Editor's Notes

You have in your hands the first issue of volume 48 of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. We begin our forty-eighth year of publication grateful to God for the opportunity to continue to publish our seminary's free-of-charge journal, which puts solid, thoughtful, scholarly articles and book reviews in the hands of our readers.

With some regularity the Reformers attended colloquies. A colloquy was a theological conference at which significant doctrinal issues were discussed—doctrinal issues over which there was often difference of opinion. The aim of the colloquies was the resolution of these differences, although this aim was not always achieved. One significant colloquy comes to mind: the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, which ended without Luther and Zwingli coming to agreement on the issue of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. This past summer the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA) held a colloquy—a theological conference. The PRCA and the EPCA are in a "Corresponding Relationship." The purpose of the conference was mutual encouragement in areas of agreement, as well as discussion in areas where there is disagreement. The main theme of the conference was the doctrine of God's covenant. We are indebted to the four main speakers at the conference for submitting the written manuscripts of their speeches for publication in this issue of PRTJ.

The articles call attention to important areas of agreement—the centrality of the covenant in Reformed theology, the covenant arising out of the intra-trinitarian life of God, the essence of the covenant as a bond of friendship and fellowship, the unilateral character of the covenant, and the place of the children of believers in the covenant. The articles also address areas of disagreement. One well-known area of disagreement is the EPCA's permitting the remarriage of the "innocent party" after divorce or those who have been faithlessly deserted, in line with the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith (24.5, 6). This is the issue treated in Prof. Dykstra's article.

EPCA pastor, the Rev. David Torlach, presents a rather unique explanation of the so-called covenant of works—an explanation that

is within the bounds of the Westminster Confession of Faith and is, at the same time, distinct from the traditional (objectionable) covenant of works view popular among most Presbyterian and Reformed theologians. Although the PRCA holds to a covenant with Adam prior to the fall, we prefer not to describe this covenant as a covenant of works, nor to speak of covenant "conditions," since this term has been so misused. In addition, we would differ with Rev. Torlach's presentation of the covenant at Sinai as the covenant of works and the covenant of works continuing to be in effect still today.

At the same time, it must not be overlooked that Rev. Torlach rejects all possibility of Adam's meriting with God. He insists that God's covenant was not a mutual agreement between God and Adam, but rather that Adam was created in covenant with God. And he rejects the notion that Adam could have earned a higher life or righteousness with God. All that Adam could do by his obedience in the garden was to continue to live in the state of righteousness in which he had been created. If one insists on maintaining the covenant of works, and will yet be Reformed, these positions must be maintained. And Rev. Torlach goes beyond this, by insisting that Christ and the covenant of grace were not a second option, an afterthought made necessary by Adam's fall into sin; rather, God had eternally purposed Christ and the covenant of grace with the elect. To that, we add a hearty "Amen!"

And, don't forget the book reviews. Solid, insightful reviews of recently published books that deal with the issues of the day—Federal Vision, justification by faith alone, the two kingdoms controversy, the conditional covenant, and more. Included is a very favorable review of one whose articles and translations have appeared frequently on the pages of PRTJ. I refer to Dr. Eugene Heideman's review of *1834: Hendrik de Cock's Return to the True Church*, by Marvin Kamps.

Thanks to all our contributors and book reviewers. Now, dear readers, enjoy!

Soli Deo Gloria!
—RLC

The Covenant and the Confessions

Nathan Decker

Introduction

Near and dear to the hearts of God's people is the biblical truth of God's covenant. Consideration of the doctrine of God's covenant leads us to contemplate the very heart of the work of God's grace for His people. All of God's work to elect, create, regenerate, justify, sanctify, and preserve His people serves the purpose of bringing them into and causing them to enjoy covenant communion with Himself. That a sinful and undeserving people are in a covenant relationship with the infinite and glorious God of all things, that is to say, are friends of the living God, is soul-stirring.

Near and dear to the hearts of God's people are also the confessions. For Christians in the Presbyterian tradition, an official place is given to the Westminster Standards (Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism) and for those in the Reformed tradition, an official place is given to the Three Forms of Unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dordt). The confessions certainly do not serve the purpose of replacing the Bible; the confessions do not even stand on a par with the Bible. Rather, the confessions are the work of the Spirit to lead the church, usually in response to the presence of false doctrine, to explain clearly and succinctly the truth of God revealed in the Scriptures. The confessions hold a prominent place in the history of the church. They are concrete manifestations of the Spirit of Christ's work to "guide the church into all truth" (John 16:13), and they have been used by God to lead many of His people into a clearer and fuller understanding of the truth. The confessions of the church, therefore, are treasured by Reformed and Presbyterian believers.

This paper concerns these realities that are near and dear to the hearts of Reformed believers, namely, the covenant and the confessions. It will set forth the biblical teaching of God's covenant as it is expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dordt, the official confessional standards of the Protestant

Reformed Churches. The goal of the paper is certainly to lead us to better understand the doctrine of God's covenant of grace from an intellectual point of view. It is, however, much more than that. The goal of this paper is also aimed at our hearts. The overarching purpose is to lead us to an even greater heartfelt thanks to God for the beautiful doctrine of this covenant and for the confessions that God has given to us as His church. More specifically, the purpose is to lead us to appreciate the Spirit of Christ's work throughout history to lead the church of the Reformation to write and adopt confessions that teach, allow for, and are consistent with only one understanding of the covenant of God, namely, an unconditional covenant of grace.

Covenant of Grace Defined

At the outset of this paper, it is imperative to define clearly and explain briefly what is meant by God's covenant of grace. It is necessary do this on account of the fact that there are in Reformed and Presbyterian circles many different ideas concerning the nature of God's covenant. Any serious scholar of the Word of God readily acknowledges the fact that the truth of the covenant looms large in God's revelation of Himself in the Bible. On that point, there is little disagreement. With respect to what is the meaning and central significance of the covenant, however, there is much disagreement. Is the essence of the covenant an agreement or a relationship? Is the covenant established by God solely, or is it dependent in some way upon man? With whom is God's covenant established? What is the place of the children of believers in the covenant? What is man's responsibility in the covenant? What is the place of Christ in the covenant? Is the covenant a means to bring about a greater reality, or is it the end itself?

These questions are all very important, and the answers given to them will vary significantly among churches, theologians, and pastors. Before we can set forth the covenant's place in the confessions, therefore, it is necessary to give a working definition of the covenant for this paper. Having done that, we can then show how such an understanding of the covenant of grace is taught in and is consistent with the Reformed creeds.

The following is a brief definition of God's covenant: the covenant of grace is God's relationship of friendship with elect sinners in

Jesus Christ. Although brief, that definition gets at the essence of the Protestant Reformed view of God's covenant of grace. On the basis of that definition, what we will do in the following is to explain several aspects of this view of the covenant of grace. That will be followed briefly by supporting passages and explanations from the Three Forms of Unity. This explanation is not and cannot be exhaustive. Passages from the creeds will be quoted in order to demonstrate the points that are made. They are not, however, in each case *all* of the passages that could be quoted. Nevertheless, by setting forth some representative passages from the creeds, we will see that the Three Forms of Unity teach an unconditional covenant of grace with the elect, and therefore, any notion of a conditional covenant of works with more than the elect is contrary to the main lines of the Reformed faith.

The Covenant Is Grounded in the Nature of God

In the first place, God's covenant with man is grounded in the very nature of God as triune. As is the case with all important points of theology, it is prudent to begin with a discussion of God. Certainly this is the case with respect to the doctrine of the covenant. God, apart from anything or anyone that He created, is a covenant God. He is that as the God who is one in Being and three in Persons—Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Because God is three in Persons, within His own Being He enjoys sweet communion and fellowship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The confessions teach that God is a covenant God within Himself, which is the foundation of the covenant of grace. They do so in as much as they teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Lord's Day 8 of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, Articles 8-9 set forth the historic Christian understanding of who God is as triune, one in Being and three in Persons, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We need not belabor this point. However, what is noteworthy is that Article 8 of the Belgic Confession teaches that the three Persons of the Trinity are "really, truly, and eternally distinct, according to their incommunicable properties" (BC, Art. 8). A God who is one in being and one in person cannot be a covenant God who experiences communion within Himself. A God, however, who is three in Persons, each of whom is personally distinct from the others, by virtue of that fact can and

does have fellowship within Himself as God. The Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from Father to Son and from Son to Father. That is the covenant life of fellowship that the triune God experiences and into which the elect are brought in the covenant of grace.

The Covenant Is Fellowship with God

Second, the essence of the covenant is God's sweet communion and fellowship with His people. We began with the nature of God as a covenant God because it leads into this point concerning the fundamental nature of God's covenant with man. God's covenant with man is rooted in and arises out of the covenant life that He has within Himself as a triune God. The covenant of grace is God's work of bringing man into that covenant life that God already has within Himself as a triune God.

It is precisely at this point that there are serious differences in views concerning the fundamental nature of the covenant of God. Is the essence of the covenant an agreement and pact? Or, as was formerly stated, is the essence of the covenant a living relationship of friendship and love? The Spirit of truth has led the Protestant Reformed Churches to emphasize that the truth of the Scriptures is the latter, namely, that the heart of the covenant is not an agreement, but a relationship of love and fellowship.

In the book *Believers and Their Seed*, Herman Hoeksema explained that the essence of the covenant is not merely a promise, is not merely a way by which God brings His people to everlasting glory, and is not mutual agreement between two parties. Instead, he wrote that the "essence of the covenant is to be sought in this living relation of friendship whereby God the Lord is a sovereign friend of His people, and they are the Lord's friend-servants, partaking of His fellowship, by grace possessing and manifesting His life and fighting the battle of His cause in the midst of the world."[1]

So much of what follows concerning the doctrine and application of the covenant is dependent upon this very point. Therefore, I will demonstrate briefly that this conception of God's covenant as a rela-

1 Herman Hoeksema, *Believers and Their Seed* (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 1971), 65.

tionship of fellowship with man is, in fact, the teaching of the Word of God.

Let's begin by examining the main word that is used in the Old Testament, translated as "covenant," namely, *berith*. It is true that there is ambiguity surrounding the root meaning of this word. However, a strong case can be made in favor of identifying the root meaning of *berith* as "to bind" or "to clasp," which identifies the heart of the covenant as union with God. In Ezekiel 20:37, the nature of the covenant as union with God is stated explicitly: "And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the *bond* of the covenant."

Genesis 3:15, the outstanding covenant promise in the Old Testament, implies that the heart of the covenant is friendship with God. The mother promise of Genesis 3:15 reads, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." From a negative point of view, salvation is enmity (not friendship!) with the devil and his seed. What is implied positively is just the opposite: covenant salvation is loving friendship and fellowship with God.

The covenant formula found throughout the Old Testament emphasizes this relationship between God and His people. The covenant formula, found for example, in Genesis 17:7 and Jeremiah 31:33, is basically this: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." Without using the word "covenant," Revelation 21:3, a verse found in the chapter that beautifully describes life in the new creation, serves as a commentary on this point when it says, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Life with God is spoken of in terms of dwelling with and tabernacling with God. That is the language of friendship and fellowship.

Last, the Scriptures teach that the relationship of marriage (Is. 62; Ezek. 16; Eph. 5; Rev. 19) and the bond between parents and children (Ex. 4:22; II Cor. 6:18; Heb. 12:5-9) are symbolic of God's covenant relationship with His people. What is the essential nature of the marriage and family relationship? A contract and agreement? Or a relationship and fellowship? The answer is certainly the latter. Our earthly marriages and families are to be

patterned after God's relationship with us, which is a relationship of love and friendship.

When we think of God's covenant of grace, this is what needs to come to our mind: friendship and fellowship with God. Included in the Reformed conception of the covenant, therefore, are all of the blessings of salvation. The covenant is not a mechanism put in place by God in order to lead a person to receive salvation. A life of fellowship with God is not only the essence of the covenant; it is also the essence of salvation. To dwell with God (Rev. 21:3), to be friends of God (James 2:23), to know God (John 17:3), and to be one with God (John 17:23)— all of which is covenant language of fellowship—is to enjoy salvation that is worked by God. Upon those whom God incorporates into the covenant He bestows all the blessings of salvation: regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification.

The Three Forms of Unity emphasize the relationship that God has with His people in Jesus Christ. Consider first the Heidelberg Catechism. It is true that the Heidelberg Catechism does not have a Lord's Day dedicated to the teaching of the covenant. The Heidelberg Catechism, therefore, does not have a specific Lord's Day that identifies the essence of the covenant as a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Such a specific Lord's Day, however, is not necessary to show that the Heidelberg Catechism teaches this truth concerning the covenant. In light of the fact that the Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes that salvation is a personal, experiential relationship with God in Christ, it implies the truth of the covenant. In doing that, the Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes from beginning to end that salvation is a personal, experiential relationship with God in Christ.

Zacharias Ursinus, a co-author of the Heidelberg Catechism, wrote another catechism in which he stated in answer to the question, "What firm comfort do you have in life and death?,"

> That I was created by God in his image for eternal life; and after I willfully lost this in Adam, God, out of infinite and free mercy, *took me into his covenant grace* that he might give me faith, righteousness and eternal life because of the obedience and death of his Son who was sent in the flesh.

From the point of view of Ursinus, salvation for the child of God was being brought into the covenant of grace. Therefore, when the catechism teaches us concerning God's work of saving sinners, it is virtually explaining what it means to be brought into the covenant of grace. And since salvation in the Heidelberg Catechism is viewed as a living, personal, and experiential relationship with God in Christ, the Heidelberg Catechism is virtually teaching what is the essence of the covenant of grace.

Because the Heidelberg Catechism is written from this personal and experiential perspective, examples that speak of a living relationship with God through Christ abound. The following are some instances. In response to the question of what the believer's only comfort in life and death is, A. 1 says beautifully, "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but *belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ*, who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins…." And that is followed with Q. 2: "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?" The life of the Christian is enjoying the comfort of belonging to Jesus, allowing one to live and die with happiness. That is the language of a real and personal relationship with God in Christ. What is significant is the fact that those first two Q&As stand as an introduction to and summary of the entire catechism. The whole of the catechism sets forth the Christian's living relationship with Jesus Christ, which is nothing less than the essence of the covenant of grace.

The rest of the catechism speaks in many places of the Christian's union and relationship with God in Christ. In Lord's Day 7, the Lord's Day on saving faith, we read that those who are saved by Christ are "ingrafted into Him." (HC, Q&A 20). In Lord's Day 9 on the first article of the Apostle's Creed ("I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth), we read that for the Christian the "eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ…is, for the sake of Christ His Son, *my God and my Father*" (HC, Q&A 26; Q&A 120). This, too is the language of a loving relationship. A believer is a "Christian" because he or she is a "member of Christ by faith" (HC, Q&A 32). According to Lord's Day 21, the first application of the communion of the saints is that believers are "members of Christ" (HC, Q&A 55). Christians

are not careless in their lives precisely because it is impossible that one who is in a living relationship with God by being "implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (Q&A 64). Believers partake of the Lord's Supper in order to "become more and more united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us" (Q&A 76).

While the Heidelberg Catechism sets forth the doctrines of grace from the personal and experiential perspective, which accounts for many statements that speak of an intimate union to and relationship with God in Christ, the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dordt are more straight forward and doctrinal in their assertions of the truth. Nevertheless, there are several explicit statements in these two confessions that use the same kind of language as the Heidelberg Catechism. The Belgic Confession in Article 9 on the Trinity calls us to "observe the particular offices and operations of the three persons toward us." The child of God is called to do that because he or she is in a *living relationship* with that triune God. It is important for us to live out of the knowledge that "The Father is called *our* Creator, by His power; the Son is *our* Savior and Redeemer, by His blood; the Holy Ghost is *our* Sanctifier, by His dwelling in our hearts" (BC, Art. 9). In Article 22 of the Belgic Confession, faith is identified as the "instrument that keeps us *in communion* with Him in all His benefits" (BC, Art. 22).

With respect to the Canons of Dordt, Article 7 of the first head of doctrine is of particular importance in that it identifies God's work of saving the elect as bringing them into covenant fellowship: "This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and *effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His word and Spirit*" (Canons, I, 7). And then in the fifth head of doctrine, we read that God preserves eternally those whom "God calls, according to His purpose, to the *communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ* (Canons, V, 1).

In the end, however, what is most important are not those specific statements that speak of man's union and communion with God through Christ. What we should not lose sight of is the fact that covenant fellowship with God is not one doctrine among many, but the grand purpose of God with respect to all of His work with man. All

of the work that is of God the Father, by God the Son, and through God the Holy Spirit serves the purpose of bringing man into fellowship with the triune God. Therefore, in setting forth all of the main doctrines of the historic Reformed faith, the Three Forms of Unity teach the covenant of grace as fellowship with God.

God cannot fellowship with spiritually dead, guilty, depraved sinners. God works spiritual life in the hearts of His people. Therefore, the confessions' teaching on regeneration set forth an important aspect of God's covenant of grace (HC, Q&A 8; Canons, III/IV, 10-13).

Having worked spiritual life in the hearts of His people, God gives faith as the instrument by which His people enjoy in this life fellowship with Him. Therefore, the confessions' teaching concerning faith set forth an important aspect of God's covenant of grace (HC, Q&A 20-22; BC, Art. 22; Canons, I, 2-6; II, 6-7; III/IV, 13-14).

The child of God in this life has clinging to him still an old man of sin, against which he must fight all his life long. Through the faith that God has worked in his heart, God justifies the sinner, declaring to him all his life that his sins are forgiven and that he is righteous in Christ. By means of that justification, the sinner knows that despite his sin, he remains in loving communion with God all his life long. Therefore, the confessions' teaching concerning justification set forth an important aspect of God's covenant of grace (HC, Q&A 45 and 56; BC, Art. 23; Canons, II, 8; II:B, 4)

God does not and cannot have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Therefore, God sanctifies His people so that by the power of the life of Christ in them, they truly live holy lives. Therefore, the confessions' teaching concerning sanctification set forth an important aspect of God's covenant of grace (HC, Q&A 32, 43, 86, 115, 122, 124; BC, Art. 24; Canons, I, 13; V, 12-13).

The promise of God is that He will never leave nor forsake His people. The covenant of grace is, according to Genesis 17:7, an "everlasting covenant." God into all eternity in Jesus Christ will fellowship and dwell with His people (Rev. 21). If that is to take place, God must keep His people and bring His people into glory. Therefore, the confessions' teaching concerning preservation and glorification set forth this important aspect of God's covenant of grace (HC, Q&A 1, 46; BC, Art. 37; Canons, V).

The entire body or system of the Reformed faith, which is set forth in these three confessions, sheds light upon the glorious truth of God's covenant and upon the heart of that covenant, namely, fellowship now and into eternity with Jehovah in Christ.

The Covenant Is Unilateral, Unconditional, and Gracious

In the third place, the covenant of God is unilateral, unconditional, and gracious. Those are three ways of making what is essentially the same point, namely, that God sovereignly establishes and maintains this relationship of friendship with His people. The covenant is unilateral or one-sided, that is, God alone conceived of and brings man into a relationship with Himself. A unilateral covenant is set over against a bilateral covenant, which is the idea that the relationship is mutually conceived of and entered into by two equal parties. The language of Scripture is uniformly that of God speaking sovereignly, as He does in Genesis 17:7, "I will establish my covenant…." There is no denying that covenant relationships between two earthly parties can take the form of agreements mutually agreed upon and entered into by both parties (Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21:27; Isaac and Abimelech in Genesis 26:28; David and Jonathon in I Samuel 18:3). Nevertheless, when it comes to the sovereign God's relationship with a sinful people, it is God alone who efficaciously is at work.

An important implication of the truth that the covenant is unilateral is that it is *unconditional.* If the covenant is unilateral, the necessary implication is that it is unconditional. God does not enter into this covenant relationship of fellowship only if and when man fulfills a certain condition, whether that be faith or good works, as is taught by many today. Rather, God sovereignly enters into and maintains this covenant relationship. Therefore, the covenant is altogether of grace, sovereign grace! As a depraved sinner, man certainly does not deserve to be brought into a beautiful covenant relationship with God, as was described above. That sinners are brought into life with God is the outstanding manifestation of the undeserved favor of God bestowed upon a sinful people. In other words, a unilateral and unconditional covenant is a covenant *all of grace.*

The only possible conception of the covenant that is consistent with the Three Forms of Unity is one that is unconditional, sovereignly

established by God alone. It is this point that needs to be emphasized today in light of the controversies that are alive and well concerning the nature of God's covenant with His people. Is there room in the Reformed confessions for a conditional covenant, a covenant that is dependent upon the works of man, whatever those works may be, for its establishment and maintenance? The answer to that question is emphatically, "no."

While a conditional covenant based on man's works undermines *all* of the major points of the Reformed faith, I would like to highlight just one aspect of the confessions' teaching—their teaching concerning faith—for that will make clear the unconditional nature of God's covenant with His people. I focus on *faith* because one of the erroneous covenant views in our day teaches that the condition on the basis of which one is brought into the covenant and remains in the covenant is said to be faith (and faithfulness, that is, good works). I am using the term "condition" here not in the sense in which the Westminster Standards use it, namely, "a necessary means or way." Rather, I speak of "condition" in this sense: a work of man upon which the establishment and maintenance of the covenant depends. Do the confessions teach that faith and good works are man's work, on the basis of which the covenant is established by God and on the basis of which one remains in that covenant? We let the confessions speak for themselves.

> Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23, Q. 59. But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this? A. That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life.
> Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God? A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.
> Q. 61. Why sayest thou, that thou art righteous by faith only? A. Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ,

> is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.
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> Belgic Confession, Article 22: We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things, which are requisite to our salvation, are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith, have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert, that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy: for hence it would follow, that Christ was but half a Savior. Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But 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. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.
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> Canons of Dordt, I, 10—This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects.

What is the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity concerning faith? It should be very clear. Faith is a gift of God, a blessing of salvation, a fruit of being saved by God. Faith is not the work of man. And faith, therefore, is the means *by which* (emphatically not the basis *on which*) the child of God is justified and knows himself or herself to be a member of the covenant of God. Membership in God's covenant is altogether on account of the sovereign work of God. And it is all of grace. Man by nature is a depraved and dead sinner, undeserving of being in the family of God. It is impossible for him to merit anything with God. It is all of grace that dead and depraved sinners are incorpo-

rated into the family of God. With this in view, it is significant that in the Three Forms of Unity, when the term covenant is used specifically, it is always identified as a covenant of *grace*.

That raises the question: what about the believer's good works or faithfulness in connection with the covenant? Man's part is not to help establish the covenant relationship with God through faith and good works, but rather, having been incorporated into the covenant, man's part as the friend of God is to serve Him out of love and thanks. In the covenant, God is Friend-*sovereign;* man is friend-*servant.* Every child of God who knows himself or herself to be a member of God's covenant takes this part in the covenant very seriously, because of the tremendous wonder of grace that such a depraved sinner truly is and forever will be the friend of God. A condition of good works is not needed as an incentive for man to obey God's word and commandments. Rather, the inevitable fruit of God's sovereign work of bringing the elect into His covenant is their genuine desire and actual performance of good works to the glory of God's name.

The Reformed confessions are consistent with this understanding of man's part in the covenant of grace. The Three Forms of Unity teach the proper place of good works as the fruit of being brought into the covenant of grace. In the Heidelberg Catechism, the treatment of good works, prayer, and the Ten Commandments are found in the third section (on thankfulness), after the catechism has set forth man's misery of sin and deliverance from the same in Jesus Christ. Christians do good works, pray, and obey the Ten Commandments out of gratitude for having been given the blessings of the covenant of grace. To quote just one more article, the following is a portion of Article 24 from the Belgic Confession on "Man's Sanctification and Good Works:"

> We believe that this true faith being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God, and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man: for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith, which is called in Scripture,

> a faith that worketh by love, which excites man to the practice of those works, which God has commanded in His Word. Which works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace: howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good, before the tree itself is good.

God's covenant of grace is unilateral, unconditional, and all of grace, the necessary fruit of which is a life of good works performed out of gratitude to God.

The Covenant Is Established with the Elect in Christ

In the fourth place, the covenant of grace is established with the elect in Jesus Christ. Membership in the covenant of grace is determined solely by God on the basis of His eternal decree of election. It is the elect and the elect alone who are incorporated into the covenant family of God. Election governs membership in the covenant because Christ is the Head of the covenant of grace. And if Christ is the Head and Mediator of the covenant, those brought into the covenant are only those given to Jesus Christ in eternity in the decree of election. David Engelsma writes the following in *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition*:

> God established the covenant of grace, in history, with Jesus Christ. It is a fundamental error with regard to the doctrine of the covenant to relate Jesus Christ to the covenant only by having Him carry out the covenant will of God on behalf of the people of God. Jesus is not only the mediator of the covenant through whom God has fellowship with and saves His people and through whom the people of God commune with and serve God. Jesus Christ is also the head of the covenant of grace. The triune God has made the covenant with the man Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God in human nature. Jesus Christ is the representative of the people of God. He is also the source and fountain for the people of the spiritual life and the benefits of salvation that belong to the covenant.[2]

2 David J. Engelsma, *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition* (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2011), 177-8.

A few paragraphs later, Engelsma ends this section by drawing the following conclusion:

> Because Christ is the head of the covenant, as Galatians 3:16 and 19 teach, Christ determines membership in the covenant. All those, but those only, who are Christ's are the seed of Abraham with whom God makes His covenant, and heirs of the promise, which God made to Christ. This is the conclusion about membership in the covenant that Galatians 3:29 draws from the truth that God made the covenant promise to Christ: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."[3]

Those in Christ, those who are Abraham's true seed, those who are heirs according to the promise, that is, those who are members of the covenant, are the elect.

The confessions make it clear that the covenant and its blessings are for the elect alone who were chosen in eternity and given to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism does not have a specific Lord's Day on election, and therefore, does not state explicitly that the covenant is established by God exclusively with the elect. However, for two reasons the necessarily implication of what the Heidelberg Catechism does teach is a covenant of grace and its blessings for the elect alone. First, the catechism is clear in its teaching that Christ is the Head of His people and His church (HC, Q&A 49, 50, 51, and 57). To quote just one of those passages, in A. 50 concerning Jesus Christ's session at God's right hand, we read: "Because Christ is ascended into heaven for this end, that He might appear as *Head of His church*, by whom the Father governs all things." Jesus Christ as Head bestows the blessings of salvation upon His body, the church, which is composed of the elect gathered out of the world from the beginning to the end of the world (HC, Q&A 54). Second, the catechism essentially identifies the church and the covenant as to its membership in the answer to Q. 74: "Yes; for since they [infants], as well as the adult, are included in the *covenant and church* of God…." So, if Christ is the Head of the church who gives salvation blessings to its members, if the members of that church are the elect in Christ, and if the church and covenant are one and the same as to its membership, the necessary conclusion

3 Engelsma, *Covenant and Election,* 179.

is that the covenant of God, according to the catechism, is with the elect in Christ.

I pass over the Belgic Confession (which, however, is altogether consistent with the above teaching) in order to examine the Canons of Dordt. One article in particular sets down clearly the Reformed teaching concerning the covenant, Christ, and election. Article 8 of the second head of doctrine, which concerns the "Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Man Thereby," states:

> For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing, and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.

This article definitively sets forth the relationship between the covenant, election, and Christ, as taught by the historic Reformed church. Article 8 quoted above teaches the definite and efficacious atonement of the cross of Christ. Christ died for, and through that death, efficaciously saved the elect, whom He will preserve and bring into the enjoyment of His glory forever. In doing that, the article states significantly that Christ "confirmed the new covenant." Any Reformed theologian who separates election and the covenant is not reckoning honestly with Canons of Dordt II, Article 8, which explicitly ties together Christ's death, the salvation wrought on the basis of that death, and the eternal decree of election. The only conclusion to which one can come when he seriously considers the teaching of this article is that the decree of election governs the covenant of grace.

The Covenant Is Established with Believers and their Seed

In the fifth place, the covenant of grace is established with believers and their seed so that infants of believers are incorporated savingly into fellowship with God. Consider God's word to Noah in Genesis 9:9, "I will establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you…." Consider God's word to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Consider Peter's word in Acts 2:39, "For the promise is unto you, and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

In this respect, two important qualifications must be made. The first is that membership in the covenant of God is not exclusively for those who are the children of believers. God, through evangelism and mission work, brings into the covenant certain persons who were born of unbelieving parents. There are some who are "afar off" (Acts 2:39), who through the preaching of the gospel are brought into the covenant of grace. Second, God does not establish His covenant with *every single baptized* child of believers. Such is the erroneous teaching of the Federal Vision, which teaches that every single baptized child is savingly united to Jesus Christ and receives the blessings of salvation in Christ. But, according to the Federal Vision, for the continued keeping of those blessings of salvation, such a child of believers must fulfill the condition of good works. Such is not the biblical truth of the covenant of grace. Although the decree of reprobation includes some in the visible church (Rom. 9:6 and 13), the promise of God is that He establishes the covenant with believers and their children. Therefore, according to that promise of God, we view and treat our children as members of God's covenant.

The Reformed confessions teach that God realizes His covenant of grace historically in the line of continued generations. Not surprisingly, both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession teach the proper place of children in the covenant in the context of their discussions of the sacrament of baptism. Are the children of believers to be viewed as members of the covenant of grace, even in their infancy, and therefore to receive the sign of the covenant in the sacrament of baptism? The answer of these two confessions is, "yes."

Children of believers must be baptized because they, as well as adults, are incorporated into the covenant of grace. In answer to Q. 74, "Are infants also to be baptized," the catechism says:

> Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.

The Belgic Confession in its condemnation of the Baptist error that denies the baptism of infants echoes this teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in its conclusion to Article 34 on holy baptism:

> Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, whom we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised, upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And indeed Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that, which Christ hath done for them.

While the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession treat the place of children in the covenant from the point of view of the sacrament of baptism, the Canons of Dordt do the same from the heart-wrenching experience of believing parents who must deal with the death of a child in infancy. The significant article in the Canons of Dordt is Article 17 of the first head of doctrine:

> Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt the election

> and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

Without getting into the controversy that surrounds this article, the main point of its teaching is clear. Not just parents, but children of believers, are part of the covenant of grace. And when understood in light of the previous point concerning election and the covenant, the children of believers who are comprehended in the covenant are the elect children of believers.

David. Engelsma ties those two points together in his explanation of this article in *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition*:

> With explicit reference to the covenant of grace, to the infant children of believers, and to the salvation of these infant children of believers in the covenant of grace, the Canons explicitly declare that the covenant of grace is related to election: "election and [covenant] salvation." The Canons also explicitly teach that the relation between election and covenant salvation is that election governs the covenant: the salvation of infant children of believers is due to the election of these infant believers. Believing parents "have no reason to doubt of the *election* and salvation [emphasis added—DJE]" of these children, that is, the parents may believe the salvation of these infant children because of God's election of these children.[4]

Conclusion

I make two points by way of conclusion.

In the first place, a consideration of the doctrine of God's covenant of grace as it is taught in the Reformed confessions has led us to see, and therefore appreciate, the *system* of the Reformed faith. It is true that if one reads the Three Forms of Unity looking specifically for references to the truth of God's covenant, very few will be found. There is no Lord's Day, article, or head of doctrine devoted specifically to the doctrine of God's covenant of grace. (Herein is found a difference between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, which do have specific chapters and questions devoted to the doctrine of the covenant.) The word "covenant" is not found in the Belgic Confession and is found only eight times each in the Heidelberg

4 Engelsma, *Covenant and Election,* 66

Catechism and Canons of Dordt. Nevertheless, the *doctrine* of God's covenant of grace is to be found throughout these three confessions. This is true because there is beautiful harmony found in the system of the Reformed faith, which reflects the unity of the truth of Scripture. The doctrine of God's covenant of grace is not one doctrine among many, on a par with all the others. Rather, the covenant of God is the overarching theme of the entire word of God (the two parts of the Bible are, after all, the Old Testament and New Testament, "testament" being another word for "covenant"). Because this is true, all the other individual doctrines, which are taught explicitly in each confession, are not only in harmony with but shed light on the truth of God's covenant. The nature of God as triune teaches us about the truth of the covenant. God's eternal decree of election sheds light on the truth of God's covenant. The fall of man informs us concerning the nature of the covenant. Similar statements could be made concerning every doctrine of the Reformed faith expressed in the Three Forms of Unity. Having examined the central doctrine of Scripture as summarized in the Reformed confessions, we have been led to see and appreciate the unity of the truth on the doctrine of the covenant.

In the second place, having examined the covenant of grace as it is taught in the Reformed creeds, we are equipped to be faithful to our calling as churches to defend the truth of Scripture over against the lie, specifically, to defend the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace over against the lie of the conditional covenant of works. That error comes to expression today especially in the heresy of the Federal Vision. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain fully errant teachings concerning the covenant. However, this paper was written with definite errors on the covenant in mind. God has led the churches throughout the ages into the truth, and that truth has been officially established in the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds. Always in the process of developing doctrine, therefore, the question must be asked: does this teaching harmonize with the truth as taught in the creeds that the church has adopted? A conditional covenant of works does not and cannot. The unconditional covenant of grace does. And it does so beautifully. ●

The Covenant of Works and its Significance

David Torlach

Introduction and Definitions

The word "covenant" is the English translation of a biblical term. The words used in Scripture translated as "covenant" are בְּרִית (*berith*) in the Old Testament (OT) and διαθήκη (*diatheke*) in the New Testament (NT).

In attempting to come to a correct understanding of what a covenant is, many have studied the roots of these words. The origin of the word *berith* may well be a verb meaning "to create or form," or possibly "to bind or to fetter."[1] This second meaning does seem to be the most likely,[2] but rather than entering into these disputes over its exact etymology, we ought to determine the meaning from the way the Holy Spirit uses this word in Holy Scripture. This, for the Reformed believer—for the biblical Christian—must be determinative of the meaning of "covenant."

When one studies the word *berith* in the OT, it is used to denote a relationship between men of equal standing, men of differing standing, and also the relationship between God and man. Examples of a relationship between men of equal standing are Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21, or David and Jonathan in I Samuel 18:1-4. These agreements and commitments were on the basis of a love and respect that they had for one another, formalized by way of a covenant. These could be termed "parity covenants,"[3] and are obviously very different from purely business or legal contracts which occur in the Bible, such as in Genesis 23 (Abraham and Ephron), Genesis 47:18-26 (Joseph

1 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), 5, (footnote 3).

2 G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 255.

3 C. K. Campbell, *God's Covenant* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), 5; John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace.* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1954), 9; Malcolm H. Watts, Maurice Roberts, and David N. Samuel, *The Covenant of Grace* (Ramsgate, Kent: The Harrison Trust, 1992), 1.

and the people of Egypt), and Jeremiah 32:9-12 (Jeremiah and the purchase of a field). In contrast to these legal arrangements, covenants involve a personal interest in and commitment to, the well-being of the other party.

There is also a difference between these "parity covenants," and covenants that are made with men of *unequal* standing. An example of a covenant between men of unequal standing is found in Joshua 9, between Joshua and the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites deceived Israel, Joshua made or "cut" a covenant with them, and they became servants to Israel. Some have called these covenants of men "suzerainty covenants" after the Near-East term for one being an overlord.[4] That is, this type of covenant is one in which great benefit is bestowed upon an inferior, usually involving some form of communion or fellowship as well as protection. In turn, the beneficiary was expected to perform his part of serving the benefactor. Once again, this was not a business contract which could be broken by the one party not fulfilling their part of the bargain: it was lasting and could not be broken. And hence, we have Galatians 3:15—"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto." In other words, even men's covenants, if they are true *covenants,* once they have been ratified, cannot be annulled it, set it aside, or have conditions added to them.

Turning from covenants involving men only, to covenants established *by God,* there is a marked difference to bear in mind. When we read of God establishing or "cutting" a covenant with man, there is no sense of any bargaining or input on the part of man. Just as when covenants between non-equals were established, and the inferior party was not in any position to hammer out some kind of agreement, it is infinitely more so when God establishes the covenant. Isaiah 55: 9—"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." And it is not only God's thoughts, but who He is in His being—the Almighty God and Creator. God's covenants are therefore always completely from Him, and they are most sure and certain, most perfect, most good, and most wise: man on his part, cannot do anything else but acquiesce to these. This is reflected by the way in which Scripture speaks of God

4 Campbell, *God's Covenant*, 8; Watts, et.al., *The Covenant of Grace*, 1.

alone establishing His covenant, without man working or contributing in any way. So in Genesis 17:7 or Ezekiel 16:62, God says: "*I* will *establish my* covenant with you." God does the work; God establishes the covenant and the covenant belongs to Him. Nevertheless, there are still two parties involved in a covenant, and the basic idea of the covenant needs to be borne in mind: the purpose of the covenant is life and relationship, communion and benefit, as well as the commitment of the one party to the other.

Coming now to the NT, as noted already, the term for covenant is *diatheke,* and this word adds more to our understanding of covenant. Uniformly in the NT, when the Holy Spirit quotes an OT passage containing the word *berith,* He translates it as *diatheke.*[5] This is significant, for there is a word in the Greek which means a contract, bargain, or a business-like agreement between two or more parties. This is the word συνθήκη (*suntheke*); but this word is never used by the Holy Spirit. The meaning of *diatheke* is that of "a disposition or arrangement made toward another," and thus it can also indicate "a testament or will." Thus from the NT we may know that a covenant was a relationship, involving another party, with the emphasis upon the one side or party committing themselves to the other party, in order to bestow blessing and riches upon the other by way of communion or fellowship. This did not preclude responsibility or duty on the part of the recipient in the covenant. When we put this together with the OT understanding, we are in a position to define God's covenant.

According to Heinrich Bullinger, "a covenant or testament…involved coming together in a union of friendship with the observance of particular ceremonies and conditions."[6] Francis Roberts in 1657 defined the covenant as God's "gratuitous agreement with His people, promising them eternal happiness and all subordinate good: and requiring from them all due dependence upon God, and obedience unto Him, in order to His glory."[7] He also said that "covenant is a

5 For example in Hebrews 8:8, when quoting from Jeremiah 31:31.

6 Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 232.

7 Francis Roberts, *The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man* (London: printed by R.W. for George Calvert, and sold at the sign of the Half-Moon in Paul's Churchyard, 1657), 14.

gracious and intimate way of God's bringing man into 'fellowship and communion' with Himself."[8] And Herman Hoeksema, the prominent theologian of the PRC, defined the covenant as follows:

> (The covenant) is the relation of the most intimate communion of friendship, in which God reflects His own covenant life in His relation to the creature, gives to that creature life, and causes him to taste and acknowledge the highest good and the overflowing fountain of all good.[9]

These views or definitions bring out two aspects of the covenant: the covenant is not only a legal and binding *means* of God blessing His people by bringing them into relationship with Himself, but the covenant *is* the very relationship and communion itself. It is both the means and the relationship. Some appreciation of the wonder and glory of this conception of covenant can begin to be seen when it is understood that the basis of communion with God is the very fellowship that God has within Himself as the triune God—within the Trinity.

It is this perfect relationship and communion with which God condescends to bless His people in the covenant—the covenant relationship is to live and walk with God. It is not possible for mere fallen humans fully to comprehend the wondrous work of grace that God has performed: to bring man into communion with the eternal and almighty Jehovah God. As Herman Hoeksema has said: "the covenant is the very essence of religion, the highest good, the very best that can ever be imparted to man through grace, the highest bliss."[10]

Scripture Evidence of the Covenant of Works

Having established the general understanding and definition of a covenant, the next step is to see the truth of a covenant of works in Scripture. Of course, there is no term in the Scripture, "covenant of works," just as there is no term, "Trinity," but this does not preclude

8 Won Taek Lim, *The Covenant Theology of Francis Roberts* (Chungnam, South Korea: King and Kingdom, 2002), 32.

9 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1985), 322.

10 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 322.

the truth and doctrine of these matters in the Bible. We may also call this doctrine the "covenant of life," or the "covenant of nature," by which it is also known.

First, we may know that there was a covenant established with Adam in the garden. This is borne out by Scripture in Hosea 6:7—"But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me." The KJV expression here "like men" is better translated from the Hebrew as "like Adam." It is the Hebrew word for Adam, and when the same expression is used in Job 31:33, it is translated as "Adam." So we may say that God's relationship with Adam in the garden was a covenant.

This is also indicated by the language of Scripture in the first two chapters of Genesis. In the first chapter of Genesis, God is referred to as אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, "God") alone, the name indicating the almighty, infinite Being, Creator of all. However, in chapter 2, coming to the creation of man where God's particular relationship to Adam is expanded and explained, the name of God used is יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים (*Jehovah Elohim,* translated as "the LORD God"). This is the covenant name of God, indicating thereby that in regard to the creature of Adam, God had established a covenant relationship with him. This is confirmed by the whole tenor of God's dealing with Adam in the garden. God speaks to Adam as in a personal relationship of love and communion, such that, it becomes obvious that God made a practice of coming to talk and fellowship with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening.[11]

But even more than this are the two trees in the garden, which had special symbolic significance. Some have gone so far as to call them sacraments (a sacrament being a covenant sign and seal). God gave Adam not only all the trees of the garden from which to eat, but specifically a tree called the tree of life. This tree symbolized the fullness of life that Adam had with God in covenant relationship. And most notably, Adam lost access to this tree, and thus to life, when he sinned and was cast out of the garden.[12] But there was also the tree of

11 Genesis 3:8—"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden."

12 Just as a side note, God's elect will regain access to this tree in even greater abundance, in the new heaven and new earth. Revelation 22:2,

the knowledge of good and evil, of which tree Adam was commanded not to eat. Notice must be given here to the law—a law given to Adam and Eve, in covenant relationship. This symbolizes all the law of God that was written in the heart of man, by virtue of the fact that Adam was in covenant. The covenant relationship does not preclude law. The law of God is not opposed to covenant, but is part of it—the covenant is a legal relationship. This is not at all contradictory, for the law, as Paul says in Romans 7:12—"is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." The tree is also symbolic—the tree itself was not poisonous but symbolized the righteousness and obedience of man—or it would symbolize his rebellion, disobedience and unrighteousness.

And that brings us to consider something very important with respect to this covenant of nature or covenant of life—it was a *conditional* covenant. This has to be the case. There is no doubt that Adam was in covenant with God, and in Adam, all mankind was in covenant relationship to God.[13] But this covenant was conditional upon Adam's obedience—upon Adam's ongoing righteousness.[14] God gave him true and perfect life and communion with Himself, but said: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of

14—"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations…. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

13 Romans 5:12, 19—"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned…. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

14 WCF Chapter 7, section II: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." And WLC 20: "The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth; putting the creatures under his dominion, and ordaining marriage for his help; affording him communion with himself; instituting the Sabbath; entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death."

it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Thus the continuation of the covenant of life was *conditional* upon Adam's obedience to the command of God. And because Adam did not fulfill this condition, he fell from the estate wherein he was created, losing communion with God and falling under the curse of that same covenant.

Another evidence of the covenant of works lies in the NT, in the passages dealing with original sin, and the federal or covenant headship of Adam and Christ. In Romans 5, for example, it becomes quite clear that Paul compares Adam to Christ in this way. In another place Paul calls Christ the second or last Adam: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45). Both Adam and Christ were federal heads and represented different bodies of men: Adam represented all mankind, whereas Christ represented only the elect. Thus, they represented different covenants—one the covenant of life, and the other, the covenant of grace.

This same theme is carried through in the allegory given by Paul in Galatians 4, where he speaks of two covenants. Now, it could be said that Paul is only speaking here of two dispensations of the one covenant. But how is it then, that the one covenant gives birth to bondage and death, while the other covenant gives rise to freedom and the inheritance of life? Surely, by faith the right understanding and use of the old dispensation of the covenant is that all its rites and ceremonies would give rise to life in Christ? And not only that, but the entire thrust of Paul's argument is that we cannot be saved by works, but only by grace through faith alone. Therefore, either we trust in works and are under the covenant of works in Adam, or we have faith in Christ and are saved by His perfect work. Therefore, this passage also points us to the truth of the covenant of works.

And the covenant of works has never been abolished; it still stands today. Thus we have in Leviticus 18:5 (quoted in Gal. 3:15 and Rom. 10:5)—"Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord." Because a covenant made by God can never be broken or disannulled, therefore, still today, every human being stands in covenant to God—the covenant of life. They must keep the law in

order to have life with God. They must be born righteous and they must live in perfect obedience, glorifying God in thought, word and deed. If they live this way, then they will have life and communion with God. But, of course, this is completely impossible: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19).

In our consideration of this covenant (of works), plainly there are significant differences to the covenant of grace. I will not attempt here to prove the truths of the covenant of grace, but simply to state some essential differences. First—and we have already alluded to this—the covenant of works was made with Adam as the federal head of this covenant ("federal" deriving from the word *foedus*—Latin for covenant), so that all mankind was represented in Adam. Thus, the covenant of works was made with all mankind. Compare this to the covenant of grace which has Jesus Christ as its federal Head, and therefore is made only with the elect in Him. The covenant of grace is only for the elect, not for all mankind, and the covenant of grace has a different federal head than the covenant of works.

The other major difference is the unconditional nature of the covenant of grace. For all the elect in the covenant of grace, this covenant is unconditional, because all the conditions for life with God (payment of the penalty for sin, perfect righteousness and obedience, and being united to Christ by faith) have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ and by the work of His Spirit in the elect. Therefore, we receive and are in the covenant of grace unconditionally. It was because the covenant of life was conditional that we could fall from life in that covenant. But because Jesus Christ has fulfilled all the conditions of the covenant of grace as our Mediator, we can never fall from the covenant of grace.

Wrong Conceptions of the Covenant of Works

It needs to be said at this point, that there are a number of wrong conceptions of the covenant of works that have arisen over time, just as there are wrong conceptions of the covenant of grace. And some of these wrong conceptions have been held quite widely among

various theologians. But these wrong conceptions do not make the basic doctrine itself wrong—the wrong conceptions simply need to be rejected, biblically, in order to keep the purity of the biblical truth. We note just a few of these.

First, there is the idea that the covenant of works was simply an agreement, worked out between God and man, sometime after man's creation. There are two aspects to this: that it was a pact or business-like arrangement (with two equal parties); and also that it was established after the creation of man, as an after-thought or "add-on." We have already seen that the very language of God in Scripture indicates that God's covenants are never pacts or agreements, even though man's covenants may be. God conceives of the covenant; God decrees it; and God puts it into place and practice. This ties in to the way in which the covenant of life or the covenant of works was established by God at the time of man's creation. He created man to be in covenant communion with Him: this was not something added on later. This is why the Westminster Larger Catechism includes consideration of the covenant of works in the providence of God toward man, stating in question 20—"in the estate in which he was created." The Westminster Standards hold that man was created into the covenant of works—into that covenantal relationship of righteousness and communion with God.

Second, is the idea that somehow, in the covenant of works, man could earn himself a much higher place than what he enjoyed in his created state. The whole tenor of God's relationship with Adam in the garden was: "Do this and live"; "Continue in righteousness and continue to enjoy this wonderful state of fellowship and communion." Adam's relationship with God in Eden was already perfect and glorious—God said that all He had made was "very good." There was nothing higher to which Adam himself could attain. That is not to say that there may have been (and this is purely conjecture, because God never planned that this should happen!) a probationary time, after which it would have been impossible for Adam to fall. We believe this to be the case with the angels, for example. But there is no suggestion in the Bible (nor in the Westminster Standards) that this would result in Adam being translated into a far higher state of glory, so as to live and have communion with God in heaven and earth, and to have a

glorious and spiritual existence like to Christ's. No, the righteousness that Adam worked was not only his duty and his delight, but it also maintained him in the covenant relationship that God had established, because it was conditioned upon that righteousness.

Therefore, we reject the wrong conceptions of the covenant of works, but lay hold upon the truth itself.

The Covenant of Works in the Reformed Tradition

If the covenant of life is a valid Reformed, and therefore biblical truth, we should find that at least the central nub and kernel of this truth will have been present throughout the history of the NT church. And in time, we should see this doctrine developed, refined, and defended by the true church. This is precisely what we do find, as we examine the history of the development of covenant doctrine.

We start with Augustine. Andrew Woolsey, in his dissertation *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought* says, "The term 'covenant of works' was not used by Augustine, but the picture he presented of the divine arrangement with Adam in Eden contained all the ingredients of such a covenant as later portrayed by the 'covenant theologians.'"[15] He also quotes the following from Augustine:

> Many covenants, to be sure, are called God's covenants in addition to the two chief ones, the old and the new, which all may learn by reading them. Now the first covenant given to the first man is really this: "on the day that you eat, you shall die the death" (Gen. 2:17). Now since a more explicit law (*lex evidentior*) has been vouchsafed later, and the Apostle says: "But where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15), how can the words we read in Psalms be true, namely: "I have reckoned all sinners on earth as transgressors?" (Ps. 119:119). Only on the ground that all who are held in bondage by any sin are guilty of transgressing some law.
>
> Wherefore, if even infants, as the true faith maintains, are born sinners, so they are also seen to be transgressors of the law that was issued in the garden of Eden…this since circumcision was a sign of regeneration and the act of birth brings perdition upon the infant through the original sin by which God's covenant was first broken, unless regeneration sets him free, these divine words must be inter-

15 Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 173.

> preted as if they said: "He who has not been regenerated, his soul shall perish from among the people," for he broke God's covenant when in Adam, together with all mankind, he himself also sinned…. Since he [God] did not expressly state what sort of covenant the infant has broken, we are free to understand it as referring to that covenant whose infringement could be attributed to the child.[16]

Reading the other church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria, we may also see significant covenantal thought, although not as much clarity on the doctrine of the covenant of works.

In the Medieval period, there was little development of theological understanding; yet there was some. During this time, both Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus spoke of both a covenant of salvation and a covenant of creation made with all mankind. Later, more conservative theologians Gregory of Rimini and Thomas Bradwardine (in the 1300s), although they differed significantly with Aquinas and Scotus, agreed with the essence of these two covenants.[17]

Then followed the Reformation. Ulrich Zwingli had no systematic setting forth of a covenant in Eden, but in his writings on the covenant against the Anabaptists he used several concepts that paved the way for development of the doctrine of the covenant of works. These things were picked up by Heinrich Bullinger, who succeeded Zwingli in Zurich: the law of God naturally written in the heart of Adam, and the representative headship of Adam, as compared to the representative headship of Christ.[18] Bullinger developed covenant understanding much further, and is considered to be the first to have written a theology of the covenant in his *De Testamento* (in 1534). His covenant theology also appears in his *Decades*, written in 1549. Here he is very clear, in demonstrating that God's covenant of grace is only for the elect. Bullinger conceived of an external, visible church, with whom God made His covenant externally, but then distinguished that from the true, invisible and inward church, to whom in reality God's covenant belongs. But Bullinger also defined God's relationship to

16 Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 173, quoting from Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVI. 133-135.

17 Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 195-199, including footnotes.

18 Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 225.

Adam in the garden as being different from the covenant of grace. It was different in that it was a legal relationship, requiring a loving obedience to God and revealing the way in which he would continue to receive life and communion. "In fact, God showed him the tree as a sign of that which was imposed by talking about the law, certainly of his obedience to the Lord alone, as the wise and bountiful, excellent, greatest God and Creator."[19] Woolsey goes so far as to say: "The only difference between Bullinger's position and that of later 'covenant theologians' here is the appellation 'covenant of works.'"[20]

John Calvin likewise did not speak of a "covenant of works." Indeed, the word "covenant" is not found frequently in his writings, even though the concepts of covenantal theology are found there liberally. And he did write concerning the pre-fall relationship between God and Adam also. He saw that the relationship was based upon law, that the image of God was expressed in that law, and that obedience to the law was the condition upon which continuing in life was promised.[21] Woolsey notes:

> Calvin did not use the term "covenant of works"…but the kind of language he did use is worth noting: divine condescension, accommodation to man's capacity, binding and uniting man with God, a promissory agreement of life with legal and ethical obligations. It might well be asked, what more is needed to constitute a covenant of works arrangement?[22]

Calvin himself says, in speaking of God giving His law for men to obey and promising life thereby: "God…treats according to an agreement, and so there is a mutual obligation between himself and the people. No one will surely deny that God here exhibits a specimen of his mercy when he deigns thus familiarly to make a covenant with men."[23]

As the Reformation proceeded, there was further development

19 Bullinger, *Decades*, 165a-116b, quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 247.

20 Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 248.

21 John Calvin, *Institutes* I, 15.8; *Commentaries* on Genesis 2:16-17, Romans 11:35, Ezekiel 20:11.

22 Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 282.

23 Calvin, *Commentary* on Ezekiel 20:11.

of the doctrine of the covenant of grace, and side-by-side with this, the development of the covenant of works. Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, the Heidelberg theologians, were two involved in such development. These two particularly, drawing on the concepts and writings of Calvin, Beza, and Melanchthon, more carefully defined the covenant of works over against the covenant of grace, showing their similarities, differences, and relationship.

William Perkins, who was a Puritan preacher, and a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge in the late 1500s, spoke clearly of the covenant of works. He said: "There are two kinds of covenant…. The covenant of works is God's covenant, made with the condition of perfect obedience, and is expressed in the moral law…. The covenant of grace is that whereby God freely promising Christ, and his benefits, exacteth again of man, that he would by faith receive Christ, and repent of his sins."[24] And we may find that the same ideas of the covenant of works are expressed by Scottish preachers and theologians like Robert Rollock and Robert Howie. And there are others, such as Francis Gomarus, and later Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius, and then such as John Ball and Thomas Boston.

What we can also note is that, particularly at the height of the development of covenant theology in Reformed thought, holding to the covenant of works was a mark of theological orthodoxy. In fact, it was the heretics such as the Socinians or the Remonstrants (for example, Episcopius) who rejected the covenant of works as a scriptural doctrine. And once again today we find that the covenant of works is attacked by the latest of the heresies against the Reformed faith—the Federal Vision.

The Covenant of Works in the Reformed Confessions

One would expect that, with the development of covenant theology through the period of the Reformation, it would be the later Reformed confessions that would speak of this doctrine. And this is what we find.

Interestingly, Herman Bavinck said that "The doctrine of the covenant of works is based on Scripture and is eminently valuable."

24 William Perkins, *Golden Chaine,* quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 466.

And, "The covenant of works and the covenant of grace stand and fall together." He actually maintained that the basic understanding of the concepts of the covenant of works are found in the Belgic Confession Articles 14-15 and in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&As 6-11.

But by the time we come to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, as we have seen, the doctrine is well defined throughout the Reformed world, and therefore is stated explicitly. The doctrine of the covenant of works is also found a bit later in the Helvetic Consensus Formula of 1675, Canons 7-10.

The Significance of the Covenant of Works

As with all the truths of Scripture, the doctrine of the covenant of works is not just an academic fact. All the truths of the Bible point to the beauty and the wonder of Jesus Christ and His work. And this is precisely what the covenant of works does also.

The covenant of works clearly sets forth what is central and necessary for man in order to have life and communion with God—that is, perfect righteousness and perfect loving obedience. Which is to say, to be conformed perfectly to the law of God, and gladly to obey the will of our Creator. Therefore, as soon as man ceased to have righteousness and obedience, even in one small thing, he lost the communion and blessings of that covenant and came under its necessary curse. God, being the God of all righteousness and justice, must bring the whole of His infinite judgment to bear on all and every sin. This is the basis for understanding what relationship all mankind has with God by nature—and what kind of salvation we need. It is utterly impossible for us to repair the covenant of works and enter into blessing with God through our own works. Any work of ours is completely excluded by understanding that initial covenant of works—it is a death knell to the heresy of the Federal Vision which claims that we need faith and works.

Next, the covenant of works clearly sets forth the salvation, the rescue, we need. We need someone to fulfill the covenant of works, to stand in our place as a Federal and Covenant Head, to repair all that has been broken, and to fulfill completely all that we were unable to do in Adam. This is what Christ does (Rom. 5:1-21). First, He takes all the penalty incurred by everyone that belongs to Him, and He

suffers that perfect justice for all our sins: original and actual. But second, He then stands in the place of the first Adam, and for all the elect, chosen in Him before the world began, He lives a life of perfect righteousness and loving obedience. Jesus Christ fulfills, completely and perfectly, the covenant of works. Being God and man, His perfect work stands for all eternity for all of His people.

The covenant of works also unmistakably sets forth the relationship between law and gospel. Law and gospel are not completely separated, but are intimately connected. God's law, being a reflection of Himself is holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12). And mankind was originally created in a covenant involving law. In Adam, we were under the law, and blessed greatly by it and by the keeping of it. But having fallen, that same law, that same covenant, became a curse and not a blessing, because of our sin. But then, Christ comes, and fulfills that law—His blood has been sprinkled upon the mercy seat and the righteousness of the law satisfied. Now, the gospel, the good news is—we are no longer under the law (under the covenant of works), but we are under grace (the covenant of grace): "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). The terror of the law is gone, the curse of the covenant of works taken away, and the law is now our golden pathway to walk in, out of gratitude to our covenant God for all He has done for us. The law of God is thus seen to be important for all aspects of our life with God: antinomianism is done away with; legalism is condemned, and the Federal Vision shown to be heresy.

Further, the covenant of works brings home to the natural man where he stands before God. He does not simply stand as a creature, owing honor and worship to God as Creator; but he is in reality in a relationship to God—God established the covenant of works with Adam and every human being in him, and that covenant still stands. This is an absolute requirement of all men, that they fulfill all that covenant, or they face the eternal wrath of God. In this way, it can be shown that God is just and good to bring eternal judgment against all who are not in Christ.

In contrast to the covenant of works, the covenant of grace shines in even greater beauty and glory. Jesus Christ has come and fulfilled all the conditions of the covenant of works, completely, to the uttermost.

The covenant of works was revealed first, that we might know and see what Christ has done on our behalf in the covenant of grace. And this is what makes the covenant of grace unconditional to the elect. God from all eternity established His counsel of peace between Himself (the triune God) and Jesus Christ (the Branch) as seen in Zechariah 6:12-13: "And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both"). He then set forth the conditional covenant of works, in which man fell into sin, rendering himself spiritually dead and condemned. Jesus Christ came, having taken His people to Himself, and fulfilled the counsel of peace, working and fulfilling all conditions as Prophet, Priest and King. Therefore, as we stand in Christ and with Him as our Mediator, there are no conditions for our salvation. The Holy Spirit works faith in us, and we are united to Christ, and all conditions are fulfilled. Nothing stands in the way of our salvation, or in the way of our blessedness in life and communion forever with God. The covenant of works actually emphasizes and stresses the unconditional nature of the covenant of grace.

Finally, this doctrine of the covenant of works shows that through the work of Christ and grace, we have been elevated to a far higher life than we would ever have had in the garden, and in the first covenant, perfect though it was. That is, Adam's life in the garden was as perfect as it could ever be, as a creature enjoying life and communion with God in covenant with Him. But God always planned something far greater. In the way of the covenant of grace, it is necessary that we are united to Christ, the second Adam, in order to be made partakers of the benefits He has purchased. But that means something very glorious, which God always purposed. We are made to be heirs with Christ—we are made to be the very sons and daughters of God and (whatever glorious thing this may mean) made "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4). Adam, and mankind in him, could never earn or merit anything greater than that which God had lovingly given in the estate of creation. For when we have done all those things which

we are commanded to do in God's law, we still confess that we are unprofitable servants: we have only done that which was our duty to do (Luke 17:10). But Christ, being both man and the eternal Son of God, could earn or merit far more for His people. That was always God's purpose, and we would receive the most wondrous blessings that He has earned in the covenant of redemption.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I quote from Wilhelmus á Brakel, theologian from the late 1600s, and author of *A Christian's Reasonable Service*. He said: "Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will very readily deny that Christ by His active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect."[25] Brakel spoke truly concerning the Arminians of his day; and in our day, he speaks truly concerning the men of the Federal Vision.

There are those who deny the concept of the covenant of works, but who hold to the principles of truth contained in it. We understand that our brethren of the PRC, although they have rejected a particular conception of the covenant of works, stand with us in many of the principles outlined in this paper, and in that we rejoice. But, it would be equally good to convince them from Scripture of the correct and confessional understanding we have of this doctrine and which we hold dear.

May the Lord use these things we have examined to encourage our hearts in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ, for His glory, and for the strengthening of His church. ●

25 Wilhelmus á Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 1, trans. Bartel Elshout (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 355.

God's Covenant of Grace and Marriage

Russell J. Dykstra

God's gracious covenant with His people is a central and extraordinarily significant doctrine in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The church has long understood the importance of God's covenant, as is evident from the identification of God's inspired Word as the Old Testament (or covenant) and the New Testament (or covenant). In the judgment of most Reformed theologians, the covenant is the very heart of Reformed doctrine and life. Many Presbyterian theologians have likewise devoted solid efforts in setting forth and explaining this doctrine. In the doctrine of the covenant all theology "comes together." The various doctrines of a church come into focus in her doctrine of the covenant, thus revealing either intrinsic conflict and contradiction in its theology, or, harmonious, organic unity.

For the Protestant Reformed Churches, the doctrine of the covenant is essential to our existence as a denomination. Already in 1950, Rev. Herman Hoeksema set forth what he believed to be the distinctive contribution of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Reformed faith, as well as their distinctive stand in the Reformed church-world. He wrote:

> But I ask, what is the heritage of the Protestant Reformed Churches? Is there any part of the truth which they have emphasized and further developed in distinction from other Reformed Churches?
>
> ...If you ask me what is the most peculiar treasure of the Protestant Reformed Churches, I answer without any hesitation: their peculiar view of the covenant.
>
> And what is their particular conception?
>
> It stands closely connected with their denial of common grace, and with their emphasis on the doctrine of election and reprobation.
>
> Moreover, it emphasizes and carries out the organic idea.
>
> Briefly stated it teaches that God realizes His eternal covenant of friendship, in Christ, the Firstborn of every creature, and the First-begotten of the dead, organically, and antithetically along the

lines of election and reprobation, and in connection with the organic development of all things.

That is, in a nutshell, the peculiar Protestant Reformed heritage.[1]

Subsequent events in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) would only confirm that conviction, and if possible, make the doctrine of the covenant to be even more distinct and more beloved by the members of the PRC.

This glorious doctrine is significant not merely for theology. Believers live out of their theology, and what they believe will affect, even direct, their lives. This is especially true of the doctrine of God's covenant of grace. The covenant sets forth our relationship to God and that relationship is determinative for all of life's relationships. Since we live with God in conscious covenant life, we live in this world as His friends and servants. That will directly affect our lives as families and will determine our relationship to our neighbors, our fellow workers, and obviously, our fellow saints.

One of the institutions that is profoundly affected by God's gracious covenant is marriage. Every believer recognizes the close relationship between God's covenant of grace and marriage. The Bible presents God's covenant with His people in terms of marriage. The burden of this paper is that marriage exists for the sake of God's covenant, and therefore marriage must be shaped and molded after God's everlasting covenant of grace.

In the paper we will examine first, what the covenant is. You can be assured that I will be setting forth my conviction of what the Bible teaches, and that this is the established position of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Second, we will examine passages that link the covenant and marriage. Third, we will compare and contrast the institution of marriage with God's covenant with His people—how they are alike, and how they are different. Fourth, we will note the effect that a conditional covenant has on the institution of marriage, as compared to an unconditional covenant. In particular, I will focus on the implications for marriage and face the question, is marriage a union that only God dissolves by death, or is marriage a union that can be dissolved as the result of sin? The goal of the paper in this

1 "Protestant Reformed," *Standard Bearer*, 26, (March 15, 1950): 269.

fourth section is to demonstrate that marriage, like God's covenant, is unbreakable, and that only death dissolves the union of husband and wife.

God's Gracious Covenant of Friendship

Briefly expressed, we hold that God's covenant of grace is a relationship of friendship that God sovereignly establishes with His chosen people in Christ. In this covenant, Christ is both Head of the covenant people and Mediator of the covenant. God establishes His covenant unconditionally with believers and their elect seed in the line of continued generations.

The starting point for understanding the covenant is God Himself—God is a covenant God. As the eternal, triune God, He is the living God. Father, Son, and Spirit have lived together eternally in a relationship of love and friendship. That glorious life is the pattern for God's gracious covenant with His people in Christ. For God has determined that His people will know and love Him, live with Him in fellowship, and praise Him forever.

The Bible emphasizes that the essence of the covenant of grace is a relationship of friendship. That is not to say that the Bible anywhere defines the covenant as friendship, any more than the Bible in any one place neatly defines and circumscribes the atonement, or justification, or any central doctrine. Yet this truth is presented throughout the Bible.

Evidence that God's relationship to His people is a friendship is found already in the garden of Eden, where God walked in the garden, calling to His friend/servant Adam to commune together (Gen. 3:8), apparently an ordinary activity, and one enjoyed by friends. In fact, God had created Adam and Eve in His own image and likeness so that a relationship of friendship could exist. Immediately after the fall, God promised to put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Though God did not explain how, subsequent history revealed that God accomplished that enmity by drawing His chosen people out of the fallen race into covenant friendship with him. As friends of God, His people would be hated by the world.

Further, of Enoch and Noah we read that they *walked with God*, another activity of friends. In addition, Scripture calls Abraham a *friend of God* no less than three times (II Chron. 20:7; Is. 41:8; James 2:23).

The covenant God *dwelt* in and with Israel, saying "I will establish my covenant with you…and I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul will not abhor you, and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:9, 11, 12). The tabernacle itself was a revelation of the covenant. It is called God's house—which calls to mind a family dwelling place and fellowship. The tabernacle consisted of two rooms, with God (symbolically) present in one, and the people (represented in the priests) in the other. It pictured the covenant—God and His people dwelling together under one roof.

Consider also how Psalm 25:14 describes the intimacy of covenant life with God—"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." The Hebrew discloses the remarkable familiarity found in God's life with His people. The root meaning of the word translated "secret" is "pillow" or "cushion." It paints the picture of friends sitting together in familiar conversation, or even of a husband and wife in fellowship, with their heads lying on a common pillow. This is about friendship. Jehovah shares His familiar conversations, His secrets, with His friends, and (note the Hebrew parallelism in Psalm 25) causes them to know His covenant.

This covenant relationship is realized in Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the covenant. He is Immanuel—God with us. He came to tabernacle with us (John 1:14). And by His atoning work He realized the covenant: removing the sin and guilt that stood between His people and God, removing forever their curse, and reconciling them unto the Father. These same people are given the life of Christ from above and are recreated in His image, thus making fellowship with God both possible and actual.

The culmination of this eternal covenant of grace and reconciliation is recorded in Revelation 21:3—"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them."

God not only teaches in His Word that the covenant is a relation of friendship; He causes us to know (from our experience) the nature of that friendship, namely, that it is close, intimate, and unbreakable. He has given three human relationships as pictures of the covenant

life. By means of these, God not only drives home the truth that the essence of the covenant is friendship; He also gives His people a foretaste of the eternal covenant of grace.

God illustrates His friendship with His covenant people with the *friendship of men* like David and Jonathan, whose souls were *knit together* in love. We read that "Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul" (I Sam. 18: 1-4). Proverbs 18:24 hints at the same—"there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

The *family* is also a picture of God's covenant with us, for He is our Father for Jesus' sake. God adopts us as His children (Eph. 1:4-6), even sending the Spirit of Christ into our hearts crying "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Recreated in the image of Christ, God's covenant people even bear a spiritual resemblance to their elder brother. It becomes manifest that they belong to the family of God, and as children they have the right to live in His house, sit at His table, and have communion with each other and with God in Christ. To them is the inheritance promised, viz., eternal life.

The third picture of the covenant is *marriage,* to which we will return later. All these God-given pictures also indicate that the essence of the covenant is friendship.

For the sake of clarity and completeness, we focus on a few more elements of the covenant. First, the covenant of God is an *eternal* covenant made with Christ and with the people of God, chosen in Christ. This is the teaching of Psalm 89:1-37. This Psalm begins with the psalmist praising God for His faithfulness. Then God Himself speaks: "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations" (Ps. 89:3-4). God's covenant is with "His chosen" (pointing to election) and with David (a type of Christ). God promises to establish His throne *forever*, indicating that the covenant is eternal, and that the one with whom the covenant is made is God's own Son, whose throne alone is eternal.

The descriptions and promises found in verses 19 ff. can only refer ultimately to Christ. It becomes especially evident in verse 26: "He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God." And notice God's promise in the next verse: "Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth."

Then comes the beautiful description of an eternal, unbreakable covenant (28): "My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him." God explains that if the *children* of His Son (those given to Christ eternally) break the covenant, He (God) will chastise them (30-32). "Nevertheless (God affirms) my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from *him* [Christ], nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. *My covenant will I not break,* nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Ps. 89:33-34, my emphasis).

God's covenant is an eternal covenant of love made with His own Son, and all those given to the Son by the Father.

God made this plain to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, testifying, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Galatians 3 explains that the "seed" in this promise is Christ Himself. The Spirit declares: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

This is why God's covenant of grace is *unbreakable.* The children of Christ will 'break' the covenant. This 'breaking' of the covenant does not meant that they will dissolve, eliminate, or disannul it. Rather they will *violate* God demands to His covenant people. But they cannot break (that is, dissolve) God's covenant because God established it eternally with Christ. God's covenant is unbreakable.

The Bible also teaches that God establishes His covenant with *believers and their seed.* Genesis 17:7 is the clearest statement of this. There God addresses Abraham (His friend): "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Yet, since the covenant is with the elect in Christ, not all the natural children of Abraham are meant. God establishes His covenant of love and friendship with the elect children of believers, not with the reprobate born to believing parents, such as Esau.

Thus when God established His covenant with Christ, He established it with every member of the body of Christ, and accordingly, with every member of the covenant. This is God's eternal plan. God eternally appointed Christ Head and Mediator of the covenant. The

covenant of grace is not a response to the fall of Adam, or a stopgap effort to fix Adam's sin. The covenant of grace is God's eternal plan. God's goal is to live in covenant love and fellowship with His people eternally.

What has been said implies that God's covenant is *controlled by election.* Many falsely accuse the PRC of identifying covenant with election. That charge is nonsense. Election is a *decree* to choose certain persons to salvation in Christ. The covenant is a *relationship* of friendship. Yet the closest possible relation exists between covenant and election, for election determines membership in the covenant, and reprobation excludes from the covenant. Simply put, God establishes His covenant only with the elect. In addition to the texts given above, consider also Psalm 132:11-14: "The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

Marriage: A Picture of God's Covenant

God's eternal, unbreakable covenant with His people in Christ shapes and molds marriage, because God created marriage to be a picture of His covenant relationship with His people. This becomes plain already in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, God presents this relationship as a betrothal. A betrothal was not the same as the modern-day engagement, which is an agreement to become married, but not a legal agreement. A betrothal was legally binding. This is evident from the betrothal of Joseph and Mary. When Joseph discovered that Mary was with child, he determined to put her away. It was divorce that he intended to pursue. They were legally husband and wife, but not yet living together as husband and wife. Thus also Deuteronomy 20:7, which speaks of a man "that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her."

In the prophecy of Hosea, God uses this relationship to describe His covenant life with Israel. The Lord speaks to the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel toward the end her existence. She had forsaken

Jehovah. God describes Israel's sins as adultery ("…the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD," Hos. 1:2). Israel's sins are so bad that God declares: "Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts" (Hos. 2:2). When Israel turned to idols, "she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the LORD" (Hos. 2:13).

But Jehovah did not forsake His wife. On the contrary, He promises, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi" (Hos. 2:14-16—*Ishi* is literally "my man," or better here, "my husband").

Through the prophet Hosea God speaks of a covenant: "And in that day will I make a covenant for them…" (Hos. 2:18). Then follows the beautiful vow of His betrothal to Israel: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD…. And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Hos. 2:19, 20, 23).

Several other inspired prophets use this same kind of language to describe the relationship of God to Israel and/or to Judah.

The prophecy of Jeremiah addresses apostatizing Judah, and God commands His messenger, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness" (Jer. 2:2). *Espousal* is the same as *betrothal*. In subsequent verses God condemns her for her departure from Him, comparing her actions to that of a harlot, and, one who has loved many strangers.

The Lord subsequently addresses Judah as *His wife*. "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers." And then

the unexpected, amazing, gracious admonition: "Yet return again to me, saith the LORD" (Jer. 3:1).

Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord continued to describe the wickedness of both Israel and Judah in terms of an unfaithful wife, and speaks even of the divorce! "And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery *I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce*; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also" (Jer. 3:8, my emphasis).

And still, most amazing, God tells them: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Jer. 3:14). That is the gracious assurance, even though, in verse 20 the Lord reminds them: "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD" (Jer. 3:20).

And *still* the Lord does not utterly forsake His wife. In Jeremiah 31:3 He speaks of His undying love: "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

And later in that chapter, God, Israel's Husband, gives the promise of a new covenant.

> Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, *although I was an husband unto them*, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and *will be their God, and they shall be my people.* And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for *they shall all know me,* from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (31-34, my emphasis).

Our marriage to God, His covenant of grace, is never broken (dissolved). Though His covenant people transgress and play the adul-

teress, so that God puts them away—divorces them—for a time, still God maintains the marriage. Even after putting her away, divorcing her, He still insists that they are married.

The same truth of God's unconditional, everlasting covenant is set forth in Ezekiel 16 in terms of a marriage. In it God reminds Judah of her hopeless birth (unwanted and left to die) and of God's giving her life (vv. 4-6). After she matured, God took her as His wife—"Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine" (8).

The following verses recount Judah's apostasy in term of adultery with many lovers, that is, idol gods, "as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband" (32)! For this spiritual adultery God prophesied certain and dreadful judgment, ending with: "For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant" (59).

So is the marriage (the covenant) over? By now we know that cannot happen. In amazing grace, Jehovah concludes, "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant…. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD" (60, 62).

God spoke to Judah also through Isaiah, with a similar message to a spiritually unfaithful wife. "Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away" (Is. 50:1). But Jehovah did not forsake His eternally beloved wife. "For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer" (Is. 54:6-8).

Isaiah even sees the day when the betrothed will be living together as husband and wife: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither

shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the Bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Is. 62:4-5).

If the Old Testament was a time of betrothal, the New Testament is the wedding. The Bridegroom, God in the flesh, comes, and the wedding is imminent. In unspeakable love He lays down His life for her, purchasing her, and cleansing her for Himself.

The inspired apostle Paul sets forth this reality in Ephesians 5:22-33. Christ is the Husband, and the church is the wife. The relationship of Christ and His church is the pattern for the behavior of the husband and wife. "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:24-25).

Paul quotes from the institution of marriage in Genesis 1—"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" (31). Then, unexpectedly, he adds: "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (32). The true marriage is that of Christ to His church.

Before the marriage can be consummated, Christ is caught up to heaven. There He is preparing a place for her in His Father's house of many mansions. But He promises to return for her. And He does not desert His bride. He sends His Spirit to dwell within her until He returns.

When He returns, He will take His bride unto himself, according to the revelation of the things that must shortly come to pass (the book of Revelation). The wedding feast is prepared, and the announcement is made:

> Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

Finally, the bride comes. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). And the announcement sounds, replete with covenantal language. "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev 21:3). And the bride and the Bridegroom will see each other face to face and enjoy covenant love and fellowship forever and ever. The marriage is consummated. The eternal, unbreakable covenant is brought to the goal: God dwelling with His eternally beloved people.

The church has long recognized this reality. Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger wrote a large treatise in which he compared marriage to a covenant. Martin Luther spoke of "the covenant of marriage." John Calvin likewise saw that the union of the husband and wife in marriage pictured the church's union with Christ. Many books have been written based on that same premise.

One particularly insightful second generation Reformer was Jerome Zanchi.[2] He wrote in his commentary on Hosea that the prophet "is alluding to the covenant by which God, as a husband, had pledged his fidelity to the people, and the people, as wife, had pledged their fidelity to God" (157). We will have occasion to return to this writing later in the paper.

We have seen then, that frequently the Bible establishes the firm connection between God's covenant of grace and marriage. Since marriage is a reflection or picture of God's covenant, the essence of the covenant of grace should be, must be, manifested in what the church teaches and practices with regard to the institution of marriage.

Covenant and Marriage: Compared and Contrasted

The beauty of the covenant of grace is revealed in the institution of marriage in many ways. First, in God's covenant, He chooses His

2 Zanchi did not write a treatise on the covenant, but only addressed the relationship between the covenant and marriage in several writings. John J. Farthing demonstrates the explicit connection that Zanchi made between covenant and marriage. "Foedus Evangelicum: Jerome Zanchi on the Covenant," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 29 (1994), no. 1: 149-67. All quotations of Zanchi are from this article.

people in Christ. He establishes His covenant with a specific, particular people whom He loves and draws to Himself. The rest of the race of men is rejected by God. He will not live in fellowship with them. In time He hates all workers of iniquity. In eternity He condemns and dismisses them—"Depart from me; I never knew you." But His people are the apple of His eye. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," He tells them. And, in eternity, they will live in blessed, covenant fellowship, knowing God more and better 'each day,' forever.

Similarly, in marriage, the bridegroom selects his wife in love. By so doing he rejects all other women as his wife. He commits himself to love her alone, and vows to do so. He will live with her alone in close, intimate love and fellowship as long as they both shall live.

Closely related to the above is a second similarity, namely, that God is first in His covenant relationship. The church does not choose God, nor establish a relationship with Him. Rather, God sovereignly establishes His covenant with His people chosen in Christ. The same is reflected in the earthly picture of marriage. The man is first, in that he proposes to his beloved, and takes her to himself to be his wife.

Third, as has been demonstrated, God's covenant of grace is a relationship of love and friendship. Marriage is likewise intended by God to be a relationship of love. Both husband and wife are repeatedly commanded to love the other. Their union is so close that they are one flesh. It is closer than the relationship of parents to children, for they leave father and mother and cleave to each other. The husband is called to dwell with his wife. Love, intimacy, and fellowship are the heart of the marriage relationship when a marriage is what God requires it to be.

Fourth, in the covenant, God in Christ is everything to the church. He is the Head, the wisdom, consolation, and assistance to His church. The church looks to Him for all that she needs. She cries out to Him for help, for protection, and for every blessing. God promises His people that He will be all of that. He is absolutely faithful to His promises. He will not fail His people, for He will be their God eternally. And the church by His grace responds—living unto God and for His glory.

Marriage should reflect that as well. In love, the husband commits himself to the lifelong care of his bride. He promises to provide for

her, protect her, comfort her, and assist her in all things that belong to this life and a better. The wife responds to that with love and thankfulness. She lives for and unto her husband and lives her life through him.

Fifth, these relationships—both the covenant and marriage—grow progressively better. A young couple, so much in love, still do not realize the joys they will share together. They think they know each other, but in reality they have a lifetime of learning about the other ahead of them. The more they know each other—living in love—the more they can enjoy living and sharing their life together. A good marriage is one in which husband and wife grow closer all their married life. Obviously, this is only a picture because sin mars this growth in love and fellowship. The reality is God's covenant life with His people. God knows His people with a perfect knowledge of love. He has created His own, and knows them in all their emotions, thoughts, desires, plans, and activities. And He causes His people to know Him. By His Word and Spirit He causes them to know His greatness and glory, love and mercy. He tells them His secrets, including His eternal plans for them. And God's people grow in that knowledge in time and eternity. Now we know in part, but then we shall know even as we are known. For ever and ever, we will grow in our knowledge of our divine Husband. Every new discovery will only make us to love Him more. And we will not, not in an eternity, come to the end of this growing in love. For God is infinite.

Sixth, in His covenant God has eternally chosen His people in love. As for marriage, the man and the woman do not know that they will be husband and wife until they meet and become well acquainted. Yet, it is true that they have been created for each other. God made the man and the woman, generally speaking, to complement each other physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. In marriage, God makes one particular man for one particular woman. They complement each other as none others can. God created Eve for Adam. No other woman would have been fitting for him. Together they became one whole.

In marriage today this is still true, though sin diminishes and damages this oneness. Marriage between two sinners is not the perfect relationship it was for Adam and Eve in the state of rectitude.

Nonetheless, that complementary relationship still today reflects God's covenant with His people in this way: the church is chosen and fashioned by God to be the perfect complement to Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23).

Finally, we note that God's covenant can be broken. That is to say, it can be violated by His covenant people. They transgress against God, reject His covenant demands, and thus break His covenant. As demonstrated above, God's covenant is never broken in the sense that it is annulled.

So also, marriage can be broken. In fact, both husband and wife break the marriage vows constantly. They do not perform the duties that are required of a husband and a wife. They mistreat each other. They bicker and fight. They can be unfaithful in the relationship by failing to live in close, intimate love. They can become too intimate with another person of the opposite sex. And, most damaging of all to the marriage, they can commit adultery. They "break," that is, violate, the marriage relationship. It remains to be determined whether the marriage bond is dissolved by this unfaithfulness, or whether it abides, though "broken," as God's covenant abides.

A major difference between marriage and the covenant as far as breaking the relationship is concerned, is that God is ever faithful, and never sins against His people. However, in a marriage, both husband and wife are unfaithful, and violate their vows.

Briefly we point out two other obvious differences between God's covenant of grace, and the institution of marriage. First, God's covenant is eternal, and marriage is limited to time. Jesus clearly taught that earthly marriages do not continue in heaven (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25). And Romans 7:1-3 states that death dissolves the marriage bond. From a covenantal point of view, the reason why marriage ceases at death is that the full reality is enjoyed, as death takes us immediately to Christ, our Bridegroom. We are married to Him, and not to any other.

Second, the covenant is all of God, for He is the sovereign, eternal Jehovah, while His people are but creatures. He planned the covenant and He chose His people; He forms them in the womb and recreates them in the image of His Son. He gave the Mediator, and He realizes the covenant in the cross. He gathers His people into the covenant.

Man contributes nothing. We do not consent to it; we do not fill conditions. We only live out of what God has done for us and continues to do in us.

Marriage is quite different, for both husband and wife are creatures. God has given them different positions in marriage, making the man the head and giving him authority over the woman. But as believers they are joint heirs of the grace of life, equal before God. In addition, the man and the woman agree to get married. They assist each other. They both contribute to the married life together. That is obviously different from God's covenant.

The Broken Bond—Violated or Dissolved?

We return now to the question whether or not a marriage can be dissolved by the actions of men. God's covenant cannot be dissolved, for man cannot accomplish that, and God has promised never to break it. Is the same true of marriage?

The Reformers had some things to say about this. Reformed theologians from Calvin to the present have written that the marriage bond is indissoluble.

Calvin wrote: "[Christ] states, that the reason why God declared man and wife to be one flesh, was to prevent any one from violating that indissoluble tie by divorce" (*Institutes*, 2.12.7).[3] Again, he wrote, "And as he declares that it is not in the power of the husband to dissolve the marriage…."[4]

Zanchi argues that God "promises to confirm the union between himself and the true Israel (i.e., the elect) in such a way that there will be no possibility of its being dissolved."[5] And he makes the connection—"Just as marriage is indissoluble, so is the covenant."[6]

It is very important to recognize that all the blessings of God's covenant depend on this one essential element, namely, that the covenant of God cannot be broken. God makes countless promises—loving, assuring, comforting promises to His people. He will never leave or

3 John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion.* Transl. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 1:408.

4 John Calvin. *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, 2* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 380.

5 Farthing, "Zanchi on the covenant," 157.

6 Farthing, "Zanchi on the covenant," 156.

forsake us. He will live with us eternally. He is our God and we are His people. Glorious promises these are. We need not worry that one day God will tire of us. Nor should we fear that we will one day commit a sin that will end our relationship. It is absolutely sure. God's covenant *cannot be broken* (dissolved).

Marriage has many of the same elements. A man may tell a woman that he loves her, that he will care for her, protect her and nourish her. But it is not until he asks her to marry him that she can be sure that he will perform what he has said. When they are married, he makes his vows before God and man, promising:

> I take you ____, to be my wedded wife,
> To have and to hold from this day forward,
> For better, for worse,
> For richer, for poorer,
> In sickness and in health,
> To love and to honor
> Till death do us part.

What a beautiful, assuring, trusting relationship is established!

But, what happens to her assurance, comfort, and complete trust when the wife knows that the marriage can be dissolved if she commits certain sins, or if the husband commits certain sins? Is that not the loss of all that marriage assures a woman? And, since marriage is a picture, what does this testify concerning the very heart of God's everlasting covenant of grace? That is the more important concern.

It must be pointed out that a theological connection exists between a conditional covenant and the allowance of divorce for nearly any reason. And, there is a connection between conditional covenant theology and the practice of allowing for remarriage after divorce, whether in all cases, or in a select few. Allow me to demonstrate this using a specific case in point.

In 1985 a significant defense of the unbreakable bond of marriage appeared in the book *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus.*[7] Two capable theologians, William A. Heth

7 The book was first published by Hodder and Stoughton in London in 1984, and in 1985 in Nashville, Tennessee by Thomas Nelson. An enlarged edition was printed in 1997, and a third edition in 2002.

and Gordon J. Wenham, took the bold stand that Jesus taught no remarriage after divorce. They demonstrated that this was the virtually unanimous position of the early church. They provided exegesis to support the early church's conviction about what Jesus taught. It was a courageous if unpopular stand for truth in the face of a swelling tide of approval for no-fault divorce for any reason and a wide-open remarriage policy.

Sad to say, Heth and Wenham are now divided on this issue. In the Spring, 2002 issue of *The Southern Baptist Journal*, Wenham wrote an exegetically based article entitled "Does the New Testament Approve Divorce after Remarriage?" His answer is, "No." In the same issue, Heth wrote "Jesus and Divorce, How My Mind Has Changed."[8] He no longer believes that Jesus forbids remarriage after divorce.

What made Heth change his mind? He points out a number of influences. I will not go into all of them, but mention only one, namely, the theological justification for his change of mind. That theological basis, Heth maintains, is that the covenants of the Bible may be both violated and dissolved. Although Heth does not in this article expressly apply this to God's covenant of grace, everything in the article indicates that all biblical covenants can be dissolved. In any case, Heth insists that this allows the marriage bond to be dissolved.

Again, we will not delve extensively into Heth's reasons for maintaining that God's covenant is dissoluble. The interested reader can discover his reasons by consulting the journal article. Heth gained what he describes as a new understanding of Near Eastern covenants and the Jewish practice of divorce. Heth became convinced that "in terms of Hebrew usage covenants may be both violated and dissolved." He adds that with this new understanding, "I knew immediately that my no remarriage view had been placed in jeopardy" (18).

Even apart from Heth's reasons, is it not plain that if God's covenant can be broken (annulled, dissolved) by man, and marriage is a picture of God's gracious covenant, that this will open the door to divorce for every reason? Man's sins can dissolve God's covenant. Man's sins can dissolve the marriage. This is one of the evil fruits of a conditional covenant.

8 The issue is available online at http://www.sbts.edu/Resources/Publications/Journal/Spring_2002.aspx.

The matter of the sins of husbands and wives dissolving the marriage bond has significant implications also for remarriage. The first implication is that the allowance of remarriage after divorce only for the innocent party in the instances of adultery and desertion cannot be maintained consistently. If the sins of husbands and wives (adultery and desertion) and the subsequent divorce dissolve the marriage for the innocent party, then the bond is dissolved. It cannot be that the bond dissolves for the innocent party, who thus may remarry, but does not dissolve for the guilty one. If the innocent party is allowed to remarry, it can only be because the marriage bond is no more. Consequently, no possible reason exists for prohibiting remarriage for the guilty party. If he repents of his sins and confesses them, the church must allow him to remarry, for the bond of marriage is dissolved.

The conclusion, then, is clear. If the covenant of God is unconditional and unbreakable, then marriage is a lifelong bond that God forms ("what God hath joined together") and only He can dissolve through death. And, on the other hand, if God's covenant is conditional and breakable, there is good theological justification for divorce for any reason, and for remarriage after divorce.

I conclude therefore with a personal plea to Reformed and Presbyterian believers who hold to the Westminster Confession of Faith's position on divorce and remarriage.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are confessional churches. We know, love, preach, and live out of our three confessions. We greatly appreciate other Reformed and Presbyterian churches who are confessional.

At the same time, all the children of the Reformation confess that the Bible is the only authority for faith and life. As sons and daughters of the Reformation, we know we must be Reformed, but always reforming—that is to say, always going back to the Bible, and making sure that we are in harmony with the Word in doctrine and life. In God's plan, doctrines come to clearer development though controversy and study of the Bible. Part of that process is a willingness to check our confessions, evaluating them in the light of God's Word.

As regards the doctrine of God's covenant of grace, confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian churches stand united. We insist that the covenant is God's, that it is eternal, unconditional, and unbreakable.

We are adamant that the covenant is with the elect, and that Christ is both the Head and Mediator of the covenant. We teach infant baptism based on the truth that God establishes His covenant with believers and their seed in their generations. We maintain that marriage is a God-instituted picture of the covenant, and therefore take a high view of marriage, not lightly allowing divorce even on the one, biblical ground of adultery.

Now, out of the love that I have for truly Reformed and Presbyterian brothers, I urge those who hold to the Westminster's position on divorce and remarriage to consider the doctrine and practice of marriage in light of the covenant of grace. I implore you to reevaluate the teaching that adultery and desertion dissolve the marriage bond. And consider that this is in conflict with the precious doctrine of the covenant as an eternal and unbreakable relationship.

The glorious doctrine of God's covenant of grace is a beautiful fruit of the great sixteenth-century Reformation. May God grant that this warm and comforting doctrine unites those who love the Reformed truth. And may none be afraid to allow this cardinal truth of God's everlasting covenant of grace to direct both theology and walk of life. ●

Of Such Is the Kingdom of God

Mark Shand

But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:14

Confusion and ignorance reign within many Presbyterian and Reformed churches, as to the biblical, covenantal view of the children of believing parents. The confusion has become so great that even those churches that administer the sacrament of baptism to the children of believing parents, are at a loss to explain why they do so. Members and even officebearers in such churches struggle to explain why they administer the sign and seal of the covenant of grace to those who are too young to comprehend the gospel intellectually and are unable to provide cogent evidence of their repentance and faith.

Consequently, in many Presbyterian and Reformed churches worldwide, infant baptism has become simply a ritual that takes place following the birth of a child, but that holds no real spiritual significance. As a result, the sacrament that is designed to be, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life"[1] has been reduced to an expression of future hope; an anticipation on the part of believing parents and the church that some time in the future, when the child comes to years of discretion, he or she will experience a work of God's grace in his heart and openly confess his faith in Jesus Christ.

Instead of propounding a distinctively Reformed view of children in the covenant, many Presbyterian and Reformed churches reflect a variety of views that have been distorted by the errors of Anabaptism and Arminianism. The tragedy and practical significance of this can-

1 *The Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXVIII.1, "Of Baptism" (Inverness: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1981), 114.

not be overstated. Writing nearly twenty years ago, Robert Rayburn rightly noted:

> One of the features of Presbyterian thought and life which ought most dramatically to distinguish it from the prevailing evangelicalism is its view of the Church's children. That even evangelical Presbyterianism is not clearly differentiated in this way is, in my judgment one of the saddest and most dangerous consequences of the debasement of our theology in both pulpit and pew. I do not hesitate to say that there has been such a debasement in respect to the doctrine of covenant succession—i.e., that set of truths connected with the purpose of God that his saving grace should run in the lines of generations—and that this debasement has resulted in Presbyterian people being robbed of one of the most precious parts of their inheritance.[2]

This sad state of affairs is compounded when it is realized just how far many Presbyterian and Reformed churches have departed from their own creedal statements that address clearly and unambiguously the subject of covenant children.

The Reformed Creeds

Take careful note of the plain language employed in some of the major Reformed Creeds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (all emphases mine).[3]

The Belgic Confession (1561)

> We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law, hath made an end, by the shedding of His blood, of all other sheddings of blood which men could or would make as a propitiation or satisfaction for sin; and that He, having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, hath instituted the sacrament of baptism instead thereof; by which we are received into the church of God, and

2 Robert S. Rayburn, "The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture and Covenant Succession," *Presbyterion* 22, (1996): 76.

3 *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998); Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom,* 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983).

separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to Him whose ensign and banner we bear, and which serves as a testimony to us that He will forever be our gracious God and Father. ...We believe that every man, who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal ought to be but once baptized with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same: ...Therefore we *detest the error of the Anabaptists,* who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and *moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, who, we believe, ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant,* as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And, *indeed, Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons; and, therefore, they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ hath done for them;* as the Lord commanded in the law, that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ's suffering and death shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ. Moreover, what circumcision was to the Jews, that baptism is for our children. And for this reason Paul calls baptism the "circumcision of Christ" (Art. 34, 51, 52).

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Q. 74. Are infants also to be baptized?
Ans: Yes; for since they, as well as the adult, *are included in the covenant* and church of God; and since *redemption from sin by the blood of Christ,* and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is *promised to them no less than to the adult;* they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church, and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant (15).

Canons of Dordt (1618-1619)

First Head, Article 17: The Salvation of the Infants of Believers
Since we must make judgments about God's will from His Word, which *testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their*

parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

Chapter 28: Of Holy Baptism

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto *him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.* Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.

IV. Not only those that do actually profess *faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.*

V. Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are *undoubtedly regenerated.*

VI. The *efficacy of baptism* is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, *the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost,* to such *(whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.*

Note that the Westminster Confession of Faith does not make any distinction between those who "*actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ"* and *"the infants of one, or both, believing parents."*

Therefore, baptism, according to the Confession, is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the child of a believing parent into the visible church; but also, to be unto that child as *"a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his/her ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his/her giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life."*

By the right use of baptism, *"the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will."* The grace promised in baptism, that is, the grace of salvation in Jesus Christ, is not only offered or set forth, but really exhibited and conferred, by the Holy Spirit to both adults and children alike. The basis for the conferral of such grace being "*the counsel of God's own will*."

Westminster Larger Catechism

> Q165: What is Baptism?
> Ans: Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, *to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life;* and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.
>
> Q166: Unto whom is Baptism to be administered?
> Ans: Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but *infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him,* are in that respect *within the covenant, and to be baptized.*

The Views of the Reformers

Not surprisingly, the Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries held similar views to those enshrined in the Reformed creeds.

John Calvin

Calvin was clearly of the view that the covenant and its promises belonged not only to Abraham, but also to his children. He also maintained that the same was true for believers and their children in the New Testament age. Consequently, in the New Testament age, the covenant promises—embracing as they did God's Fatherly love

and care in Jesus Christ—belonged not only to Christian parents, but also to their children.

> Now, if we choose to investigate whether it is right to administer baptism to infants, shall we not say that a man is talking nonsense or indeed raving who would halt with the mere element of water and outward observance, but cannot bear to turn his mind to the spiritual mystery? If any account of this is made, it will be evident that baptism is properly administered to infants as something owed to them. For in early times the Lord did not deign to have them circumcised without making them participants in all those things which were then signified by circumcision [cf. Genesis 17:12]. Otherwise, he would have mocked his people with mere trickery if he had nursed them on meaningless symbols, which is a dreadful thing even to hear of. For he expressly declares that the circumcision of a tiny infant will be in lieu of a seal to certify the promise of the covenant. But if the covenant still remains firm and steadfast, it applies no less today to the children of Christians than under the Old Testament it pertained to the infants of the Jews.[4]

> Indeed, it is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham [cf. Genesis 17:14] is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people, and that this word relates no less to Christians than it then related to the Jews. ...Accordingly, the children of the Jews also, because they had been made heirs of his covenant and distinguished from the children of the impious, were called a holy seed [Ezra 9:2; Isaiah 6:18]. For this same reason, the children of Christians are considered holy; and even though born with only one believing parent, by the apostle's testimony they differ from the unclean seed of idolators [1 Corinthians 7:14].[5]

Calvin did not view the children of believers as unregenerate; quite the contrary. He regarded the children of believers, though not head for head, as recipients of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, he maintained that the children of believing parents belonged to the

4 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion.* Edited by John T. McNeil; translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.16.5, 22.

5 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.16.6.

church, even before they received the sign and seal of baptism. Indeed, they received the sign and seal of baptism *because* they already belonged to the body of Christ.

> From this it follows [that is, that children who die in infancy are not barred from the kingdom of heaven] that the children of believers are baptized not in order that they who were previously strangers to the Church may then for the first time become children of God, but rather that, because by the blessing of the promise they already belonged to the body of Christ, they are received into the church with this solemn sign.[6]

> The offspring of believers are born holy, because their children, while yet in the womb, before they breathe the vital air, have been adopted into the covenant of eternal life. Nor are they brought into the Church by baptism on any other ground than because they belonged to the body of the Church before they were born.[7]

> Nay, on what ground do we admit them to baptism unless that they are the heirs of promise? For did not the promise of life apply to them it would be a profanation of baptism to give it to them. But if God has adopted them into his kingdom, how great injustice is done to his promise, as if it were not of itself sufficient for their salvation! ...The salvation of infants is included in the promise in which God declares to believers that He will be a God to them and to their seed.[8]

Calvin's views of covenant children were assailed by the Anabaptists who contended that children were incapable of regeneration and so ought not to be baptized.

> They think that they are putting forward a very strong reason why children are to be barred from baptism when they claim that children because of their age are not yet able to understand the mystery signified in it, namely, spiritual regeneration, which cannot take place

6 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.15.22.

7 John Calvin, *Interim, Adultero - germanum: ciu adiecta est vera Christianae Pacificationis et Ecclesiae Reformandae Ratio* (Corpus Reformatorum) 35. 619.

8 John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin, Tracts and Letters.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 3:109.

> in earliest infancy. Our opponents therefore conclude that children are to be considered solely as children of Adam until they reach an appropriate age for the second birth.[9]

Calvin's response was terse.

> But God's truth everywhere opposes all these arguments….
> But how (they ask) are infants, unendowed with knowledge of good or evil, regenerated? We reply that God's work, though beyond our understanding, is still not annulled. Now it is perfectly clear that those infants who are to be saved (as some are surely saved from that early age) are previously regenerated by the Lord. For if they bear with them an inborn corruption from their mother's womb, they must be cleansed of it before they can be admitted into God's Kingdom, for nothing polluted or defiled may enter there [Revelation 21:27]. If they are born sinners, as both David and Paul affirm [Ephesians 2:3; Psalm 51:5], either they remain unpleasing and hateful to God, or they must be justified. And what further do we seek, when the Judge himself plainly declares that entry into heavenly life opens only to men who are born anew [John 3:3]?
> And to silence such gainsayers, God provided a proof in John the Baptist, whom he sanctified in his mother's womb [Luke 1:15] - something he could do in others. And they do not gain anything here by this mocking evasion—that it was only once, and that from this one instance it does not immediately follow that the Lord usually deals thus with infants. But we are not arguing in this way either. Our purpose is solely to show that they unjustly and wickedly shut God's power within these narrow limits to which it does not permit itself to be confined. Their other quibble has no more weight. They claim that, in accordance with the usual mode of expression of Scripture, the phrase "from the womb" is merely the equivalent of saying "from childhood." But we can clearly see that the angel, when he declared this to Zechariah, meant something else, namely, that John would, while yet unborn, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us not attempt, then, to impose a law upon God to keep him from sanctifying whom he pleases, just as he sanctified this child, inasmuch as his power is not lessened.[10]

9 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.16.17.
10 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.16.17.

John Knox

The embracing of covenant children within the church and a refusal to identify them with the children of the heathen was not confined to the Swiss Reformation. John Knox's "The Order of Baptism," in which he indicates the nature of the address that the minister ought to give on the occasion of the baptism of a covenant child, is enlightening.

> Then let us consider, dearly beloved, how Almighty God has not only made us his children by adoption, and received us into the fellowship of his Church; but also has promised that he will be our God, and the God of our children, unto the thousand generation. Which thing, as he confirmed to his people of the Old Testament by the sacrament of Circumcision, so has he also renewed the same to us in his New Testament by the sacrament of Baptism; doing us thereby to know, that *our infants appertain to him by covenant, and therefore ought not to be defrauded of those holy signs and badges whereby his children are known from infidels and pagans.* Neither is it requisite, that all those that receive this Sacrament have the use of understanding and faith; but chiefly that they be contained under the name of God's people....[11]

Ulrich Zwingli

> The children of Christians are not less the children of God than their parents are, or than the children of Old Testament times were: but if they belong to God, who will refuse them baptism?[12]

Peter Martyr Vermigli

> But if thou demand how the children of the Christians belong unto the Church or unto Christ, we will answer: no other wise, than the children of the Hebrews, being of the posterity of Abraham, were said to be contained in the covenant of God. For God promised (Gen. 17:7), unto Abraham that he would not only be his God, but also the God of his seed. ...For as our own salvation is, so verily is altogether the salvation of our children of the mere election and mercy of God,

11 John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1855), 4:187.

12 Huldreich Zwingli's Werke, *Zweyten bandes erste Abtheilung* (Zurich, 1830), 245.

which oftentimes goeth together with natural propagation. ...Not that it doth always so happen of necessity: because the promise is not general as touching all the seed, but of that only in which the election together consenteth. ...Therefore we judge the children of the Saints to be saints, so long as they by reason of their age, shall not declare themselves strangers from Christ. We exclude them not from the Church but embrace them as members thereof: hoping well, that as they be the seed of the Saints according to the flesh, so also they be partakers of the divine election, and that they have the Holy Ghost and grace of Christ: and for this cause we baptize them.[13]

Heinrich Bullinger

Since the young babes and infants of the faithful are in the number of reckoning of God's people, and partakers of the promise touching the purification through Christ; it followeth of necessity, that they are as well to be baptized, as they that be of perfect age which profess the Christian faith.[14]

Zacharias Ursinus

In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus writes:

Hence all, and only those are to be baptized according to the command of Christ, who are, and ought to be regarded as members of the visible church, whether they be adults professing repentance and faith, or infants born in the church; for all the children of those that believe are included in the covenant, and church of God, unless they exclude themselves. They are, therefore, also disciples of Christ, because they are born in the church, or school of Christ; and hence the Holy Spirit teaches them in a manner adapted to their capacity and age.

...The Anabaptists, therefore, in denying baptism to the children of the church, do not only deprive them of their rights, but they also prevent the grace of God from being seen in its richness, since God wills that the offspring of the faithful should be included amongst the members of the church, even from the womb: yea they manifestly detract from the grace of the New Covenant, and narrow down that of

13 Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The Common Places* (Thomas Vautrollier, 1574), 115.

14 *Fifty Godly and Learned Sermons* (London, 1587), 382.

> the old, inasmuch as they refuse to extend baptism to infants, to whom circumcision was formerly extended; they weaken the comfort of the church, and of faithful parents; they set aside the solemn obligation by which God will have the offspring of his people consecrated to him from their very infancy, distinguished, and separated from the world; they weaken in parents and children their sense of gratitude, and the desire which they should have to perform their obligations to God….[15]

The next generation of Reformers also embraced these same truths.

Francis Turretin

Turretin in defending the baptism of covenant children against the Anabaptists was called to respond to the contention that "infants are not capacious [able to hold much] of the grace of regeneration, nor of the other blessings of the covenant which are accustomed to be conferred by the Spirit through the word,"[16]

> But it is gratuitously supposed that they are not capacious [able to hold much] of the blessing of the covenant. For who denies that they are capacious of the remission of sins and of Christ's redemption, and of the other benefits which depend upon the covenant into which infants are received? Who can doubt that baptism (with respect to these) is able to be a distinctive sign (introducing into the visible church) and a seal both of the divine truth in the federal promises and of our obligation to mutual duty? For if they are not capable of obligation in the present, they can be in the future. As to regeneration, however, why should infants not be capable of regeneration as they are of sin (unless we say that guilt has more power than of grace)? And as they are rational (although we do not put forth an act of reason), what hinders them from being called holy and believers by the Holy Spirit given to them, although they cannot as yet exert an act of faith.[17]

15 Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, transl. by G.W. Williard (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), 366-368.

16 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1997) 3:416.

17 Turretin, *Institutes*.

Herman Witsius

> Now after a principle of spiritual life is infused into the elect soul by regeneration, divine grace does not always proceed therein in the same method and order. It is possible that for some time, the spirit of the life of Christ, may lie, as it were dormant in some, (almost in the same manner, as vegetative life in the seed of a plant, or sensitive life in the seed of an animal, or a poetical genius in one born a poet), so as that no vital operations can yet proceed therefrom, though savingly united to Christ, the fountain of true life, by the Spirit. This is the case with respect to elect and regenerate infants, whose is the kingdom of God, and who therefore are reckoned among believers and saints, though unqualified through age, actually to believe and practice godliness....
>
> But when the foundation is laid, divine grace does not always grow up in the same manner. It often happens that this principle of spiritual life which had discovered its activity in the most tender childhood...grows up by degrees with the person, after the example of our Lord, who 'increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.'[18]

What is evident is that at least until the time of the Westminster Assembly in the mid-seventeenth century there was some variation, but no substantial difference of views among the Reformers as to the place of children in the covenant.[19] Such agreement prevailed in Presbyterian circles until the eighteenth century.[20]

18 Witsius, Herman. *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Escondido, California: The den Hulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 1:366, 367.

19 Lewis Bevins Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), 34-52.

20 The focus of this paper is upon the views that prevailed with respect to covenant children in Presbyterian churches. Similar views can also be found in the history of the continental Reformed churches. However, it ought also to be noted that other views surfaced in the continental Reformed tradition, most noticeably that of the conditional covenant. Those who maintain the conditional covenant hold that all the children of believing parents "without exception are in the covenant in this sense, that God promises them all salvation and extends to them all his covenant grace in Christ. However, the actual fulfilment of the promise, the actual reception of covenant grace, and the actual realization of the covenant with them personally depend upon

The eighteenth century saw a radical change in Presbyterian circles regarding the view of covenant children. This coincided with the Great Awakening in New England.[21] Under the ministry of men such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield many experienced powerful conversion experiences, coupled with profound conviction of sin and anguish of soul. Over time, these experiences came to be

their believing in Christ and thus taking hold of the covenant when they grow up." David J. Engelsma, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers* (Jenison, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 14.

It is of interest to note that the doctrine of a conditional covenant lies at the root of the contemporary debate concerning the Federal vision. "The doctrine of a conditional covenant now being developed by the federal vision is the teaching that God on his part is gracious to all the baptized babies of believing members of the church alike. Whether this grace abides with a child and is effective to bring a child to everlasting salvation in Abraham's bosom, however, depend upon conditions that the child must perform. The conditions are the child's faith and obedience. Some children perform the conditions and are saved. Others—*many* others—fail to perform the conditions and go lost, despite the fact that God was as gracious to them as he was to those who are saved.

"According to the federal vision, God has a gracious attitude toward every child of godly parents. He desires to save every child. At the baptism of the children of believers, God actually bestows the grace of the covenant upon every baptized child alike.

"...This covenant grace, of which every child is a recipient, is *saving* grace, the grace of God in the crucified and risen Christ. That it is a saving grace does not mean that it irresistibly saves every child or, for that matter, any child. It does not. But the meaning is that this grace would save, would bring the child to heaven, *if* the child performs the conditions.

"...By the covenant promise to every child at baptism, God actually establishes his covenant with every baptized child. He unites every child to Christ." David J. Engelsma, *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* (Jenison, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2012), 37-8.

21 The term "The Great Awakening" refers to several periods of religious revival in American religious history. Historians and theologians identify three or four waves of increased religious enthusiasm occurring between the early eighteenth century and the late nineteenth century. Each of these "Great Awakenings" was characterized by widespread revivals, which saw a sharp increase of interest in religion under a profound sense of conviction and sin.

accepted as the norm and the touchstone for all true conversions.[22]

The excessive, and almost exclusive, emphasis on a conscious religious experience of conviction and conversion, as the essential evidence of genuine salvation, led to a significant shift in the thinking of many leading Presbyterian theologians in North America.[23] Men with such illustrious names as Archibald Alexander, James Henley Thornwell and Robert Dabney, to name only a few, began to view covenant children in a different light.

Archibald Alexander[24]

> The education of children should proceed on the principle that they are in an unregenerate state, until evidences of piety clearly appear, in

22 The Great Awakening came on the back of the half-way covenant. The half-way covenant had its origins in the mid-seventeenth century among the Congregationalists in New England. The Massachusetts Synod of 1662 asserted that baptized adults who had had no conversion experience, might be received into church membership upon confession of piety of life. Such confessions became known as '*owning the covenant.*' This artifice resulted in many, on becoming parents, 'owning the covenant' so that they could access for their children the right of baptism, but in circumstances where they themselves demonstrated little or no evidence of true piety. The half-way covenant ushered in dead formalism and an obfuscation of the true meaning of baptism. The growth of dead orthodoxy paved the way for and was the impetus for the Great Awakening in New England.

23 The impact of the congregational churches is highlighted by the decision of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1788 to adopt its own *Directory for Public Worship* in lieu of the one approved by the Westminster Assembly. The differences between the American *Directory* and the earlier one of Westminster were significant. The whole section relating to the administration of baptism was much abbreviated. The detail found in the *Directory* of the Westminster Assembly disappeared. Absent were the references that thanked God for bringing children into the bosom of the church to be partakers of the inestimable benefits purchased by Christ.

24 (1772-1851) Presbyterian theologian and educator. Ordained in 1794, he became early in 1807 the minister of Pine Street Church, Philadelphia, one of the largest congregations in the United States. In 1812, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church established Princeton Theological Seminary and Alexander was appointed its first professor.

which case they should be sedulously cherished and nurtured. These are Christ's lambs—'little ones, who believe in him'—whom none should offend or mislead upon the peril of a terrible punishment. But though the religious education of children should proceed on the ground that they are destitute of grace, it ought ever to be used as a means of grace.

...Although the grace of God may be communicated to a human soul at any period of its existence in this world; yet the fact manifestly is, that very few are renewed before the exercise of reason commences; and not many in early childhood. Most persons with whom we have been acquainted grew up without giving any decisive evidence of a change of heart.[25]

James Henley Thornwell[26]

"If it be asked, why the Church embraces the family, and is not restricted to professing individuals, the answer is plain. The children of the faithful are the heirs apparent of the promises. God has graciously promised to show mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments; the decree of election runs largely in their loins, and through their faithfulness in rearing a holy seed, the Church is perpetuated, and new recruits are constantly added to the communion of saints. They are all incorporated into the Church, because many of them hereafter are to be of the Church. ...It is clear that while they are in the Church by external union [by baptism], in the spirit and temper of their minds they belong to the world. ...Of the world and in the Church—this expresses precisely their status, and determines the mode in which the Church should deal with them.

As in the Church, and in the Church as heirs of promises which they have not yet embraced, they are to be trained to a proper sense of their privileges, to be instructed in a knowledge of their duty, and induced and persuaded by every lawful influence to accept the grace which has been signified and freely offered in their baptism. They have been externally consecrated to God, and the Church is to seek that they may be likewise inwardly sanctified. Her peculiar obligations to

25 Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 13, 14.

26 (1812-1862) Southern Presbyterian. Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina.

> teach and persuade them grow out of their visible connection with her. They are born unto her as children, and as children, the great duty she owes to them is to educate them. But in heart and spirit they are of the world. In this aspect, how is she to treat them? Precisely as she treats all other impenitent and unbelieving men...."[27]

These men made a distinction between the significance of adult baptism and the baptism of covenant children. Baptism in the case of a child was considered only to be a sign of the spiritual blessings that he may receive in later years, provided he believed. On the other hand, for adults who made a profession of their faith, baptism was viewed as spiritual renewal and an ingrafting into Christ. The distinction was one without biblical substance.

Theological justification for this position was engineered by a fallacious conception of the covenant of grace and consequently of infant baptism. Thornwell and Dabney maintained that there were two aspects or sides to the covenant of grace: the one external and the other internal. The external aspect was preferable to a purely legal relationship, while the internal concerned the covenant as a communion of life.[28]

Their conception of the external or legal aspect of the covenant was that the covenant was a compact or an agreement between two parties, with mutual conditions and stipulations. In that respect, they considered the covenant to be a purely objective arrangement.

> It was thought to be possible for one not to meet the requirements of the covenant, not to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet to be in covenant relation with God. In this sense, the covenant was not made with men in the quality of believers, or as the true children of God. In this broader aspect the covenant was conceived as including many in whom the covenant promises were never realized. Children of believers entered the covenant as a legal relationship, but this did not mean that they were also at once in the covenant as a "communion of life." It did not even mean that the covenant relation would ever come to its full realization in their lives. In other words, it was believed that

27 James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1986), 4:340.

28 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 286-7.

> persons who were presumably unregenerate and unconverted could be in the covenant as a legal agreement.[29]

Robert Dabney[30] adopted similar views:

> When our standards say, "All baptized persons are members of the Church," this by no means implies their title to all sealing ordinances, suffrage and office. They are *minor citizens in the ecclesiastical commonwealth,* under tutelage, training, and instruction, and government; heirs, *if they will exercise the graces obligatory on them,* of all the ultimate franchises of the Church, but not allowed to enjoy them until qualified[31] (emphasis mine).

Dabney's conception of the place of covenant children is made abundantly clear when in response to the question, "What are the benefits then that accrue from baptism?", he responded:

> The benefits of infant baptism, and of this form of membership for the children of God's believing people, are great. ...This relation to the Church, and this discipline, are, first, in exact harmony with the great fact of experience, that the children of God's people are the great hope of the Church's increase. This being a fact, it is obviously wisdom to organize the Church with reference to it, so as to provide every proper means for training for working up this the most hopeful material of Zion's increase.[32]

It is appropriate to observe that these views were not universally held by Presbyterians.

29 Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine,* 85.

30 Robert Dabney (1820-1898) Southern Presbyterian; contemporary of John Henley Thornwell. Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

31 Robert Lewis Dabney, *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia* 6th ed. (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1927), 794.

32 Dabney, *Syllabus and Notes,* 798.

Charles Hodge[33]

> After consecrating them to God, in reliance upon His covenant, we still take it for granted that they are not His—that they are to grow up in sin, the children of the adversary, until some future and definite time, when they may be brought under conviction for sin, and led to embrace the Saviour. Hence they grow up, not looking to God as their Father, to Jesus as their Redeemer, to the Spirit of holiness as their sanctifier, and to the Church as their home; but with a feeling that they are aliens, and God an enemy. In other words, we put them outside of the kingdom by our treatment, while yet we hold them to be in it according to our theory. We constantly assume that their first actions and emotions of a moral nature will be evil and only evil, instead of believing that by Divine grace, and in the faithfulness of the Most High to His own engagements, they will have true spiritual exercises from childhood. Hence, as they come to years of maturity, they stand aloof, waiting as it were, for God to enlist them—waiting to get religion, as the phrase goes, instead of feeling that they belong to God, and are to love and serve Him from the beginning.[34]

Not surprisingly, the contentions regarding the view of covenant children spread beyond the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Presbyterians became divided on the subject. For example, William Cunningham35 adopted views that essentially mirrored those of Thornwell and Dabney. Writing against baptismal regeneration, Cunningham states:

> There is a great difficulty felt,—a difficulty which Scripture does not afford us adequate materials for removing, in laying down any distinct

33 Charles Hodge (1797-1878); Hodge was the leading American Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1819 and studied under Archibald Alexander. He was appointed to the Faculty at Princeton in 1820 and remained there for the rest of his life, except for two years' study in Germany and France.

34 Charles Hodge, *The Mode and Subjects of Baptism With a Practical View of Infant Baptism* (Belfast: The Evangelical Bookshop, 1966), 41.

35 William Cunningham (1805-1861); Scottish theologian; one of the leaders in the Disruption of 1843; also instrumental in the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland. Professor and principal of the Free Church College, Edinburgh.

> and definite doctrine as to the bearing and efficacy of baptism in the case of infants, to whom alone, ordinarily, we see it administered. ...And yet is quite plain to anyone who is capable of reflecting upon the subject, that it is *adult* baptism alone which embodies and brings out the full idea of the ordinance, and should be regarded as the primary type of it,—*that* from which mainly and principally we should form our conceptions of what baptism is and means, and was intended to accomplish.[36]

The result was confusion in Presbyterian churches around the globe; a confusion that continues to the present day.[37] The result of this is that the generally held view of Presbyterians today as regards the significance of the baptism of covenant children is of this order: "[Baptized children] are different from children who are not from believing parents. They are covenant members, and as such are more privileged (in view of their life inside the covenant), but they are not automatically saved by their covenant membership."[38]

The result is that the sacrament of baptism with respect to covenant children has, in effect, become a bare ritual, without any real meaning or significance. Such a conception of infant baptism is not fundamentally different from that espoused by those who reject paedo-baptism.

The Biblical and Reformed Position

It is evident from Scripture and from the Reformed creeds that the children of believers are included in the covenant, and they are to be included in the covenant, *as children*. Therefore, they are to receive the sign and the seal of the covenant of grace, *as children*. They are members of Christ's church. God is their God and they are His children from conception and birth. As children, they are called

36 William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 246.

37 The confusion has even extended to the questioning of whether covenant children can be regenerated in the womb, despite explicit scriptural examples. It has led to a fundamental misconception of the relationship between regeneration and total depravity as regards covenant children, the contention being that a covenant child who is regenerated in the womb cannot be said to be born totally depraved.

38 Greg Strawbridge ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), 107.

upon to love and obey the Lord. The Lord requires this of them, and He requires this of them, as children, and not only when they come to years of discretion.

This is the case, notwithstanding that it is indisputable that *not every child* of believing parents is a true child of God. Esau was the son of believing parents and received the sign of circumcision, but he was unregenerate and reprobate. Therefore, it is unbiblical to *presume* that every child of believing parents is regenerate and elect. That is simply not true. But that is quite a different thing from maintaining that the children of believers are children of the promise and are to be viewed and treated as such. Such a position requires no presumption as to the regeneration or otherwise of the child in question.

But the question remains, why baptize covenant children? Is baptism, as so many assert today, simply a provision of God whereby covenant children are privileged above other children, in that they grow up in homes where God is honored and where they are taught the things of God?

Though this is a very common view, it does not do justice to the Word of God, nor does it accord with the Reformed creeds. Rather, it creates an unfounded distinction between adults and children as regards the covenant that is not found in Scripture, nor in the Reformed creeds.

God does not *merely* place the children of believers in a more spiritually advantageous position than the children of unbelievers, so that they have a greater prospect of coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is not to say that covenant children do not enjoy a spiritually privileged position; they undoubtedly do.

God *establishes* His covenant with the children of believers, *as children*. This is the plain teaching of Genesis 17:7: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and *thy seed after thee in their generations* for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee"* (emphasis mine).

God promises to establish His covenant, His relationship of fellowship and friendship with the children of believers in and through Jesus Christ in the line of believing families. Accordingly, the church ought not to regard the children of believers as heathens, or even as

heathens with an edge over other heathens.[39] They are the children of the covenant.

But how does this view accord with the indisputable truth that not all covenant children are saved? The answer is that, although all the children of believing parents are *of the covenant*, that is, are in the sphere of or the outward administration of the covenant, and so receive the sign and seal of the covenant and are raised as covenant children, not all are *in the covenant*. Not all are the spiritual seed of Abraham. The covenant is not established with every child of believing parents, head for head, just as the covenant was not established with every son and daughter of Abraham, head for head. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Among the children of believers, there are those who are elect and those who are reprobate. Though the reprobate, such as Esau, come under the outward administration of the covenant and so receive the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, they are not the true children of God. Nor are they the true children of the covenant.[40] The covenant, God's relationship of friendship in and through Jesus Christ, is only established with the elect children of believers.[41]

But then comes the objection: Well, doesn't that mean that some, if not many children of believers, receive the sign and seal of the covenant that does not truly belong to them? The answer is, "yes." But before any one becomes too alarmed, he should also ask himself, Is it not also true of those who are baptized after having come to years of discretion? Is it not true that some of those also receive the sign and seal of the covenant, when, in reality, it does not belong to them? That is undeniably the case.

We ought also to ask, why does God allow that unregenerate, reprobate children should receive the sign and seal of His covenant. Indeed, more significantly, why does He command that? At the same time, we ought also consider whether the prospect of such a thing occurring is unheard of in Scripture? The answer is that it is not. In

39 Engelsma, *The Covenant of God*, 12.

40 Westminster Larger Catechism, *Q31:* With whom was the covenant of grace made? Ans: The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.

41 Engelsma, *The Covenant of God*, 16.

fact, it accords with the way in which God deals with the elect and reprobate in the midst of the church.

Consider the parable of the wheat and the tares (cf. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43):

> The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. *Let both grow together until the harvest:* and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (emphasis mine).

Consider also the parable of the net cast into the sea (cf. Matt. 13:47-50): "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, *and gathered of every kind*" (emphasis mine).

Consider the administration of circumcision, the sign and seal of the covenant in the Old Testament dispensation (cf. Gen. 17:11-13):

> And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

According to the command of God, every male child was to receive the sign of circumcision on the eighth day of life. The application of the sign did not require any cognition on the part of the child. The seriousness with which God viewed this matter is indicated in Genesis 17:14. "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."[42]

42 Cf. Exodus 4:24-26. "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision."

It is also noteworthy that circumcision was to be administered also to those who were "bought with money of any stranger." No mention is made of the repentance and faith of those men or boys.

The important place that children occupy in the covenant is evident from Jesus Christ's command to His disciples, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mark 10:14).

Consider also the command of God concerning the training of children (cf. Deut. 4:9, 10 and Deut. 6:6, 7):

> Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.
>
> And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Why does God allow those who are reprobate to receive the sign and seal of the covenant of grace? Why are they given a place within the church of Jesus Christ? Why are they to be taught the ways of the Lord? The answer is, because of God's love for those whom He has chosen in Jesus Christ from before the foundation of the world. For their sake, God permits the reprobate seed to receive the sign and seal of His covenant of grace.

The elect, not the reprobate, are the ones who are the focus of God. It is for their sake that Jesus Christ delays His return upon the clouds of glory. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Why the delay? Because the Lord is not willing that any of His elect should perish, but that every last one for whom Jesus Christ has died

should come to repentance and faith. God's concern is with the elect in Jesus Christ.

Why baptize all of the children of believers, if not all of them are actually true children of the covenant? Why treat them all as covenant children, when it is known that some of them are almost certainly reprobate? The answer is, God commands it. God gathers His children, in the line of believing families. But we are not privy to the identity of those children of believers, who are in reality God's children. Therefore, we are to treat all of the children of believers as the children of God, until they manifest themselves to be otherwise.

But, is this not really presumptive regeneration dressed up in a slightly different manner? The answer is, no. There is no presumption being made here concerning regeneration. This view simply recognizes that God has promised to draw some of His children from the succeeding generations of believers. Yet because we do not know who among them are the true children of God, and so for the sake of the elect children, God commands that all the children of believers be raised as His children. Election determines the approach that the church and parents are to adopt with respect to covenant children.

This organic view of the covenant is illustrated by a farmer who plants his field with wheat. As the wheat grows, so too do the weeds. Even if eventually there are more weeds than wheat in the field, the farmer views and deals with his field as a wheat field. His view of the field as a wheat field dictates his approach. He cultivates, waters, and fertilizes the field for the sake of the wheat. Although the weeds will receive the same treatment, nonetheless, the farmer persists because of the wheat. He does not allow the presence of the weeds to dictate his approach. Nor does the presence of the weeds lead him to doubt the existence of the wheat. In the same way, neither does the possible presence of the reprobate among the children of believers deter parents or the church from viewing and treating them as the children of God.

John Murray is on target when he states:

> The baptism of children, then, means that the grace of God takes hold of children at a very early age, even from the womb. That is to say, in

> other words, we must not exclude the operations of God's efficacious and saving grace from the sphere or realm of earliest infanthood. It is this truth our Lord gave his most insistent and emphatic testimony when He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."
>
> We would not, of course, be misunderstood when we assert this principle. We do not say that the operations of God's saving grace are present in the heart of every infant. The fact is only too apparent that multitudes grow up to years of discretion and intelligence and show that the saving grace of God did not take hold of their hearts and minds in the days of their infancy. ...But it is nevertheless true... that the grace of God is operative in the realm of the infant heart and mind. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise."[43]

An Important Issue

Does it matter? Does it matter what view, we take of covenant children? Does it matter so far as believing parents are concerned? Does it matter so far as the church is concerned? Does it matter from the perspective of the ministry? Absolutely! The view that is taken of covenant children has significant practical implications attached to it for both parents and the church alike. As John Murray writes:

> What a blessed thought and hope and confidence is extended to believing parents when in baptism they commit their children to the regenerating and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit and to the purging efficacy of the blood of Christ, so that, if perchance the Lord is pleased to remove them in infancy, they—believing parents—can plead and rest upon the promises of the Covenant of Grace on their behalf.
>
> ...We should appreciate the preciousness of these truths for the reason that children do not need to grow up to the years of discretion and intelligence before they become the Lord's. Just as children are sinful before they come to the years of discretion and understanding, so by the sovereign grace of God they do not need to grow up before they become partakers of saving grace. They may grow up not only in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but also in His favor and sanctifying grace. They may in their tenderest years be introduced

43 John Murray, "Why We Baptize Infants," *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine* 11 (1997), 165.

into the family and household of the heavenly Father.[44]

The view that one takes of covenant children clearly dictates the approach of the church and parents toward their upbringing. Viewing our children as the children of God demands that parents train their children in the ways of the Lord. But not only must they train them in those ways, but they must approach them in their teaching and discipline as those who are regenerate.

Our children must be taught to understand that their feelings, acts, habits, and manners must accord with the will of God. The expectation and the anticipation of parents must be that their children will conduct themselves as the children of God. They must be addressed in those terms, and not simply from a perspective of the law of God. Covenant children are to be approached as true, spiritual friends of God. There must be a recognition that children are empowered by the Holy Spirit to love God and the neighbor.

Not only do parents need to bear such matters in mind, but so too does the church. Children need to be nurtured and cared for by the church. Jesus Christ was serious, when He commanded Peter, "*Feed my lambs*." Failure to nurture and care for our covenant youth through the preaching and through catechetical instruction is a dereliction of duty on the part of the church and in particular the minister of the Word. The minister must recognize that when he addresses the congregation, as "Beloved in Jesus Christ," he is addressing also the covenant children. If such issues are not clear in the mind of the minister, how will he be able properly to minister to such children? "Are these little ones living plants or are they poisonous weeds? If [a minister] cannot answer the question, how shall he go to work? The question lies at the very threshold of the pastor's office."[45]

Elders need to care spiritually for covenant children. The church also needs to busy itself with discipline of covenant children in cases where they show a deliberate and willful disregard for the law of God.

This a far cry from the approach that flows from the position

44 John Murray, "Why We Baptize Infants," *The Presbyterian Guardian* 5 (1938), 144.

45 E. V. Gerhart, "The Efficacy of Baptism," *Mercersburg Review* X, Art. 1 (January, 1858), 6.

adopted by Thornwell. His approach demands a different view of the congregation. Consequently, that is why ministers who adopt a similar position today address their congregations as "friends" or some similar term, but not as "beloved in Jesus Christ."

Thornwell's approach demands that children be treated as spiritual strangers and outcasts. There can be no sense of parents and their children serving the Lord together. Parents cannot say with Joshua, "*As for me and my house we will serve the Lord*." Children cannot be addressed as those who love God and who seek to live their lives out of thankfulness of heart to God. Rather, the emphasis has to be placed upon the requirements of the law; a law that they have no desire to keep because they are apparently unregenerate. The insurmountable requirements and demands of the law are brought to bear, without the gospel.

Covenant children are taught that they are lost sinners under the wrath of God and that their only hope is that one day they may be born again. With this approach, there is a real danger that parents and the church alike are calling "common" that which God Himself has cleansed.

Under that view, how can children be encouraged to pray? How can one who is unregenerate pray? How can a child be encouraged to recite the Lord's prayer? How can children be encouraged to participate in worship? How can they sing the psalms? How can a child be exhorted to keep the fifth commandment? It is beyond the unregenerate child. Consequently, order in the home may be sought by virtue of their fear of discipline, but not by virtue of the child's love for God.

The effect of such teaching can be spiritually numbing. Children raised under such a regime are often confused as to their state before God. Taught that they are unregenerate and hell-deserving sinners, they seek assurance of their salvation, but such assurance often proves elusive. They conclude that their conversion experiences are insufficient, and so they are repeatedly caused to doubt their salvation. What a spiritually debilitating condition!

Does this mean that covenant children ought not be encouraged to seek conversion? This is an important issue for both ministers and parents alike. Should ministers preach that covenant children need to be converted? Should parents pray for such a thing? Should children be urgently called to conversion?

The answer is, yes. Jesus says in Matthew 18:3, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Covenant children must be recipients of the gift of faith. They must know of true repentance. They must be converted and turn to God as their heavenly Father.

Therefore, covenant children are to be called to repent of their sins and to turn from them. They must know of heartfelt sorrow for sin and they must experience true faith in Jesus Christ. That is the biblical calling of both minister and parents. Covenant children must not be allowed to coast along as though they have no need to consider their state before God.

It is imperative that the doctrine of covenant children be rightly understood for the spiritual life of the church. The track record of the Presbyterian Church since the mid-nineteenth century has not been overly encouraging. Without a proper view of covenant children, the church will drive her children into the world.

Presbyterian churches need to pay careful attention to their Confessional Standards and to the Word of God. The inroads made by false conceptions of the covenant and consequently of infant baptism need to be addressed urgently.

> To our apprehension there is a practical error here of great perniciousness. Having given our children to God, in accordance with His appointment, we ought not to feel or to act as though it were a nullity. To our faith, the presumption should be that they are the Lord's, and that as they come to maturity they will develop a life of piety. Instead of waiting, therefore, for a period of definite conviction and conversion, we should rather look for, and endeavour to call out, from the commencement of moral action, the motions and exercises of the renewed heart. Teach them to hate sin, to think and speak of God as a father, and of Christ as a saviour. Let them be taught to say, We love the Lord, we love and trust Jesus, we love His people, we love the Church with all her doctrines and ordinances, we hate sin in all its forms, and are determined, by God's help, that we will not be its slaves. And let us expect that, as they come to years of deliberate action, their life will correspond to this teaching. Is this too much to expect of our covenant God? Is this presumption? Is this less pleasing to God, than a spirit of unbelief, which nullifies His word? We think not. It may be a strong faith is required for such a course, but it is a

> legitimate faith, well pleasing to God, comforting to ourselves, and most blessed in its bearing upon our children. If we can but exercise it, by His help, vast numbers of our children will be sanctified from the womb, and will indeed grow up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord', and will stand like olive plants around our table and our dwelling.[46]

What Hodge asserts is Presbyterian and it is Reformed. It is also confessional and covenantal. And moreover, it is biblical and it is pleasing to God.

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." ●

46 Hodge, *The Mode*, 42-3.

Book Reviews

Grace, Not Law! The Answer to Antinomianism, David H. J. Gay, (n.p.: Brachus, 2013). Pp. 98. $5.38 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Introduction

In the providence of God, I have throughout my ministry had a special interest in the heresy of antinomism, or antinomianism. This is not only because antinomism is one of the two main heresies by which the gospel of grace is always bedeviled. As Augustus M. Toplady remarked, "Christ is always crucified between two thieves: Arminianism and antinomism."

But my special interest in the heresy is due also to the circumstances in my first congregation. The members came from a German Reformed tradition that was influenced by the Dutch/German theologian, Hermann F. Kohlbrugge. If Kohlbrugge was not an antinomian, he was decidedly weak regarding the place of the law in the Christian life of sanctification. He indicated this weakness in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. At the very beginning of his treatment of the third section of the Catechism, Kohlbrugge posed the question, "What is the most thankful creature of God?" His answer was the pathetic, sanctification-disparaging, "A dog."

Ministers influenced by Kohlbrugge explained the "must" of Q. 86 of the Catechism as expressing certainty, not obligation. The saved Christian will necessarily do good works. But the Kohlbruggians shied from applying the "must" to their congregations as confronting them with their duty.

The "*Du sollst*" (the "Thou shalt," in German) of the commandments means only, "You will," not, "You ought to." The practical consequence of this explanation of the "thou shalt" of the commandments is that the church has nothing to say, and nothing to do in the way of discipline, regarding a member whose life plainly shows the response to the law's "you will"—"I will *not*."

The members of the congregation had been separated from a German Reformed church in Nebraska by that church's discipline of a leading elder for his teaching a class that salvation includes sanctification and that a sanctified life is a life of obedience to the law of God. His offense was

teaching that we "must" do the good works required by the law of God, as taught by Q. 86 of the Catechism. That is, his offense was his repudiation of antinomism.

An Antinomian Book

Grace, Not Law! is evidence that antinomism continues to be a threat to professing Christians and to the Christian religion. This is the sole value of the book. This is not much. But it is something. Especially is the little book valuable for its demonstration of the deceptiveness of antinomism.

Always antinomism promotes itself by extolling salvation by grace and by misrepresenting what the Reformed faith describes as the "third use of the law," that is, the use of the law as teaching the standard or rule of the thankful Christian life. Antinomism portrays this use of the law as a falling away from grace into legalism, or works-righteousness. The antinomian is the preacher of grace; the teacher of the law as it is confessed in the third part of the Catechism is a "law-preacher," a teacher of righteousness and salvation by the sinner's own works. This, of course, is a damning charge, if it can be made to stick.

Gay is a master of the typical antinomian slander. "Believers…should not preach the law; *we* should preach Christ!…We should not be going to the law; we should be going to Christ" (8, 9). "Look to Christ!…not to the law! Look to Christ! Christ is your deliver (sic)!" (63).

In addition, the author distinguishes himself by additional deception in the controversy between the Reformed faith and antinomism with regard to the law. Whether this deception is deliberate or due to ignorance, God will judge. But deception it is.

Gay would have the reader believe that he opposes antinomism. Hence, the sub-title of the book. Oddly, however, he opposes antinomism by advocating the heresy. The way to ward off the lawlessness of antinomism in the church, according to Gay, is by repudiating and banishing the ten commandments, that is, by vigorously promoting antinomism. Gay proposes that we outlaw opposition to the law by outlawing the law. It is as though in the field of medicine a doctor would combat cancer by advocating the administration to persons of cancerous cells.

Gay vehemently affirms his opposition to an unrighteous life on the part of Christians. His solution is the equally vehement

repudiation of the use of the law of God by preacher or believer as the standard of a righteous life.

The outstanding foes of Gay's antinomism, as Gay repeatedly notes, are John Calvin and the Reformed faith. Gay condemns "the vast majority of…Reformed and evangelical believers…. They follow John Calvin. And he taught that it is the law of God—the ten commandments…that's the standard" (53). Contrary to Gay's intention, this is high praise of Calvin and his "followers." Indeed, higher praise, especially in these lawless last days, is hard to imagine.

What Antinomism Truly Is

Gay's deceptive attack on the law of God is exposed by examining his definition of the heresy of antinomism. He defines antinomism as opposition in the Christian church to any and all law, virtually as open, avowed, immoral living. "An antinomian is one who will not have any law to govern him. If you like, he is a law unto himself. He is lawless" (68). Since Gay deplores and denounces such an immoral life, he would have the reader believe that he—Gay—is not an antinomian.

The deception in this description of antinomism is twofold. First, an antinomian is not one who opposes "any and all law" in general. An antinomian is one who specifically opposes and rejects the ten commandments of Exodus 20 as the authoritative guide and rule of the holy, Christian life. According to this (accurate) definition, Gay is a raging antinomian. Gay defines antinomism as he does so that he may escape detection. For he does profess allegiance to a certain law. This is the "law of Christ," which, although undefined, is evidently not the ten commandments of Exodus 20.

The second mistake of Gay's description of antinomism is his identification of the heresy with flagrantly immoral behavior. Antinomism is not blatantly worldly living, although the error invariably leads to this iniquity. Antinomism is the doctrinal denial that the Christian life is regulated by the ten commandments, and that the Christian is commanded by God to obey the ten commandments. Gay repeatedly, clearly, and emphatically denies that the ten commandments are the guide and rule of the Christian life. He criticizes Calvin for teaching that "the law is the everlasting rule of a good and holy life" (18). Therefore, Gay is an antinomian heretic, and his book is antinomian heresy.

"Under the Law"

Damning as this deception is, Gay's deception in the matter of antinomism goes further. He insists on presenting Calvin's and the Reformed faith's doctrine of the law as the teaching that the Christian is "under the law." Gay charges that "Reformed teachers" proclaim that "believers are… under the law of Moses" (7). Since the Bible plainly teaches that believers are not "under the law," Gay can triumphantly conclude that the Bible condemns the Reformed faith's teaching that the Christian life is required to be lived according to the law as its standard, or guide.

But "*under* the law" is not the same as "*according to* the law." To be under the law, as the Bible teaches being under the law, is to be required to keep the law for righteousness with God and, therefore, to be subject to the law's curse. The elect believer is not "under the law." The Reformed faith does not teach such a thing. The Reformed faith, as the gospel of grace, has always been the main opponent of the doctrine that believers are "under the law." The Reformed faith has always been the outstanding champion of the truth that believers are "under grace."

But the Bible's teaching that the believer is not "*under* the law" neither means nor implies that the believer is not called to live "*according to* the law," the law being the authoritative guide of his life. Gay proclaims that gracious salvation frees the believer from the law: "Every believer is liberated from law," by which is meant the law of the ten commandments (11). On the basis of Scripture, the Reformed faith proclaims that gracious salvation liberates the believer from *sin*, so that he is free to obey the law, which is the authoritative rule of a holy, thankful life.

Law and Sanctification

As if all this error in the important matter of God's work of sanctification and the believer's calling to live a thankful life were not enough, Gay also misrepresents the Reformed doctrine of the law, and misstates the issue between his antinomism and the Reformed use of the law in the Christian life. He does this by condemning the Reformed doctrine as teaching that sinners are sanctified by the law. This charge by Gay is an important element in his assault on the Reformed doctrine and in his defense of his own antinomism.

Gay describes the Reformed faith as teaching that, although we are justified by faith, we are sanc-

tified by the law. This enables him to distinguish himself as a consistent preacher of grace, whereas the Reformed, allegedly, teach justification by grace and sanctification by works of obedience to the law. "The Reformed…argue that the way to get believers sanctified…is to teach and preach the law to them; and by 'the law,' they mean the ten commandments" (8). Whereas the Reformed faith calls people to Christ for justification, according to Gay, it tells believers, "You must go to the law for sanctification" (63).

Supposedly in distinction from Calvin and the Reformed faith, Gay proclaims that "the new-covenant way of sanctification…is not by the law but by grace" (10).

To the proclamation that we are sanctified by grace, not by the law, the Reformed faith responds with the Dutch proverb: "*Een waarheid als een koe*" (English: "a truth as [obvious as] a cow"). Of course, sanctification, like justification, indeed, like all salvation, is by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by the law. Of course, grace makes us holy, as grace also justifies us. Of course, the law, as law on its own, the law as law, can no more make us holy than it can pronounce us righteous.

But the Reformed doctrine of the third use of the law does not teach that the law makes us holy. Nor is the issue between the Reformed faith and antinomians such as David Gay at all that the Reformed faith affirms, whereas the antinomians deny, that the law sanctifies. By raising this as the issue, Gay fights a straw man.

The issue is not that grace sanctifies the elect by faith alone in Jesus Christ. The issue is not that the law cannot make the sinner holy, anymore than it can pronounce us just.

But the issue is this: When Christ sanctifies the elect believer by faith alone in Him, does He liberate the believer from the law, as is the heretical doctrine of David Gay and of all his antinomian cohorts in the history of the church? Or, does He liberate the believer from the power of sin in order that the believer can and will now obey the ten commandments of the law of God, which ten commandments Christ continues to propose to the New Testament Israel of God as the will of God for their thankful life? This is the Reformed doctrine. This doctrine includes that the law be preached, not only to expose to the believer his sinfulness and sins, so that he may flee to Christ crucified

for pardon and peace, but also to instruct him how he is to thank God for his gracious salvation.

Gay's presentation of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification is false. But something important becomes unmistakably plain from the misrepresentation. Gay refuses to teach confessing Christians to obey the ten commandments as the rule of their saved, grateful lives. He rejects the law as the necessary guide of the life of holiness. Gay is "*anti* (against)-*nomian* (the law of the ten commandments)."

The Lawlessness of Antinomism

And this points out another fatal flaw in antinomism. It gives the Christian no guide for the realizing of his fervent desire to live acceptably and thankfully to God his Savior. Antinomism "liberates" the believer from the law. And now the believer is on his own. No law, no *divine*, trustworthy, authoritative law regulates his life.

Thus does antinomism invariably result in careless, unrighteous, and, finally, profligate living. If God's law is not the rule of one's life, the believer's own desires, or the ungodly way of the world, or the carelessness of nominal Christianity, and, in the end, no law at all governs the life of one professing Christianity.

Antinomism is essentially lawlessness, though it may for a while befool both the antinomian and his disciples by professing concern for holiness. The name of the heresy perfectly captures its anti-Christian teaching: "against the law" (of the ten commandments). It is worse, therefore, than the lawlessness of the ungodly whose lives are simply lacking the law. Antinomism is hostility, and active opposition, to the law of the ten commandments. Antinomism is "*anti*" the law of the ten commandments.

Contrary to Gay's profession, how can antinomism truly be zealous for holiness of life when holiness of life begins with the inscribing of the law of God on the heart of the child of God (Jer. 31:33)—the law that antinomism despises and rejects?

It should not be overlooked, in light of Jeremiah 31:33, that God's estimation of His law in the matter of salvation is radically different from the estimation of David Gay and of all antinomians. Gay does away with the law. God, on the contrary, writes the law on the hearts of His new covenant people.

Evidently sensing the weak-

ness of his theology in leaving the believer without an authoritative guide or rule for his life, Gay proposes instead that the saved Christian take Jesus as his example, that is, that he imitate Jesus. Having rejected the law as the guide of the Christian life, Gay raises the question, "How can I live as a Christian should live? What is the Christian life?" His answer is: "Live as Jesus would live!" (69)

To exclaim that the Christian life must be an imitation of the life of Christ has its emotional appeal. But when this imitation of Jesus is stripped of obedience to the ten commandments, as is the case in the theology of antinomian Gay, it lacks all definiteness, concreteness, and, well, down-to-earth reality. The emotional call, "Live as Jesus would!," like the trivial, superficial, pop slogan of a few years ago, "What would Jesus do?" is useless, and indeed destructive of the Christian life.

Everyone has his own conception of the life of Christ. "Liberated" from the law, humans invariably cast Christ in the image of themselves and make of the life of Christ whatever suits them. Liberals live like Jesus by tolerating sin, refusing to punish criminals, approving homosexuality and rampant divorce and remarriage, robbing the rich to support the have-nots, and relieving humans of their material distresses in such a way as to cause widespread economic disaster. So-called Christian Marxists in South America imitate Jesus by forcible redistribution of wealth. Charismatics imitate Jesus by dancing wildly to raucous music, waving their arms, and speaking in tongues. "Christian" hippies imitated Jesus by getting high on pot and living freely in fornication.

Having dispensed with the law, antinomian Gay asks, "How then should we live?"

His answer?

"Imitate Jesus!"

But now arises another question: "How shall I imitate Jesus?" By not marrying? By spending forty days and nights in a desert, without food or drink? By cleansing the temple? By changing water into wine? By excoriating the money-changers in the temple? By walking on water? By dying on a cross?

Whom does Gay think he is fooling with his replacement of the law of God by a vague, undefined "imitation of Jesus?"

This is not to deny that the Christian life in certain, carefully prescribed respects is to be patterned after the behavior of Jesus

(see I Pet. 2:21). But it is to deny that the Christian life is an imitation of Jesus from which the ten commandments are banished.

How shall we now live? How shall we saved believers now live a complete Christian life in all areas of human life? How shall we live so as to please and glorify God? How shall we live so that we have certainty, *absolute* certainty, that we are pleasing God and will be rewarded with eternal life?

These are not insignificant questions.

These are questions about *life*, about the *Christian* life.

They concern no small aspect of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

God's answer to the questions is, "To the law and to the testimony" (Is. 8:20).

Such is also the answer of the Reformed faith, as the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism shows. A life of good works is the life lived "according to the law of God." It is not a life "founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men" (Heid. Cat., Q. 91).

Gay has no positive answer to the question, other than the vague and useless, "Imitate Jesus!" But he does have a negative answer: "*Away from* the law and the testimony!"

And God's judgment on him, as on all antinomians, is: "There is no light in them" (Is. 8:20). ●

By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters. Foreword by David F. Wells. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006. Pp. 213. $17.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

***For* the Book:**
Defense of Justification

There is something to be said for this book: It is a defense of justification by faith alone against the denial of this cardinal truth by the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) and by the Federal Vision (FV).

The book contends that justification in Romans refers to one's legal standing before God the judge, rather than to one's inclusion among the covenant people of God, as N. T. Wright wrongly argues. Justification is the imputation of righteousness, not the divine declaration concerning God's covenant faithfulness. Justification is not only forgiveness

of sins; it is also the imputation to the believing sinner of the active obedience of Jesus Christ in the elect believer's stead.

The contribution by C. Fitz-Simons Allison (several different authors contribute various essays related to the subject of the book's title) is delightful, and perceptive. Allison observes that denial of imputation is possible today (in ostensibly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles!) inasmuch as we live in a "climate bereft of biblical awe of God's justice, transcendence, and awesomeness" (110).

The book does not hesitate to name names, or to skewer the enemies of the truth of righteousness by faith alone. In his essay, "Reflection on Auburn Theology," that is, the theology of Christian Reconstruction and the FV, T. David Gordon suggests that "Pastor Steven Schlissel embodies the best and worst of Auburn Theology [that is, the FV—DJE]: a great, bombastic provocateur who may be temperamentally unsuited to be a theologian" (114). Schlissel is the independent, who has long been the darling of the conservative Christian Reformed ministers and members and whose theology the men of the United Reformed Churches have never forthrightly denounced and repudiated, although shrewd self-interest has moved them to distance themselves from "bombastic, provocateur" Schlissel in public, after using him.

Bolt on HH

Of special interest to the Protestant Reformed reader is the article by Prof. John Bolt, Christian Reformed theologian at Calvin Theological Seminary. Bolt's article is titled, "Why the Covenant of Works is a Necessary Doctrine: Revisiting the Objections to a Venerable Reformed Doctrine" (171-189). Bolt reexamines the covenant with Adam in Paradise in light of the denial by the men of the FV and others that that covenant was a covenant of works. In this reexamination of the nature of the covenant with Adam, Bolt considers Herman Hoeksema's rejection of the doctrine of that covenant as the doctrine that was current in his (Christian Reformed) circles in his day.

Although judging Hoeksema to be "wrong about covenant conditionality," which covenant conditionality Hoeksema denied (186), Bolt is appreciative of much of Hoeksema's explanation

of the Adamic covenant. "Hoeksema is right about the relational dimension of the Adamic covenant…. Hoeksema's theological instincts…are right on target here and reflect some of the profoundest convictions and insights in the Reformed theological and confessional tradition" (186).

The conclusion of Bolt's article is commendation of Hoeksema's understanding of the covenant with Adam:

> Hoeksema's brief and cryptic comments in his discussion on the covenant with Adam in creation carry all the more weight. For Hoeksema the covenant relation is not "incidental, a means to an end," but rather "a fundamental relationship in which Adam stood to God by virtue of his creation; [it was] a relation of living fellowship and friendship…. From the very first moment of his existence…Adam stood in that covenant relation to God and was conscious of that living fellowship and friendship which is essential to that relationship." …As God's covenant friend and representative "office-bearer in all creation" Adam was given a task as God's co-worker for which his reward was the Sabbath-like "pure delight of it in the favor of God" (188, 189).

Having quoted Hoeksema's declaration that "all Scripture presents the covenant relation as fundamental and essential…. There can be no doubt that Adam in this state of integrity stood in covenant relation to God," Bolt concludes his piece with a hearty, "Yes. Indeed!" (189)

In light of this approval of Hoeksema's conception of the covenant with Adam, Bolt, despite his disavowal of Hoeksema's repudiation of a conditional covenant with Adam, cannot possibly find himself in agreement with the doctrine that posits that covenant as a conditional contract proposed by God and accepted by Adam sometime after Adam's creation, which was the doctrine of a conditional covenant that Hoeksema was rejecting.

Against the Book: Defense of Justification

There is, however, also something to be said *against* this book: It is a defense of justification by faith alone against the denial of this cardinal truth by the NPP and by the FV.

By the present time, some fourteen years after Norman

Shepherd's public proclamation of the theology of the FV in Reformed circles by his publication of the book, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*, it ought to be abundantly evident to every Reformed Christian, much more to every Reformed theologian, that defense of justification by faith alone against the frontal attack on the Reformed faith by the FV is both desperately inadequate and grievously wrong.

The engine of the FV assault on the heart and core of the Reformed faith, which is the gospel of grace of Holy Scripture, is the FV's doctrine of the covenant as a gracious, but conditional, relationship with all baptized persons, especially all baptized babies of believing parents, alike. *The* issue in the life and death struggle of Reformed orthodoxy with the theology of the FV is the FV's doctrine of a universal, gracious, saving, but *conditional* covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. (I note that "*conditional* covenant of *grace*" is an oxymoron.) The advocates of the FV thus openly advertise their teaching (see Shepherd's *The Call of Grace*). The name of the theology betrays the covenantal essence of the theology: "federal" means "covenant." Justification in the covenant by faith and by works is only the implication of the more basic false doctrine of a conditional covenant of grace. The source and force of the heresy of the FV is the conditional covenant of saving grace, which covenant is deliberately, openly, and thoroughly cut loose from the eternal decree of election, the sole source and foundation of all salvation that is gracious, that is, of the only salvation there is.

As long as the self-proclaimed adversaries of the FV and self-proclaimed defenders of the Reformed faith in its hour of crisis—and this *is* the hour of its crisis—dance around the issue of the unconditionality or conditionality of the covenant of (saving) grace, the FV remains firmly embedded in the Reformed churches, and will, like every fatal disease that is tolerated in the body, eventually destroy the confession of the truth of salvation by sovereign grace alone. Thus, the FV will destroy the Reformed and Presbyterian churches that tolerate the doctrine of a conditional covenant as energetically spread by the FV.

Mere Dialogue

Second, against the book is that it engages in dialogue with the FV and the NPP. The dialogue

is argumentative. But it is mere dialogue. All the contributors to the book respond to the advocates of the FV and of the NPP, as though these heretics were legitimate disputants in the churches. They are not. The Reformed creeds clearly confess justification by faith alone. Just as clearly, and sharply, they condemn the theology of justification by works as heresy, as a teaching officially condemned by and banned from all Reformed churches.

Reformed men must not, indeed *may* not, perpetually debate the proponents of the FV and of the NPP. Whether justification is by faith alone or by faith and works, whether the meaning of Romans and Galatians is the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) or a doctrine of membership in the church (ecclesiology), are not debatable matters in a Reformed church. These issues have been decided. The creeds plainly confess the decisions on these matters.

Theologians must not, indeed *may* not, debate the heretics within their churches. The churches must discipline the heretics, and then as heretics of the first water—men who deny the gospel of grace at its heart, and who are introducing the false gospel of Rome, Arminius, and Pelagius into the churches of the Reformation.

A book against the FV surfacing in a Reformed church must be very brief, indeed, only one line: "The doctrine of justification by works is condemned by the Reformed creeds, and I, therefore, charge you—the author, preacher, or lecturer advocating the FV—before your consistory with the public sin of heresy."

Not one of the contributors to *By Faith Alone* appeals to the Reformed confessions, for example, Lord's Days 23 and 24 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Not one calls for, much less announces, the discipline of the heretics in the Reformed churches.

Cornelis P. Venema explicitly notes that N. T. Wright's NPP rejects as an "encumbrance" the "traditional formulations and confessional…positions of the sixteenth-century Reformation" (34). Venema then calmly proceeds to debate Wright, rather than condemn the popular, influential heretic as contradicting the Reformed creeds, including the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (see Articles 11 and 12), and as violating his commitment to uphold his church's, and all the Reformation's, confessions.

The impression is left that the controversy with the FV and with the NPP is merely an interesting, largely amiable theological discussion, which enables learned theologians to put their theological acumen on display, and publishing companies to sell one book after another.

Indeed, the churches of most of the contributors to the volume have distinguished themselves either by producing the heretics, or by exonerating the leading teachers of the FV at their ecclesiastical assemblies, or by harboring and protecting them within their fellowship.

"Nothing Genuinely Evangelical Will Remain"

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is mistaken when in his "Afterword," reflecting on the content of the book, he lauds the book as "an arsenal of theological arguments in defense of the gospel" (207). The only theological weapon that will destroy the FV and thus defend the gospel against its attack is missing: proclamation of sovereign, efficacious, particular grace in the covenant.

In addition, the book's arsenal of weapons does not include the imperious call to exercise Christian discipline against the heretics.

Where discipline is not exercised, heresy inevitably wins the day—and the churches. Where discipline is not exercised, theologians and churches alike show that they do not take the issue, which is the truth of the gospel, seriously.

An "arsenal" lacking the only two weapons that will defeat the foe and safeguard the kingdom leaves something to be desired.

"By faith alone" is, therefore, doomed in the churches of the defenders of this fundamental truth. The very last word in the book itself is the dreadful warning. In light, not so much of the false doctrine of the FV and of the NPP, as of the fatal weaknesses of the defenders of the truth that Luther rightly described as the article of a standing or falling church, the warning, which the writer intended only as a warning against a possibility, in fact announces a certainty: "Nothing genuinely evangelical will remain of evangelicalism" (208).

That is, nothing of the genuine gospel will remain of that which claims to be the preaching and confessing of the gospel. ●

1834: Hendrik de Cock's Return to the True Church, Marvin Kamps. (Jenison, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014) Pp. xx+491 (cloth). [Reviewed by Dr. Eugene P. Heideman, professor emeritus, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI.]

As the "Father of the Secession of 1834" in the Netherlands, Hendrik de Cock is a crucial figure not only in the history of Reformed churches in the Netherlands, but also in the history of Dutch Reformed denominations in North America. Marvin Kamps writes that "The significance of the Secession is that it restored to the Reformed believers in the Netherlands the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus by faith through grace alone. The significance for us in North America is that through our fathers who immigrated to this continent, we are instructed in the same confession of faith on the basis of God's word. All true Reformed believers [in North America—EPH] are the heirs of the saints of the Secession of 1834" (231-2).

Because Hendrik de Cock and his writings are largely unknown today by the majority of the members of the Dutch Reformed denominations in the English speaking world, this book is important for making available to English readers a brief biography of Hendrik de Cock and his role as a leader of the Secession of 1834. It is especially valuable because approximately one half of its pages consist of Kamps' translations of key writings by de Cock and several of his defenders and opponents. He writes that the translations are included because "they will give the flavor of the controversy and testify to the serious nature of the apostasy in the state church, while describing the determined, godly witness and pleas of the humble Secessionists" (xvii).

In his "Preface" Kamps evaluates the place of de Cock and the Secession of 1834 in the various Dutch Reformed denominations since 1834 and the present. He writes that each of his readers will have to answer for himself the question, "Am I truly a spiritual son of this reformer of the Reformed Church?" (xii). Although this book is published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Kamps intends it to be read by all those who in one way or another trace their roots back to de Cock as their spiritual father (xii).

This book is helpful in tracing de Cock's conversion from the liberalism of the the faculty in the University of Groningen to the Reformed orthodoxy of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. Inclusion of a translation of the text of "Reformed Doctrine" by C. Baron van Zylen of Nyevelt frames de Cock's conversion in the context of the theological defense of Reformed orthodoxy that others in the national Reformed church were fighting for after King William I promulgated the new church order in 1816 (82-93).

Kamps must also be commended for informing his readers about the circumstances that brought de Cock to republish in 1833 the Canons of Dordt and the Compendium that were being suppressed by the Directorate of the Netherlands Reformed Church. In the same year he produced his notorious attack on the unorthodox teachings of the "two wolves," G. Benthem Reddingius and L. Meijer Brouwer, pastors who had departed far from the faith as defended by the 1618-1619 Synod of Dordt. Inclusion of de Cock's introductions to the "Decisions of the National Synod of Dordrecht" (117-126) and the "Compendium of the Christian Religion" are conveniently available for the first time to English readers (129-133). Equally valuable for an understanding of the significance of the Secession of 1834 is Kamps' translation of his defense of Reformed doctrine against the teachings of Reddingius and Brouwer (313-365).

The leaders of the Secession of 1834 maintained that the Formula of Subscription signed by ministers in the Netherlands Reformed Church had to be interpreted to mean that they were loyal to the doctrines in the three Confessions *because* they are fully in accord with Scripture, not *in so far as* they are in accord. De Cock charged that pastors were breaking their oath when they openly deviated from the doctrines of the Trinity or original sin and taught an Arian Christology in place of the Christology of the Nicene Creed. Kamps enables his readers to judge whether de Cock was fair to the pastors when he includes both his translation of Groningen professor Pieter Hofstede de Groot's defense of the pastors and the Reveil attorney C. M. vander Kemp's response to Hofstede de Groot (366-450). Along with the inclusion of Hofstede de Groot's defense of the pastors, Kamps'

translation of the correspondence between de Cock and Hofstede de Groot, who were close friends in the University and thereafter (de Cock succeeded Hofstede de Groot as pastor in Ulrum) until de Cock's conversion, adds much to the value of this book.

Kamps traces the growth of tension between de Cock and Hendrik Scholte about matters of church order, the baptism of children of non-communicant members of the church, and the relation of church and state. He sides with de Cock for being a strong defender of the old Church Order of Dordt in opposition to Scholte who proposed a more radically congregational polity. De Cock opposed Scholte who insisted on restricting infant baptism to children of parents who had openly confessed their faith before the elders of the church. On this issue of infant baptism, Kamps sides with Scholte and Van Velzen against de Cock. He also takes the side of Scholte against de Cock on the separation of church and state. He criticizes de Cock for still holding to remnants of a "Volkskerk" tradition of church-state relationships, while Scholte is commended for his acceptance of the American distinction as understood at the time of the Secession.

In contrast to Hendrik Scholte who had secession in his blood and left the Netherlands Reformed Church without looking back, de Cock withdrew from it reluctantly. His "Act of Secession or Return" was written in the hope that the Netherlands Reformed Church, even though it was a false church, could still be brought to repentance and "return to the true service of the Lord" (246). On this point, Kamps stands closer to Scholte than to de Cock. As Miskotte pointed out in his 1934 centennial address on de Cock's role in the Secession of 1834, (K. Miskotte, *Korte Nabetrachting, 1834,* p. 83), de Cock still held high regard for God's faithfulness to His people unto the third and fourth generation, with the result he was ready to baptize children of non-communicant members. He still retained remnants of hope that the term "false church" was not the last word for the national "volkskerk."

Kamps recognizes that there were ministers in the Netherlands Reformed Church who remained true to the faith and manifested true faith and godliness. One such was Dirk Molenaar, whose correspondence with de Cock is translated and included in the book. Scholte recognized the true witness of Molenaar, but accused

him of cowardice when he bowed to the pressure of King William and the church Directorate to keep silent. Kamps uses a harsher term when he writes that Molenaar was "disobedient" by remaining in the Netherlands Reformed Church (251). Kamps is more positive toward the "Seven Gentlemen" in the Hague, including C. M. vander Kemp, who did not withdraw from the national church but remained within its fellowship and fought from within for the reform of the church (407-409).

We owe a great debt to Marvin Kamps for making available to English readers his biography of Hendrik de Cock in the context of the Separation of 1834. We have here in English a number of translations pertaining to the Secession that are essential for understanding what happened in the Netherlands in 1834 and in the emigration movement led by Hendrik Scholte and Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte beginning in 1847. It is unfortunate that no index is included in this important book. ●

Old Testament Commentary Survey, 5th edition, by Tremper Longman III. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013. Pp. 159. $26.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

In this book, Longman evaluates many Old Testament commentaries. First he evaluates five one-volume commentaries. Next he evaluates forty-one commentary sets and series, including those of Calvin, Keil-Delitzsch, Leupold, and the New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Then, taking each book of the Old Testament at a time, he evaluates a dozen or more individual commentaries on that book. In each section, the commentaries are listed in alphabetical order of their author or editor.

Each commentary gets a one paragraph description, and then a twofold evaluation. First, Longman evaluates who would best benefit from it. If a layman, the evaluation is given an "L"; if a minister or seminary student, an "M"; and if a scholar, an "S." Second, he gives each commentary a star rating, with five stars being excellent, and one or two stars being poor.

The book's introduction

makes clear that "this guide is for anyone, layperson or ministers, who desires to buy a commentary" (2). On page 3, Longman sets forth the wrong and right ways to use a commentary. Two wrong ways are "to ignore completely the use of commentaries" and "to become overly dependent on commentaries." On the other hand, "the right way to use a commentary is as a help." Longman gives excellent advice here, whether to ministers or laypersons: first study the text on your own, discover its riches for yourself, and then use a commentary to help you understand it more fully.

Appendix A contains a list of those commentaries that received a five star rating. This is helpful. One can go immediately to this appendix to look for the best. And one finds that Calvin's Commentaries made the five star list! Appendix B contains a list of commentaries which Longman himself wrote. While he includes his own commentaries in his evaluations, he gives only an "L," "M," or "S" rating to them, and does not rate them by stars.

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This format is the same that he used in the fourth edition of this book, which appeared in 2007; and presumably the same that he used in the first three editions as well (1991, 1995, 2003). The major difference in the various editions is that Longman reviewed commentaries that were written since his previous edition. Judging from his list of abbreviations at the beginning of his work, several of the new commentaries reviewed in this fifth edition include those in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (recently published by Baker) and the Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (recently published by Eerdmans). While Longman gives good reviews to some of the individual volumes in the Brazos series, he gives the series as a whole three stars, while the Two Horizons series gets four and a half stars. I'll call that objectiveness on Longman's part, if you consider that Baker is the publisher of Longman's commentary survey which I am reviewing.

Of course, not every commentary is mentioned in this book. Nor would we expect it to be.

The Reformed Free Publishing Association currently publishes only three works devoted to a verse by verse explanation of Old Testament books of the Bible—Robert C. Harbach's commentary on Genesis, Homer C. Hoeksema's sermons on Isaiah, and Rev.

Ronald Hanko's commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. (I exclude the Unfolding Covenant History series from this list because, though of great value, it is not a systematic exposition of verses and chapters as most commentaries are). None of the RFPA commentaries are treated—and I did not expect they would be. Of course, a book of recorded sermons does not technically qualify as a commentary.

Also of interest to me was whether any of the volumes of the Evangelical Press Study Commentaries were reviewed. Unless I overlooked it, none were.

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Anyone searching for commentaries will immediately recognize the book's value.

However, I have two caveats. First, I think that the price is a bit steep for what the reader gets—a book of advice about commentaries, which becomes outdated as the years go by. So I would recommend a book like this to a person who uses commentaries frequently or buys new ones often. For the rest, I would encourage the church library to buy a copy of this book, and let all share it.

Second, one merely has to type "recommended commentaries" into the searchbar of one's internet browser, in order to find recommendations of other men, given free of charge. Two noteworthy websites are http://www.challies.com/recommendations/commentaries and http://www.ligonier.org/blog/top-commentaries-on-every-book-of-the-bible. ●

Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism, ed. Robert L. Plummer. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. Pp. 256. $18.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Journeys of Faith records the journeys of four different men from one "liturgical tradition" (14) or "ecclesiastical allegiance" (15) to another. The first is Wilbur Ellsworth, who pastored three Baptist churches over a forty-year period, but converted to Eastern Orthodoxy. Next is Francis Beckwith, born and reared Roman Catholic, but becoming "at the age of twenty three...a firmly

committed Protestant" (82), who later found himself back in the Roman Catholic church for good. By contrast, Chris Castaldo records his conversion from Roman Catholicism to evangelicalism. Finally, Lyle Dorsett tells us of his journey from Lutheranism to Anglicanism, with stops in the Baptist and United Methodist traditions along the way.

After each man tells his story, another man (not one of the other main contributors) responds to it. Craig Blaising responds to Wilbur Ellsworth; Gregg Allison to Francis Beckwith; Brad Gregory to Chris Castaldo; and Robert Peterson to Lyle Dorsett. After each response, the one telling his story gets the final word—a chance to respond to the one who responded to him.

All of this is sandwiched between an introduction and conclusion, both written by Robert Plummer, the editor.

Ecumenically motivated

One is not surprised to learn that Plummer has an ecumenical motive in writing the book.

Not that this is his *only* motive; he also desires to "help." In the introduction, Plummer gives his goals for the book (p. 14):

> 1. To help Evangelicals understand why persons are leaving their churches for Christian traditions which are more liturgical.
> 2. To help Evangelical leaders in responding to questions from church members who are attracted to liturgical Christian traditions.
> 3. To help non-Evangelicals, such as Catholic and Orthodox Christians, in understanding why persons have departed their traditions for Evangelicalism, why some Evangelicals are now moving in the other direction, and what fundamental differences remain between Evangelical and non-Evangelical communities.

And in the conclusion he states what he hopes readers will take away from this book (p. 24):

> 1. I hope readers are able to recognize with greater sympathy the complex motivations which influence conversions to other Christian traditions.
> 2. I want readers who are struggling with the desire to leave their tradition to feel both more understood and, in many cases, more hesitant.
> 3. I hope that all Christians would find in this volume a model for peaceable ecumenical dialogue. People who

> claim Jesus as Lord should be able to disagree before a nonbelieving world without denying the love for others we profess marks us as Christians (John 13:34-35).

There it is—"a model for peaceable ecumenical dialogue"—for Christians of all stripes. The book is not about the journeys of Christians within their tradition—from one Reformed or Presbyterian or Baptist group to another—but about the journeys of evangelicals to Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism. Between those groups, we should have "peaceable ecumenical dialogue."

This certainly comes out in the tone of the respondents. Plummer chose as respondents those who would be critical of the liturgical tradition to which a man journeyed. As good Baptists, Blaising and Allison find weaknesses in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Gregory is Catholic, so certainly he is not impressed with Castaldo's departure from Roman Catholicism. And Peterson belongs to the PCA, and therefore has issues with Anglicanism. But these respondents make sure to point out that they appreciate *this*, and appreciate *that*, about the tradition they are critiquing. A model for peaceable ecumenical dialogue.

In all fairness, the respondents *do* talk issues, and for the most part they talk *fundamental* issues. Craig Blaising critiques Eastern Orthodoxy for exalting tradition above Scripture, venerating icons and Mary, and its view of the Eucharist. He also responds appropriately to Ellsworth's "Christus Victor" view of Christ's death that denies that Christ's death was penal satisfaction.

Gregg Allison critiques Roman Catholicism for its faulty view of Scripture and revelation, including the idea that revelation includes tradition, that the apocryphal writings are part of Scripture, and that the church is the official interpreter of Scripture. In addition, he critiques Rome's view of merit, of Mary, of the sacraments working *ex opere operato*, and of transubstantiation.

And Robert Peterson, whose response I considered the least substantive of all, evaluates Anglicanism negatively because of its doctrinal latitude (tolerance of heresy), and its hierarchical view of church government. Dorsett's last word was to find evidence of doctrinal latitude also within Presbyterianism.

All of these issues raised by the respondents are to the point.

But then Blaising closes by noting in a long paragraph what Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism have in common; Peterson begins with that thought, and extends it for four pages; and Allison is concerned to convince the reader that he must "reconsider and abandon" any journey he might be taking toward Rome, because it is a journey from "greater faithfulness to lesser faithfulness" —meaning that Rome still exhibits some degree of "faithfulness" (115). Allison also refrains from referring to Rome's veneration of Mary and of the sacramental elements in the Eucharist as being idolatry.

One must be very soft, when promoting modern ecumenical peaceableness. And that is one of my criticisms of the book.

Without question, how we carry out discussions about religious matters with others who disagree with us is important. Our love for our non-Christian or non-Reformed neighbors must show itself in the manner in which we interact with them. But the pretty prattle promoting peaceableness gets to be too much. Even more, I disagree with the idea that all of these liturgical traditions are valid expressions of the Christian faith, their faults and weaknesses notwithstanding.

That being said, the book was certainly worth reading for the education it gave me, particularly regarding Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism.

Roman Catholicism

Beckwith's account of his journey to Roman Catholicism taught me nothing new. Beckwith did the best job of any in developing the theological issues with which he had to grapple as he made his journey. At length he defends Rome's view of justification, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacrament of penance, and apostolic succession. Nothing new; but all of this did refresh my memory on two points.

First, Rome does not change. Beckwith's extended explanation of Rome's view of justification underscores that Rome today presents the matter as she always did, uses the same texts in support of her view, and gives those texts the same interpretation. And, as an aside, this reminded me that there was plenty of ecumenical dialogue between Rome and Protestants in the 1500s as well—but it was seldom peaceable, and it was never pretty prattle. The reason was not because in that day

Christians knew nothing about love. The reason was that men in those days understood these issues to be fundamental issues, and the struggle to be a life and death struggle for the truth.

Second, Rome delights in appealing to church history, to the ancient fathers. In itself, this is not bad; the Reformers did and all Protestants should delight in the same. But Rome's appeal to them underscores the fallacy of her view of tradition. I'm putting in my own words a point that Beckwith makes on page 129: "If the fathers did it, it must be right; if Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy does what the fathers did, it is obviously right; if the Protestants differ from the fathers, and therefore also from Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy, obviously the Protestants are wrong." We in the Reformed tradition do well to know the teachings of the ancient fathers, both in order to see that the seeds of Reformed thought were found in them too (Augustine being the obvious example), and to see how Rome's appeal to them is not always discerning enough.

From Chris Castaldo, an ex-Roman Catholic, I *learned* about Roman Catholicism.

I enjoyed Castaldo's account, not primarily because he became Evangelical, but primarily because of his insights into Roman Catholicism.

Castaldo conveyed clearly that ultimate authority, for Rome, was found in the church and *not* in the Bible. Therefore, when the church allows for it, Romish tradition may be dismissed when convenient, while maintaining Romish authority.

As evidence, during some official Roman Catholic religious event held on a Friday during Lent, and apparently unbeknownst to those in attendance, the banquet hall's chef had prepared filet mignon. This was no small problem: for a Roman Catholic "to knowingly and willfully consume meat during Lent constitutes a mortal sin. If one should die after doing so, it would put that person into the flames of eternal damnation" (147). But not to worry. The bishop announced that he had "the authority to declare a special dispensation which will allow us to eat meat during Lent," and pronouncing the blessing. The resort was saved from having to scrounge up fish at the last moment, and the attendees could enjoy filet mignon. Castaldo looked at his neighbor "who sat beside me thinking that if he had choked on his steak and died

apart from the bishop's blessing, he would have been roasted. But now, after the bishop's prayer, he could feast in peace" (147). It all depends on the bishop's will.

I learned further that the Roman Catholic concept of *incarnation* is not that God's eternal Son *once* took on Himself our human nature so that He is continuously human, but that the act of the incarnation itself is "continuing until the end of time" (149; these are the words of Pope Benedict XVI). This has significant implications for Rome's idea of herself: the "institution of the Roman Catholic Church...is the embodiment of Jesus on earth" (149-150). It also has implications for the Eucharist, helping to explain Christ's bodily presence; and for Rome's view of the ongoing death of Christ, so that our justification has not yet finally been accomplished.

And I was reminded that, even apart from a right understanding of Scripture's teaching regarding justification, many Roman Catholics struggle with guilt, and find no relief from that struggle while living under Rome's idea of sin and salvation. I heard once of another man who experienced the same thing. His name was Martin Luther.

Brad Gregory, Castaldo's respondent, took Castaldo's undermining of the pillar on which Roman Catholicism rests most seriously, and responded by trying to make the Protestant view of *sola Scriptura* and the perspicuity of Scripture look silly. If Scripture is so clear, why are Protestants so divided? Do you see any such division in Rome? Castaldo's last word was also worth reading. Among other things, he said about Rome's unity: "if you probe below the surface, you discover that such agreement often doesn't go beyond a common liturgy and clerical attire" (180-181).

Evangelicalism

Wilbur Ellsworth, who journeyed from the Baptist tradition to Eastern Orthodoxy, did a fine job of pointing out the weaknesses of Evangelicalism.

They should make any Reformed, Presbyterian, and Baptist man, woman, and child weep —even if he does not consider himself "Evangelical," as I do not consider myself to be.

Early in his pastorate at First Baptist of Wheaton, Ellsworth became concerned about its own "worship life" (24), as well as the broader phenomena of "seeker sensitive worship services" (25). He was acutely aware of a "lack of any theological basis" (26) that governed his congregation, and

others, when facing questions about worship styles. And, when he left First Baptist to pastor Christ Church in Glen Ellyn, he discovered what else had been lacking: "a prevailing spirit of reverence in its worship life" (28).

Indeed. Reverence! Reverence is missing in Evangelicalism! And it is missing in much that calls itself Reformed!

Evangelicalism, Baptists, Presbyterians, Reformed—any group which has sold out reverence in the interests of "seeker sensitive services" will find that if they gain seekers, they lose those who delighted in reverence!

This is not the place to defend the need for reverence in worship, to underscore how Jehovah's majesty and holiness are to affect our worship, or to see that the second commandment is relevant. Here I simply point out that this is a fundamental weakness in Evangelicalism, and that those who desire to worship reverently are prone to leave Evangelicalism entirely.

Unfortunately, for some that journey leads them to Eastern Orthodoxy.

Would that Reformed churches will avoid cultural trends in worship, and the idea that we can "grow" the church by changing our worship styles to please the masses!

Would that we manifest reverence in worship—both outwardly, in the worship style and form, as well as inwardly, in the hearts of all who worship!

And would that all who are ready to leave Evangelicalism for reverence in worship could find it, not in Eastern Orthodoxy, but in Reformed churches that strive to remain faithful to Scripture's instruction regarding worship! ●

Parade of Faith: A Biographical History of the Christian Church, by Ruth A. Tucker. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. Pp. 509, (cloth). $39.99. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Fascinating!

I challenge anyone who claims to find church history boring to read this book, and then say in all honesty that the book—and the history it records—was boring.

Ruth Tucker makes the *subject* matter of her book interesting, by presenting "a biographical

history." Each of the 24 chapters is devoted to successive eras in church history. After an overview of the entire period, Tucker gives a brief biography of several individuals who played a key role in the church's history in that day. For example, Chapter 1, which is devoted to the period of biblical history after Christ's resurrection, includes accounts of Jesus' mother Mary, John the Baptist, and the apostles Peter and Paul. Chapter 8, entitled "Medieval Theology," includes accounts of the lives of Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Thomas Becket, Thomas Aquinas, Bonventure, and William of Ockham.

Not only the subject matter, but also its *presentation*, is delightful to the reader. Tucker brings the history alive by her use of the present tense in recording past history. For example: "When Luther returns from his confinement in Wartburg, he is stunned by the momentum of the reform" (228).

Each chapter contains various sidebars which are of interest. Some are quotes of the writings and speeches of the leading figures of that period; others are quotes from later scholars about these leading figures. Did you know that Luther's dog was named "Tolpel"? (Luther's *Table Talk*, from which Tucker quotes, also indicates this).

Others contain a one paragraph summary of important figures whose lives are not given extensive treatment. While Chapter 12 presents the history of the Swiss Reformation from the viewpoint of the lives of Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, and Renee of Ferrara, the sidebar on page 253, entitled "Calvin's Colleagues," contains a few remarks about Farel, Bucer, and Beza.

One of my favorite sidebars in each chapter was the treatment of "Everyday Life." Early in each chapter, Tucker devoted most of two pages to some aspect of life in that day: "Growing Up in Nazareth," "Early Christian Worship," "Food, Fasts, and Feasts" (in the chapter on Eastern Orthodoxy, from the fourth century on), "Marriage and Family in Medieval Times," "Sixteenth Century Divorce," "Male Perspectives on Women in Ministry." You get the point.

Church History as *Parade*

Tucker ties together the church's history by the metaphor of a parade.

The metaphor underscores that church history develops and progresses. Tucker keeps this thought prominent. Near the

beginning of every chapter is a sidebar with the theme "Parade of History," in which she sets forth in about five sentences in what direction the history is moving. She concludes each chapter with several paragraphs of questions beginning with "What if"—in what direction would history have gone, if these particular events did not occur?

Tucker herself admits that her book "is not a reference work or an exhaustive history of Christianity, nor is the selection of individuals and topics free from subjectivity" (12). It is as if she is watching the parade pass by while seated in one location, and sees certain sights or developments that another, seated three blocks down the road, might not see.

For the most part, Tucker gets it right. From the early history of the New Testament church through the Reformation, the people she notices in the parade are the people that factored largely in church history. We can overlook the omission of the biographies of some great figures, by realizing that Tucker had to select a few out of many. That she includes a non-Christian on rare occasion (Muhammad, for example) is understandable; he factored large in church history. Some individuals (Margary Kempe and Renee of Ferrara) seem not to warrant the attention they are given, but Tucker admits that the selection was subjective. Still, that Renee gets four pages while Farel, Bucer, and Beza are given a paragraph in a sidebar says something about Tucker's perspective on the parade.

As the parade winds down, two things become apparent.

First, the reader realizes that the church, whose history is presented in biographies, is not necessarily the Reformed church. Granted, Tucker never claimed it would be the history of the Reformed church. But the reader might have assumed it, if he knew that Tucker is a member of the Christian Reformed Church, and a former professor at Calvin Theological Seminary. The only narrowly Reformed person whose biography is included after the time of the Reformation is that of Abraham Kuyper. Other Protestants, such as Bonhoeffer and Barth, are also recognized. But don't expect to find any mention of the Synod of Dordt, even though the early Christian councils are given fair treatment.

Second, the reader realizes that the parade, as Tucker saw it includes nominal Christians who made headlines in their day, but whose doctrines and interpreta-

tions of Scripture did not contribute positively to the church's right understanding of Scripture. Chapter 22 includes biographies of Evangeline Booth (Commander of the Salvation Army) and Aimee Semple McPherson (founder of the Foursquare Gospel). And Chapter 24 concludes by including C. S. Lewis; Martin Luther King, Jr, Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, and Billy Graham.

What I am saying is that in reading this book, watching the parade pass by me, I beheld at first a grand, spectacular procession. But, as happens at some parades, it fizzled out at the end—as if the candy was all gone, and some of the floats and bands made an early exit. I lost interest.

This is, of course, one man's subjective analysis. By it I do not suggest that Tucker failed in her purpose. Rather, I suggest to readers of the *PRTJ*, whom I expect share my views of the church and her history, that you too would find the last chapters of the book less interesting and relevant than the former.

Criticisms

The book is not entirely praiseworthy.

First, I fault Tucker for not including footnotes of her quotations in the body of her book. The quotes in her sidebars she always attributes to their author and gives the title of the work in which that quote appeared. But her copious quotations in the body of the text are without footnotes. Tucker says, "Quotes within the body of the text are taken from original sources, most of which can be found online at such sites as *Medieval Sourcebook*" (12).

To my mind, Tucker undermines her own accuracy as a historian by not providing the reader the specific and original source of her quotes. She gives me the impression that she is not striving to be historically accurate, but only to entertain. If "most" of the quotes can be found on a certain website, one is left wondering where the rest can be found. And one can only hope that the site *Medieval Sourcebook* is available to posterity for generations to come, exactly as Tucker saw it when she borrowed from it, so that the reader can always refer to it. But the nature of internet sites is that they come and go. Historians and scholars demonstrate their reliability by using footnotes, even when striving to be entertaining.

Second, Tucker finds one subtheme in this parade that struck me odd. Tucker feels constrained to let us know that Mary of Egypt

was a sex addict (93), that Peter Abelard was a scholar with sex appeal (164), and that Aimee Temple McPherson brought "sex appeal to the stage" (451). In addition, she provides us with "Everyday Life" vignettes on "Same Sex Love" in Charlemagne's empire (140), "Rape in the Middle Ages" (200), and "Bundling in New England" (390). I am no prude. I do not ask to be sheltered from such information. But this is an essential aspect of church history? Again, this says more about her desire to be entertaining, and about the age in which she wrote the book, than it says about the history of which she writes.

Third, Tucker's inclusion of a four letter word beginning with "d" (12) is offensive to any pious Christian. Rightly used, this "d" word refers to God's prerogative to condemn the wicked to everlasting punishment in hell. The flippant use of the word as an adjective is a vain use of God's name, in violation of the third commandment. That Tucker does not use the word herself, but includes it in a quote from Henry Ford, does not matter. The history of the church ought to be the history of the pious use of the names, attributes, honors, and prerogatives of Jehovah God.

Fourth, the reader must understand that, while much of what Tucker writes is historically accurate, she slips in her own twist or interpretation which is not always accurate.

Sometimes the reader can assume that, and other times Tucker tells the reader as much. So realistic is her writing style, that although Tucker presents Pope Joan as a legend (147-148), the reader almost believes that there was a female pope, disguised as a man (Pope John VIII, A.D. 853), who gives birth to a baby while en route to a papal appearance. Is it true that "the chair used for the papal consecration was designed with a hole so that an inspector can verify gender with certainty" (148)? No, it is not, and Tucker tells the reader as much. But clearly, her goal in this book is, at least in part, to entertain.

Yet, in other places she is not so up front. That Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms and asked for a day to give his answer is a historical fact. But of all the biographies of Luther which I have in my study, none so much as suggests that Luther was truly, internally, "tempted to recant, remembering the fate of Jan Hus" (227).

Fifth, Tucker gives occasion to the reader who loves the

Reformed faith (the doctrines of sovereign grace) to question whether she loves the same. She does not explicitly deny the doctrine of sovereign, double, unconditional predestination, but when she treats the doctrine she makes comments that lead one to wonder. One example, referring to Aquinas: "His conclusions are often less than profound, as on the topic of predestination" (171). If her following comments on Aquinas' view are truly what he said, and faithful to his intent, then his defense of double predestination was quite profound, considering the times in which he lived!

Sixth, her ecumenical spirit manifests itself repeatedly. By this I do not refer to her appreciation for the catholic church, gathered out of every nation, consisting of men and women of every skin color and language. Rather, I refer to her assumption that all professing Christians, by virtue of professing to be Christians, are brothers and sisters in Christ. She and her husband worshiped in an Eastern Orthodox church. "The people in the pews seemed sincere and no less genuinely Christian than those in my own church. Yet there was a chasm separating us. That we were asked not to participate in the Eucharist was as much their loss as ours" (117).

Of course, the personal position of a history on any issue or matter does not mean that the history book which he or she produces is of little value. This book is not of little value. But, as with any history book, it must be read asking the question: is the author's portrayal of and evaluation of this history correct? ●

Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture, David Van Drunen. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010. Pp. 208, (paper), $16.99. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

David Van Drunen has accomplished something that borders on the miraculous. An Orthodox Presbyterian theologian, a professor at Westminster West Seminary in California, and treating an issue forever closely linked with Abraham Kuyper and with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, as Van Drunen

knows well, he has managed to write a book on Christianity and culture without discussing the issue of a common grace of God. Indeed, he *mentions* common grace only once and then in passing. Even the single mention queerly qualifies common grace as being "providential": "God's providential common grace" (181).

This feat of ignoring common grace—beyond any shadow of doubt *deliberately* ignoring common grace—is, however, not praiseworthy. Not even in the judgment of an avowed enemy of common grace, as this reviewer is. Such is the very essence of the transformational conception of the cultural calling of the Christian on the part of those whom Van Drunen opposes, and such is the very nature of the discussion of the cultural calling of the church and Christian in Reformed circles, at least from the time of Abraham Kuyper, that any Reformed treatment of the issue *must* openly consider the theory of common grace, whether to defend and promote it, or to reject it.

Simply to ignore common grace in a consideration of the Christian and culture is theologically irresponsible at best or cowardly at worst. The latter is not impossible. In this case, the Reformed theologian, though he clearly sees the doctrinal error and the disastrous practical effects of rooting the Christian's participation in culture in a common grace of God, shies from condemning common grace, lest he bring down on himself the scorn and reprobation of the theological establishment. Silence, then, is the best policy. The best policy, but not an honorable policy.

The book is yet another attempt to answer the question with which Reformed and Presbyterian churches and theologians are forever struggling, and over which they are constantly fighting, and even splitting: the relation of the Christian to "culture." What is in view by "culture" is not so much the creation itself and its ordinances, for example, marriage, family, labor, and government, as the entire way of life of a society and nation in the creation and its ordinances. Inasmuch as this culture is corrupted, indeed controlled, by ungodly men and women, indeed, by Satan himself (II Cor. 4:4), the subject is the relation of the Christian to a wicked world.

One prominent answer by Reformed theologians to the question of the relation of the Christian to culture is that Christians are called by God to "redeem" and

"transform" the culture, so that in some superficial way the culture becomes "Christian." This view was powerfully introduced into the Reformed community by the Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, and his colleague, Herman Bavinck. Kuyper proposed that the spiritual power of this enterprise is a common grace of God, that is, a cultural grace of God that Christians share with unbelievers. The Christian Reformed Church and its schools, especially but by no means exclusively Calvin College, are the main proponents of this huge cultural calling of Reformed Christians. In its church dogma of common grace, adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, the Christian Reformed Church bound this conception of the relation of the Christian and culture upon all its members.

Raising hope in the Reformed reader, Van Drunen opposes the prevalent, popular explanation of the relation of the Christian to culture that advocates redemption and transformation.

Why he rejects this view of the relation of Christian to culture, Van Drunen does not inform the reader, except to note in a general way that the view is not grounded in Scripture. Against the foundation of the transformationalist and redemptive conception, namely, common grace, he offers no objection. Of the glaring effect of the transformationalist view and program, namely, sheer worldliness, he takes no note.

In place of the redemptive, transformational view of the Christian's relation to culture, Van Drunen proposes a two kingdoms dichotomy of the Christian's life. His church life he lives in gratitude for God's redemption of him by Jesus Christ and in separation from the ungodly. This is life in one of the kingdoms of God.

The rest of his life, what could be called his cultural life, that is, his life in society as a worker, as a student, as a citizen of a particular, earthly nation, the Christian lives as in a kingdom other than, and alongside, the spiritual kingdom of Christ. This kingdom is merely earthly and temporal. Without yielding to temptation to gross sin and while maintaining obedience to the law of God as best he can, the Christian lives in this earthly kingdom as in the sphere of God's general providence. He lives a life that he has in common with the ungodly.

The use of the adjective "common" is pervasive and dominant in Van Drunen's description of the cultural life of the Christian among and with the ungodly. The

kingdom of the cultural life of the Christian is a "common kingdom" (79f.). In this common kingdom, the Christian finds himself in a "cultural commonality" with the ungodly (77).

The impression left by this two kingdoms conception of the Christian life is that on Monday morning the Christian lowers the flag of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and raises over himself instead the flag of the United States, or of Canada, or of some other nation.

So far does Van Drunen carry this division in the Christian's life and so far does he make plain the meaning and implications of the bifurcation that, by way of example, he denies that the Reformed Christian has a calling to establish, maintain, and use good, Christian schools in the education of his children. For Van Drunen, the use of the state schools is a perfectly legitimate option for Reformed parents.

> How believing parents should educate their children is a matter of Christian liberty… Non-Christians often have made greater contributions to human learning than Christians have…. We should wish to learn from unbelievers whom God has enabled to understand wonderful things about his creation…. We impoverish our children educationally if we unduly cut them off from the accomplishments and contributions of unbelievers…. There are still many excellent teachers and fine learning opportunities in public schools (182-187).

With significant appeal to the covenant with Noah, which Van Drunen regards as the "common" covenant of a "common kingdom," Van Drunen declares that teaching and learning the subjects of the educational curriculum are "joint activities of the *common kingdom*" (179; emphasis is Van Drunen's).

At a time in history when good Christian schools must be vigorously defended and promoted by the spirit and wording of Article 21 of the Church Order of Dordt as never before, Van Drunen denies their necessity. The effect of such an attitude on the part of the seminary professor at Westminster West upon future pastors in Reformed churches will be the death of Christian schools in those fellowships. What fathers and mothers reared up at great cost and huge sacrifice, as on behalf of a divine calling in the covenant of grace, Dr. David Van Drunen casually undermines.

The Christian school with all its incalculable benefits for the covenant children of God is a casualty of the theory of two kingdoms.

In support of his advocacy of the education of covenant children by unbelievers in schools that are forbidden even to mention God (except in the cursing by teachers and students alike) and that are committed, by law, to the profaning of the name of God by refusing to "sanctify, glorify, and praise [the name] in all [God's] works," especially His works in creation and providence (Heid. Cat., LD 47), Van Drunen appeals to "natural revelation": "natural revelation…comes to all human beings equally under the Noahic covenant" (180). What Van Drunen inexcusably ignores is what unbelieving, ungodly teachers do with natural revelation. According to Romans 1, unbelieving people, including teachers and professors in the state schools, hold this natural revelation under in unrighteousness, so that they do not glorify God, but change the truth of God into a lie, in the vanity of their imaginations and in the folly of their darkened hearts (vv. 18-32).

Van Drunen and all Reformed parents who are of a mind to follow his advice concerning the education of their children would do well not to base their decision to abandon the Christian school on natural revelation.

Altogether apart from the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of God with the children of believers and the Christian principle of godly upbringing that the doctrine implies, as Ephesians 6:1-4 makes explicit, and that parents promise at the baptism of their children according to the Reformed Form for the Administration of Baptism, is Van Drunen ignorant of what is going on in the state schools in America in AD 2014?

It is true that there are two distinct kingdoms for the Christian: the spiritual, eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ and the earthly, temporal kingdom of whatever nation he or she inhabits. It is also true that King Jesus rules all in two distinct ways. He governs the church—His spiritual kingdom (Heid. Cat., LD 48)—by His grace; He governs the world outside the church, including all earthly nations, by His almighty power.

But it is not true that the Christian lives in the two distinct kingdoms in two different ways, by virtue of two different powers, according to two different standards, and with two different goals. It is not true that Christians

live a "common" cultural life in "commonality" with the ungodly.

Rather, the Christian lives all his life, culturally and spiritually, or religiously, as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. The one power of his life is the redemptive grace of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit of Christ. The one standard is the very spiritual law of God, which is both upon his heart and before him on the pages of the Bible. The one goal is the perfect revelation of the kingdom of heaven in the day of Jesus Christ.

As Van Drunen rightly contends, the motive of the Christian is not a common grace redemption of society, or of the entire inhabited world. Neither is the motive the postmillennial transformation of America, much less of all the world, or even of Grand Rapids, Michigan, or of Moscow, Idaho, or of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, into the kingdom of God.

Another weakness of Van Drunen's polemic against the transformational conception of the Christian life is its failure to expose the postmillennial implication of the conception.

But the motive of the Christian with regard to all his cultural life is to let the light of God's holiness and truth shine into the darkness of the kingdom of this world, whose god is Satan, so that his life glorifies God and leaves the godless without excuse.

The word and theological concept that explains the relation of the Christian to the world and that would put an end to the continual search of Reformed theologians for understanding of this relation is *antithesis*.

Not *redemption* of the culture.

Not *transformation* of the culture.

Not the *division* of the life of the Christian into two distinct, even different, lives.

But *antithesis*.

That is, absolute spiritual separation of the Christian from the ungodly world and its way of life, or culture, even as the Christian lives fully and actively in the culture that is controlled by the ungodly.

The biblical basis of Van Drunen's two kingdoms view of the Christian life in the world is God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 9, just as the biblical basis of Abraham Kuyper's common grace view of culture and of the Christian's participation in culture was the Noahic covenant of Genesis 9. In the theology of Van Drunen, the Christian lives a "common" cultural life with the ungodly by virtue of God's "common" covenant with him

and the ungodly, which "common covenant" is supposed to be the covenant made with Noah. "In his covenant with Noah God entered covenantal relationship with the entire human race (and with the entire creation), promising to preserve its cultural activities…. This was the formal establishment of the 'common kingdom'" (29).

Van Drunen's understanding of the covenant with Noah is mistaken, as was Kuyper's. The covenant with Noah was not essentially different from the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 and with Jesus Christ (Gal. 3). It was not a covenant with every human without exception, the reprobate ungodly as well as the elect. It was not a covenant concerned only with earthly and temporal benefits. It was not a covenant that may be described, as Van Drunen does describe it, as a covenant of "cultural commonality."

This mistaken understanding of the covenant with Noah is fundamental to Van Drunen's bifurcation of the Christian life, as also of his benign conception of the cultural life of the ungodly. In the theology of Van Drunen, God Himself has arranged that the Christian live his life in two different kingdoms, under two distinct covenants.

Although Van Drunen studiously avoids calling the covenant with Noah a covenant of "common grace," the covenant with Noah has for him the same significance that it had for Kuyper, who viewed and called it a covenant of common grace. Van Drunen acknowledges this when he declares that the covenant with Noah provides "common blessings" to all humans, godly and ungodly alike (77).

The truth about the covenant with Noah is that it was a revelation of the full breadth and scope of the covenant of God with Jesus Christ and the elect church out of all nations in Him. This covenant extends to all nations, the source of which was Noah and his three sons, in the elect among them. It extends also to the creation itself, the heaven and the earth, and to the different creatures in the creation, including the animals. The covenant with Noah made known the truth about the one covenant of God that John 3:16 extols: "God so loved *the world* (Greek: "*kosmos*").

One New Testament passage that explains the covenant with Noah of Genesis 9 is Romans 8:19-22: "The creation [Greek: "*ktisis*] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of

the children of God." Another is Colossians 1:13-20: God's saving work in Jesus Christ is the reconciliation of "all things unto himself…whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

Because Van Drunen's criticism of the transformational conception of the Christian life fails to penetrate to the root of the error in the false doctrine of a common grace of God, and because the positive description of the Christian life divides this life and neglects solidly to ground it in the antithesis, the book fails to achieve its noble, and much needed, purpose.

Reformed and Presbyterian Christianity in North America is still at a loss with regard to the Christian life in the world—the relation of the Christian to culture.

How shameful!

How exceedingly dangerous!

How unnecessary! ●

Samuel Rutherford: An Introduction to His Theology. Ed. Matthew Vogan. Edinburgh: Scottish Reformation Society, 2012. Pp. xii + 354 (paper). $30.00. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

As the title suggests, the book is a collection of essays summarizing and analyzing the theology of the Scottish Presbyterian theologian, Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661). Rutherford was an able, significant churchman in difficult times for the Presbyterians in Great Britain. He was a Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly. He was also a prolific writer. His theological works have influenced Scottish Presbyterianism to the present day, as this volume demonstrates.

Friend and foe alike would acknowledge him to have been one of the most important theologians Scotland has produced.

Such was Rutherford's reputation in his own time that the Reformed churches in the Netherlands offered him the position of professor of theology in the University of Utrecht.

As is usual in books that are collections of essays by various writers, the book is of varying worth. The essays that are the book's content are divided into six main sections: "Revaluing Rutherford's Theological Contribution"; "Rutherford and Practical Theology"; "Rutherford and Covenant Theology"; "Ruth-

erford and Ecclesiastical Theology"; "Rutherford and Political Theology"; and "Rutherford and the Covenanted Reformation."

Another worthwhile feature is the inclusion of sections of Rutherford's own theological writings. The excerpts manifest a vivid, even florid, often fanciful style of writing. Some may be attracted to this style. It has the tendency, however, of obscuring the precise doctrinal teaching of the Scottish Presbyterian and the precise doctrine itself that is under discussion. For a theologian, precision of expression must control the style of writing. This does not, however, require a pedantic style.

Criticism of Hoeksema

Of particular interest to this reviewer and undoubtedly to the readers of this journal is Sherman Isbell's treatment of Rutherford's doctrine of the covenant, "Samuel Rutherford and the Preached Covenant" (167-191). In his presentation and defense of Rutherford's doctrine of the covenant, Isbell delivers himself of severe criticism of the covenant theology of Herman Hoeksema. Criticism of Hoeksema and of the Protestant Reformed Churches is a proclivity of Isbell.

The issue is Rutherford's and Isbell's belief that the preaching of the gospel is divine (saving) grace for all to whom the preaching comes, especially in the "visible church"—the covenant community—those who perish in unbelief, according to God's eternal reprobation of them, as well as those who are saved by the grace of the preaching, according to God's eternal election of them. Isbell quotes Rutherford teaching a universal, saving grace of God for all who hear the gospel, reprobate and elect alike.

This grace for all is "saving," not because it effectually saves, for it does not (thus betraying itself as not, in fact, the grace of God at all). But, it is "saving," in the theology of Sherman Isbell, because it is of a saving nature, because it purposes salvation, and because its end would be salvation if the sinner performed the requisite "condition" upon which the salvation this grace aims at depends (according to Isbell). Isbell's "grace" is saving in precisely the sense in which the grace of God is saving in the theology of James Arminius.

> It's a state of common grace to be within the visible church…. The same blessings of Abraham come on us Gentiles. But he and all his seed were blessed and in grace by the ex-

> ternal call of the covenant…. And this external calling is of grace and so grace, no merit, as well as predestination to life is grace, or for grace. For whosoever are called, not because they are elect, but because freely loved of such a God and without merit called…they are in a state of grace. But so are all within the visible church…. And external covenanting with God is of itself free grace and a singular favour bestowed of God (176; the omissions are Rutherford's, or Isbell's).

Isbell approves this declaration of universal, impotent (saving) grace in the preaching of the gospel. This, for Isbell, is the "offer of the gospel," as the offer is popularly held today among Presbyterian and Reformed theologians.

Thus, Rutherford apparently and Isbell certainly commit themselves to the Arminianism exposed and condemned by the Canons of Dordt: (saving) grace for and towards all; the failure of the grace to save many towards whom it is directed by God; the necessary implication that the explanation of the salvation of some by this universal grace is not the sovereignty of the grace (for then all would be saved by it), but the accepting will of the sinner.

Revelatory Peculiarities of Isbell's Criticism

To a Sherman Isbell, the Reformed faith puts these questions. First, why is it fundamental Presbyterian orthodoxy to confess particular grace in predestination and particular grace in the redemption of the cross, but universal grace in the preaching of the gospel, which preaching God intends as the realizing of predestination and redemption?

Second, why is it false doctrine, subject to the sharp criticism of a Sherman Isbell, for a Reformed theologian or a Reformed church to confess particular grace in the preaching, whereas it is orthodoxy to confess particular grace in predestination and in the redemption of the cross?

Third, how does a Sherman Isbell harmonize a will of God for the salvation of many more in the preaching of the gospel than it is the determining will of God to save in His counsel (will) of predestination and in His accomplishment of redemption in the cross?

And, fourth, why such fierce criticism of a theologian (Hoeksema) and of churches (Protestant Reformed) for consistently

viewing the grace of preaching as particular, in view of Isbell's own profession of the particularity of grace in predestination and in redemption, especially in light of the truth that God in the preaching is not at loose ends, but is realizing His decree of predestination and the redemption of the cross of Jesus?

There is something puzzling about the severity and persistence of an Isbell's criticism of the confession of particular grace in the preaching. Just this doctrine in an ecclesiastical and theological atmosphere of universalizing the grace of God! Just the theologian who denies universal grace in the preaching, among multitudes who are advocating universal grace in all areas of salvation, from the counsel of God to final salvation!

So peculiar is this insistent criticism of a theologian (Herman Hoeksema) and of churches (PRC) that are "guilty" of nothing more than extending the particularity of grace in predestination and in the cross to the preaching of the gospel, that it suggests a grave weakness on the part of the critic. Regardless that he pays lip service to particular grace in predestination and in the cross, as a creedal Presbyterian is bound by the Westminster Standards to do at the very least, the truth of particular, sovereign grace does not have an Isbell's heart. Universal grace, dependent for its efficacy on the sinner's performing a "condition," has his heart.

A Conditional Covenant

In keeping with Rutherford's thinking, Isbell affirms, Isbell grounds God's universal, impotent (saving) grace in a conditional covenant. Here, the universally gracious offer is restricted to the "visible church," not all of whom are elect. "Christ himself through the preaching offers grace to all in the visible church, including reprobates" (184). In light of Isbell's own explanation of this "offer," what is meant is that God on His part has a gracious attitude towards the reprobates, desires their salvation, and, in this gracious desire, makes salvation available to them, if only they will accept the offer and perform the condition. "Christ himself… conditionally offers grace through the ministry of the gospel in the visible church" (183).

Such a conception of preaching in the congregation leads Isbell to affirm a conditional covenant. According to Isbell, claiming to follow the lead of Rutherford, all members of the visible church are in the covenant of grace, that is, Esau as well as

Jacob. God, therefore, graciously offers, and even promises, salvation to all. But the covenant and its salvation are "conditional." Whether covenant grace actually saves anyone among all those to whom the grace is directed depends upon one's fulfilling the condition. And the condition is faith.

Several miserable, un-Reformed and anti-Reformed features obviously disfigure this presentation of the covenant of God in Jesus Christ. Covenant grace is resistible. Covenant salvation depends upon the will of the child or other member of the "visible church." Faith is not part of the covenant grace of God, freely bestowed upon some—the elect—contrary to the confession of the Reformed faith in Heads 3&4 of the Canons of Dordt, but a "work" of the sinner upon which the saving, covenant grace of God depends—a "condition." Dordt, I remind the reader, confessed as Reformed orthodoxy that "faith is…to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man…" (Canons of Dordt, 3&4:14). Dordt denied that "God on His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men…" (Canons of Dordt, 3&4: Rejection of Errors 5).

Isbell's doctrine of a gracious, but conditional covenant with all members of the "visible church," reprobate and elect alike, is the false gospel of Arminianism, which the Reformed faith has condemned in the Canons of Dordt and which the Presbyterian Standards, which Isbell professes, also condemn.

Under the pressure of the Reformed creeds, a Sherman Isbell may squirm and equivocate, and even in his defense of himself contradict what he has just affirmed. Isbell does exactly this: "Though life and salvation under the covenant of grace are offered to sinners generally, only the elect will receive Christ, for only in them does the Holy Spirit create faith" (184). But the contrary doctrine that he has already passionately affirmed and defended, and that he does not recant, is sheer Arminian heresy: universal, impotent (saving) grace operative (inoperative, in reality) in a conditional covenant.

In contrast to the theology of a Sherman Isbell, the clear, consistent, biblical gospel is the truth of particular, sovereign grace, originating in the eternal decree of election, grounded in the particular redemption of the cross, and made effectual in the elect, redeemed child of God

by the preaching of the gospel. This is grace for, to, and in the elect alone, not only in the result, but also in the divine purpose, although the preaching of this gospel of grace comes to all hearers as a savor of life unto life to the elect and as a savor of death unto death to the reprobate (II Cor. 2:14-17).

In addition to his doctrinal heterodoxy, Isbell suffers from serious misunderstanding, or misrepresentation, or both, of vital doctrinal truths, as also from equally serious ambiguity, indeed, misstatement, at crucial junctures in the debate.

Evidently, in keeping with the theology of Rutherford, Isbell understands the promiscuous *preaching* of the promise to be the same as the preaching of a promiscuous *promise*—a promise made by God to reprobate and elect alike. This is misunderstanding. Gospel preaching is the promiscuous preaching of a particular promise. The promise is for those, and only those, who believe, according to divine election. The unbeliever hears the promise. He hears it in its particularity. He realizes that it is not for him, wickedly, disobediently remaining in unbelief.

Q. 31 of the WLC

Although he quotes Q. 31 of the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), Isbell refuses to recognize that this clear, authoritative confession concerning God's establishment of the covenant of grace with Christ Himself and, in Him, with all the elect, and only the elect, utterly overthrows Isbell's entire covenant project. This project is to extend the covenant to include the reprobate, at least, all the reprobate in the visible church.

The issue raised by Isbell is the question, "With whom does God make His covenant of grace?" Or, "Who are included in the covenant of grace?" Both as to the doctrine in view and virtually word-for-word, this is Q. 31 of Isbell's own WLC: "With whom was the covenant of grace made? The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed."

Why will the Presbyterian not honestly confront his own creed? Why will he not submit himself to it at this point and with regard to this vital issue, which is the very subject of Isbell's chapter in the book on Rutherford? Why does he not acknowledge that this creedal article settles the issue of the relation between election and

the covenant? Still more gravely, why does he openly violate and oppose this article of his own creed?

Not only do Isbell and his Presbyterian confederates deny that God has made His covenant of grace with "all the elect," and with them only. But they also deny that, primarily and fundamentally, God made His covenant with Jesus Christ Himself personally, as the "second Adam," or covenant head, so that the extension of the covenant to mere humans is due to their being Christ's "seed." Every form of the teaching that the covenant is made with more or others than the elect is a denial that God made His covenant in the first and fundamental instance with Jesus Christ.

WLC, Q. 31 is clear, decisive resolution of the issue that, after more than four hundred years, is still bedeviling the Reformed community: "With whom has God established the covenant of grace?"

To this question, Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches give exactly the same answer as does the WLC in Q. 31. Why then does the answer of Hoeksema to the great question show him to have been hyper-Calvinistic, antinomian, and outside the Reformed pale, in the estimation of a Sherman Isbell? Are not these charges against Hoeksema more revealing of those who make the charges than they are of Hoeksema?

Not content to hasten over Q. 31 of his creed (and Isbell is obviously in a great hurry at this point and with regard to this question and answer) and not content to refuse the doctrine of this question standing in the controversy over the issue, whether God establishes the covenant with the elect or with all in the visible church, Isbell adds to his fault by falsifying the doctrine itself as found in Q. 31 of the WLC. Isbell's very brief explanation of the question is that "Question 31 speaks of Christ's purchase of covenant blessings for the elect" (182).

But Q. 31 of the WLC does *not* speak of Christ's purchase of covenant blessings for the elect. It *implies* this. Indeed, it implies more than this. It implies that Christ has purchased covenant blessings *only* for the elect, so that the cross's purchase of covenant blessings exposes as erroneous the teaching that God on His part sincerely desires that reprobate persons share in the covenant blessings of the cross.

But the fact is that Q. 31 of the

WLC does not speak of Christ's purchase of covenant blessings for the elect. Q. 31 declares in the simple, straight-forward language that every layman can easily understand, to say nothing of the educated theologian, that God *made* the covenant of grace with Christ and, in Him, with all the elect.

Q. 31, on the very face of it, answers the question with which Isbell busies himself in his chapter on Rutherford: "With whom has God made the covenant of grace?"

To answer this question, as Isbell does, that God, in fact, makes the covenant with many humans outside of Christ, with humans who are on their own, apart from Christ's headship of them, and, indeed, with reprobates is flagrant violation and stark contradiction of Q. 31 of the WLC, Isbell's own creed.

At the very least, Q. 31 of his creed should incline a Presbyterian theologian to be much more sympathetic, and kinder, toward Herman Hoeksema than is the harsh Isbell. Why must Isbell vilify one who confesses that God made the covenant with Christ and with all those who are in Him, as their Head, by election? Why cannot Sherman Isbell and his cohorts publicly acknowledge that a Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches are faithful to the doctrine and theology of Q. 31 of the WLC? And, therefore, worthy of a place at the table around which Reformed and Presbyterians churches and theologians are debating the issue, with whom God has made His covenant of grace.

Isbell's fierce attack on Hoeksema for confessing the doctrine of Q. 31 of the WLC and Isbell's own shabby treatment of the doctrine of the question raise the suspicion that Isbell himself does not love, and even dissents from, the doctrine of Q. 31.

Inaccurate Theology and Absurd Charges

Isbell comes off badly in other respects as well. He makes the theologically inaccurate, factually mistaken, and absurd charge that Hoeksema's rejection of universal, impotent (saving) grace (the "well-meant offer") shows him to have been guilty of "antinomianism" (184).

Antinomianism is the error of denying that the law is the rule of life of sinners who are saved by grace. Hoeksema's rejection of the "well-meant offer" was not antinomian. It had nothing to do with antinomism. It was not antinomism according to

the broadest extension of that false doctrine. Hoeksema did not deny that God in the gospel *commands* all who hear to repent and believe—the "external call of the gospel." He did not question the responsibility of the sinner to obey the command by believing, even though the unregenerated sinner is incapable of doing so.

Hoeksema denied the "well-meant offer," but he did not deny the "well-meant offer" because it calls on all sinners to believe on Jesus Christ and promises to all who do believe that they will be saved.

He denied the "well-meant offer" as it is taught by such as Sherman Isbell because it teaches that God is gracious to all sinners with a grace, or love, that desires (wills) their salvation and, in this grace, makes Christ and salvation available to them, dependent upon their acceptance of the offer. Hoeksema denied the "well-meant offer," whether regarding the covenant or regarding missions because it makes faith a condition upon which salvation depends.

To accuse this doctrine of antinomism is theological ignorance and mere name-calling. Such tactics, even in theological controversy, are dishonorable, and discrediting—not to the one who is called names but to the one who does the calling.

That Hoeksema limited the external call to the elect is sheer, inexcusable falsehood: "Hoeksema defines external calling as something applicable rather to the elect" (187, 188). Contrary to Isbell's charge, Hoeksema taught that the external call of God in the preaching of the gospel comes in seriousness to all who hear the preaching, reprobate and elect alike.

> The external calling through the Word…is in a certain sense general, although it does not reach all men…. The fact remains that many are called, but few are chosen. Also the calling through the gospel does not come only to the elect, but also to the reprobate according to the good pleasure of God…. Through this calling the responsibility of man and his ethical character are maintained. God speaks to him through that gospel. In that gospel He calls him to repentance, to conversion and faith…. He presents to him the way of sin as a way that displeases God and that makes the sinner the object of God's wrath…. Moreover, in that gospel He opens for him that repents a way to be reconciled to God…. All this is being

> preached in the gospel, and is preached without distinction to all that are under the gospel, also to the reprobate. Moreover, this calling through the gospel is distinguished… in this, that it opens a way of redemption and salvation and gives the hope of eternal life in the way of faith and repentance (Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, RFPA, 1966, 470, 471).

Isbell's clumsy attempt to defend his view of the preaching as universal grace by appealing to the traditional Reformed distinction between God's revealed will and God's secret will is confusion, or ignorance. There is such a distinction. But it has nothing to do with a grace of God for all who hear the gospel, or with a desire of God for the salvation of all who come under the preaching of the gospel.

God's revealed will is His command to the sinner, making known the sinner's duty. To Pharaoh, it was the command, "Let my people go!" To the sinner under the preaching of the gospel, it is the command, "Repent, and believe on Jesus Christ!"

God's secret will is His own counsel, what He has determined to do with the sinner to whom the command comes, and by means of the command itself. With regard to Pharaoh, it was the secret will of God, as concerned Pharaoh himself, to harden Pharaoh's heart *by the command itself*, so that God might justly condemn, destroy, and damn the Egyptian king. With regard to sinners today to whom the gospel comes, God's secret will is the salvation of some—the elect—and the hardening and damnation of others—the reprobate—by means of the external call, or command, itself. Regarding an Esau, God's secret will was Esau's damnation. Regarding a Jacob, God's secret will was Jacob's salvation (cf. Romans 9).

Contrary to Isbell's supposition and claim, there is in this distinction absolutely no basis for a doctrine of a universal, saving will of God in the preaching of the gospel.

Isbell's construal of the traditional Reformed distinction between God's secret and revealed will posits contradiction in God. According to the mistaken notion of Isbell, with His secret will God wills the salvation only of some. With His revealed will, God wills the salvation of all. With His secret will, God is God in the salvation of sinners. With His

revealed will, God is dependent upon the will of sinners in saving humans.

According to Isbell's doctrine of the revealed and the secret wills of God, God is Himself a confused, conflicted Being. He Himself is torn by contradictory wills. Which of the two wills will prevail? Which of the two wills will Presbyterian preachers emphasize, and in the end decide on, to the detriment of the other will? The answer to this latter question is clear from the theology of Sherman Isbell.

This now is Presbyterian orthodoxy according to one of its preachers. And on the basis of such a monstrous notion of the will of God, which in reality is one and unified, not two and contradictory, Isbell wars against the truth that God is gracious in the gospel to the elect alone.

Will and Desire, but Not Intention

Isbell's defense of himself and his theology of universal grace in the preaching of the gospel against Hoeksema's criticism of Isbell's theology is abominable. It is significant that Isbell finds it necessary to defend his theology of the gospel call as grace to all. He himself is aware that his theology is dubious on its very face. But in defending himself, Isbell refuses squarely to face the issue. The issue, which Isbell himself raises in his contribution to the book on Rutherford, is simply this: Is God gracious to all in the preaching of the gospel? And, if He is, how can this grace to many fail in saving them? With these questions, the issue is, how does grace to all in the preaching harmonize with the Presbyterian and Reformed confessional doctrine of double predestination?

Finding it necessary to address these issues, Isbell thinks to evade the force of the pertinent, penetrating questions, and thus maintain his credentials as an orthodox Presbyterian theologian, by affirming that "God never intends the salvation of the reprobate" (189). Thus, a theologian talks out of both sides of his mouth. Thus, a theologian with his back to the wall delivers himself by verbal tricks.

Consider: Isbell argues, with passion and at length, on behalf of a gracious will of God for the salvation of all who hear the preaching of the gospel—God in grace wills the salvation of all. Isbell contends that God sincerely *desires* the salvation of all in His grace towards them. He insists that the gospel is a well-meant offer to all on the part of God, who

is gracious to all and who desires the salvation of all, which offer depends upon sinners performing the "condition" of believing.

And then, when creedal Reformed theology confronts Isbell with the question how this doctrine is to be harmonized with the Presbyterian and Reformed truths of predestination, limited atonement, efficacious grace, and the total depravity of the sinner, Isbell takes refuge in the assertion, "God does not *intend* the salvation of the reprobate." He graciously *wills* the salvation of the reprobate; He graciously *desires* the salvation of the reprobate; He graciously *offers* salvation to the reprobate; but He does not *intend* the salvation of the reprobate. This last statement is supposed to be the deliverance of Isbell as still a creedal Presbyterian, despite all the preceding statements of universal, ineffectual grace.

Isbell's defense of his theology is as sorry a business as is his theology. To teach a universal (saving) grace of God that fails to save many is to teach a frustrated God; inefficacious grace; and salvation in the end by the acceptance, that is, the will, of the sinner. If God has a gracious will for the salvation of all and if God graciously desires the salvation of all, God does, in fact, *intend*, the salvation of all. Will and desire are intention. And even if one grants Isbell his preposterous defense of himself by allowing a distinction between "will" and "desire" on the one hand and "intention" on the other hand, the God of the theology of Sherman Isbell is a God who wills and desires that which does not come to pass and a God whose (saving) grace fails to save many.

Intention or no intention, the Reformed faith condemns the doctrine of a universal, ineffectual (saving) grace of God.

The PRC and the Bible on the Call of the Gospel

In conclusion, let the reader, especially the reader who has read the article of Sherman Isbell, be clear as to the Reformed theology of Herman Hoeksema and of the Protestant Reformed Churches today.

There is no rejection of the distinction between God's revealed will and His secret will.

There is absolutely no sympathy for, or concession to, the heresy of antinomism.

There is no fear, much less denial, of the responsibility of every human, particularly under the preaching of the gospel. But, contrary to Isbell, this responsibility does not mean that salvation

is both one hundred per cent the work of God and one hundred per cent the work of the sinner who is saved (190). On the contrary, the entire work of salvation, from eternity past to eternity future, from election to the resurrection of the body, is the work of God, and the work of God alone. It is one hundred per cent God's work, and zero per cent the work of the saved sinner. It is true that we are, and are called to be, active in believing and obeying, but even our spiritual activity is God's working in us (Phil. 2:10, 11).

There is in the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches no hesitation to call every sinner to repent and believe, with urgency. Nor is there any aversion to promising in the name of God that all who do repent and believe shall be saved.

But Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches deny that the preaching of the gospel is grace to all.

We deny also that the covenant of grace is established with all the members of the "visible church" and that a universal covenant grace is conditioned upon the faith of the members. Regarding the question, with whom has God made the covenant of grace? our answer is Q. 31 of the WLC, without equivocation: with Jesus Christ personally and with the elect in Him. There are many in the sphere of the covenant. Only the elect are in the covenant; only the elect are covenant friends of God.

To say nothing of Calvin, particularly in his *Calvin's Calvinism*; of de Cock and Van Velzen; and of Bavinck, has Sherman Isbell never read the biblical resolution to the problem he addresses in his essay in the volume on Rutherford?

Has he never read Galatians 3? God made the covenant by promise with Abraham's seed, who is Christ, and in Christ with all who are Christ's (Gal. 3:16, 29).

Has he never read Romans 9-11? "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). "The children of the promise are counted for the seed," to whom and for whom is the promise of the covenant (Rom. 9:8). Among the children of believing parents, in the "visible church," God has "mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18).

On these rocks of the truth of salvation by particular, sovereign grace have been smashed all the attacks on the Reformed gospel of grace by proponents of universal, ineffectual grace in the past.

On these same rocks will be smashed the attacks on the Reformed gospel of grace by proponents of universal, ineffectual, *covenant* grace today. ●

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