev. Hoeksema’s teachings. Thereupon when our diagnosis has been completed we can look for some results.

Banners April 10, 1919, and subsequent issues up to about the end of May, 1919, contain the material to be used for our purpose. The very first article, that of April 10, it is interesting to know, states not merely the problem, but also leaves no doubt as to what Rev. Hoeksema’s solution of it is. Our critic there says that, “there are two peoples in this world, the ‘elect’ and the ‘reprobate,’ who have naturally the same life, the same talents and powers, enjoy the same privileges and gifts. How must this be explained? Must we accept that there are two kinds of grace, one kind particularly for God’s people * * * * and another kind for all men in general? Is there besides * * * * what is called particular grace still * * * * a second kind of grace, where all men meet on common ground? As I see it this is the problem. Stating it concisely it implies two questions.”²

Rev. Hoeksema says in Banner April 17 (“Two Fundamental Questions”): “First, can God in any sense of the word and to any extent ever assume an attitude of favor to those too that are

¹ English translation: “despise the common grace and know nothing other than saving grace.”

² Herman Hoeksema, “Article XXVIII: The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued),” reprinted in *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 28 (October 21, 2023): 6–8.

not in Him, whom God has not foreknown from all eternity? If not, how can we speak of common grace? In the second place the equally fundamental question arises: Is there in the heart of natural man any receptivity for the grace of God? It seems to me, these questions cannot be avoided. They force themselves upon us. They are of principle importance. Yet, with all that has been written on the subject of common grace an adequate answer to these questions has not been suggested.”³

To the first question Rev. Hoeksema replies as follows: “Now, it must be said that such an attitude of God is utterly inconceivable. From the Arminian or Semi-pelagian point of view this were impossible. To maintain that * * * * God can assume an attitude of grace to them (‘to all men * * * * regardless of their relation to Christ Jesus’) is to make an attack on God’s holiness and righteousness. Hence we deny that in any

way or to any extent, for time or eternity God assumes an attitude of * * * * grace over against the reprobate. You remark that nevertheless the fact remains that the wicked and the just alike enjoy common blessings. A far better explanation of this phenomenon is possible than that of a separate kind of grace. This common grace idea (i.e., that ‘the elect and the reprobate have a common life in the earth, enjoy common blessings,’ etc.) we deny.” What is Rev. Hoeksema’s far better explanation of the phenomenon? The Banner of May 8, 1919, answers that, “the world in its present existence, with its present life, and with all its institutions rests upon the same power of what we are used to call ‘special’ grace. It is because the human race in Adam sank upon the power of grace as it was in Christ, that it was saved from immediate ruin in paradise.”⁴

(To be continued next week)



³Herman Hoeksema, “Article XXIX: The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued),” reprinted in *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 29 (October 28, 2023): 6–8.

⁴Herman Hoeksema, “Article XXXII: The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued),” reprinted in *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 32 (November 18, 2023): 24–26.