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(AD 1635-1711)

Minister of the Gospel in Rotterdam

THE CHRISTIAN'S REASONABLE SERVICE

in which Divine Truths concerning the

COVENANT OF GRACE

are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated

as well as

The Administration of this Covenant in the Old and New Testaments

by

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Volume 2 of 4

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Preface

This volume begins with Wilhelmus à Brakel's ecclesiology. The fact that his ecclesiology follows his Christology is a departure from the sequence in which the six loci of Reformed theology are traditionally presented: theology, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology.

One might ask what à Brakel's motivation might have been for reversing soteriology and ecclesiology in light of the fact that this traditional sequence is found, for instance, in the Belgic Confession—the confession of his church. Could it be that his wholehearted commitment to covenant theology moved him to focus first on the corporate and organic outworking of the eternal covenant transactions of a triune God in the establishment of a covenant community, His church—that community where His eternal good pleasure to form a people for Himself becomes a reality and prospers by the hand of the Mediator of that covenant, Jesus Christ? Could the Anabaptist movement with its individualistic theology have moved him to focus on the corporate operations of the Holy Spirit before dealing with His work in the hearts of individual sinners, realizing that in saving the elect it is the Father's purpose to prepare a body for the Son of His good pleasure—His Son whom He gave “to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:22-23)? Could à Brakel's reversal of these two loci be an expression of the profound truth expressed in Ps 87:2, “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob”?

When considering the whole of à Brakel's theology, as well as the historical context of his ministry, there may be reason to believe that these questions could be answered in the affirmative. This is a subject that might be worthy of further pursuit. For the moment, however, let a sampling of quotes speak for themselves:

One individual person does not constitute a church or a congregation. The church is referred to as a house, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5); as a flock, “... and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16); as a body, “... and

gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph. 1:22-23); as a nation, “But ye are ... an holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9); and as a kingdom, “... who hath called you unto His kingdom” (1 Th. 2:12). However, one stone does not constitute a house, one sheep does not constitute a flock, one member is not a body, one person is not a nation, one person is not a kingdom (Chapter 24, p. ###8).

We have previously stated that the primary *purpose* of the church’s existence is *the glorification of God*. ... The secondary objective is the *salvation of the elect*. The church functions as a mother (Gal 4:26), and has within her the Word of God as an incorruptible seed (1 Pet 1:23). As such she is fruitful unto the conversion of many souls, “And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her” (Ps 87:5). By means of the preaching of the Word, the Lord will add to “the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). (Chapter 24, pp. ###53-54).

Thus, upon the foundation of ecclesiology, soteriology constitutes the saving work of the Holy Spirit whereby He adds living stones to the living temple of the Lord, “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:20-22).

Much is to be gleaned from the chapters dealing with the church. In our days, in which the church languishes and is afflicted with numerous spiritual maladies, it behooves us to make a careful study of à Brakel’s treatment of the essence, functioning, and government of the body of Christ.

The consideration that à Brakel’s soteriology constitutes more than half of his total body of divinity should remove all doubt that he might minimize the significance of the saving work of a triune God in the heart of the elect sinner. His grasp of both the nature and scope of this work, as well as his rich pastoral insights into the experience of the saints, are very evident in chapters 30-37. Particularly his treatment of the doctrine of justification, the heart of the gospel, is of pivotal importance in understanding his theology. The fact that this chapter is the lengthiest of this work implies that this subject was of cardinal significance to à Brakel himself—as it was for nearly all the theologians of the Reformation, Dutch Second Reformation, and English Puritanism movements.

His opening statement in chapter 34 [p. ###341] underscores this very succinctly:

Having discussed *calling regeneration, and faith*, we shall now proceed to *justification*, which is the soul of Christianity and the fountainhead of all true comfort and sanctification. He who errs in this

doctrine errs to his eternal destruction. The devil is therefore continually engaged in denying, perverting, and obscuring the truth expressed in this chapter and, if he does not accomplish this, to prevent exercise concerning this truth. When new errors appear on the horizon, even when they initially do not pertain to justification at all, they in time will eventually culminate in affecting this doctrine. One must therefore be all the more earnest to properly understand, defend, and meditate upon this doctrine.

Bearing this statement in mind, combined with à Brakel's grave concern for the antinomian error, it will be understood why he places strong emphasis on the need for both the personal experience of justification in the heart of a sinner, as well as the need for a daily and repeated sense of justification. It is that concern which led à Brakel to state that there is no justification from eternity—even though he wholeheartedly endorsed the theological premise that justification is rooted in the eternal counsel of peace, is founded upon the resurrection of Christ, and becomes reality from God's side in regeneration.

After his exhaustive treatment of the doctrine of justification, à Brakel delineates the blessed fruits of justification in chapters 35-37. We trust you will find these chapters to be a veritable spiritual delight.

This volume concludes with à Brakel's treatment of the sacraments—God's visible warranty that all His promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. The importance of these promises is affirmed in a precious chapter (42, p. ###601) dealing with the functioning of the promises in the life of the believer, followed by a chapter (43, p. ###639) in which à Brakel warns against false mysticism, as well as all religion which is the fruit of man's intellect rather than the work of the Holy Spirit.

All who have enjoyed—and hopefully profited from—volume one will need no further recommendation and stimulus to peruse the pages of this volume as well.

Though acknowledgements are detailed in volume one, we again wish to thank those who, in a variety of ways, have made a valuable contribution toward and assisted in preparing this translated volume for print: Garret Moerdyk, John Wesdyk, Rev. Cornelis Vogelaar, Nicholas Greendyk, Laurena Quist, Gary and Linda den Hollander, William Berkenbush, Robert Fletcher, and Sam Van Grouw, Jr. Also a word of thanks to Arlene den Hollander for assisting in the proofreading of this volume. Final proofing on the two remaining volumes, as well as the composition of detailed indices, are already well under way. The Lord willing, we hope to be able to complete the set of four volumes in 1994.

It is our prayerful wish that the triune God of the covenant of grace may also crown this second volume with His divine approbation—to the glory of His worthy Name, the edification of His saints, and the salvation of perishing sinners. Therefore, *tole lege*: take and read!

Joel R. Beeke
Bartel Elshout

Ecclesiology:
The Doctrine of the Church

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Concerning the Church

After having briefly presented to you the nature of the covenant of grace, we promised to discuss three subjects more extensively: 1) the Surety of the covenant; 2) the partakers of the covenant, who constitute the church; and 3) the ways whereby the Lord Jesus leads His partakers of this covenant to glory, or the benefits of which the Lord makes them partakers. The first subject we have already discussed in chapters 17-23, and we will now proceed to discuss the second subject: the partakers of the covenant. When considered together, they are referred to as the *church* or *congregation*.

The Church: Known from the Word of God

First, it is necessary to state clearly and succinctly what the church is in her essential nature, in order that everyone may know which congregation he ought to join. They who belong to the true church ought to rejoice, exclaiming, “Christ is here!” for Christ only dwells in the true church. Only there, by His Spirit, is He engaged in the work of conversion, consolation, and sanctification. “For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Ps 133:3).

Therefore one must search the Word of God to discern which congregation constitutes the church. I repeat, search the Word, for the veracity of God’s Word is not determined by the church, even though she preserves, protects, and proclaims the Word entrusted to her (Rom 3:2), and thus is called “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The true church, however, is identified by the Word of God, for she is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20). Scripture also teaches that one must first be instructed before one can be admitted to the sacraments, that is, be

admitted into the church community. This is confirmed in the following texts: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them” (Matt 28:19); “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41); “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus ... and the eunuch said ... what doth hinder me to be baptized” (Acts 8:35-36).

Since there are so many churches which call themselves the *Christian church*, we are at present all the more obligated to search the Word of God in order to ascertain which is the true church, and which congregation holds to the truth. He who therefore earnestly searches God’s Word by either reading it, hearing it read, or hearing it preached, and who perseveringly, humbly, and heartily prays to be led into the truth, may expect that the Lord will bring him to the true church. If he is already in the true church, he may also expect that the Lord, to his joy, will assure him of this.

Secondly, the word “church” occurs seventy-seven times in the King James Version of the Bible.¹ It is a transliteration of the Greek word κυριακη& (*kuriake*), of which “church” is the abbreviated, anglicized form. It means, “that which belongs to the Lord.” One will thus find the word κυριακο& (*kuriako*) in the phrase “the Lord’s Supper” (1 Cor 11:20), and the word κυριακη& (*kuriake*) in the phrase “the day of the Lord.” This is likewise true for the church of the Lord, that is, the congregation.

The word *congregation* is generally used in the Old Testament and *church* in the New Testament, both of which are expressed by various words in the original languages, such as ληθ (*qahal*). “Thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints ηδ(*edah*)” (Ps 89:5); “... their congregation Εκκλησι/α (*ekklesia*) shall be established before Me” (Jer 30:20); “... when ye come together in the church” (1 Cor 11:18).

The word Ευναγωγη& (*synagogé*) is not translated as “congregation,” but as “gathering.” It sometimes refers to the building in which the congregation gathers, and at other times to the congregation itself which gathers there, be they Jews or Christians. “For if there come unto your assembly (synagogé),” etc. (James 2:2). These words in their original meaning refer to an orderly gathering of people which has been summoned together, in contrast to a disorderly multitude of people. In our language “congregation” or

¹ à Brakel states that “kerk,” which we translate as “church” is not found in Scripture. This is true in the Statenvertaling, but not in the KJV; hence we revised the paragraph. Whenever the KJV uses “church,” the Statenvertaling uses “gemeente,” which is the equivalent of “congregation.”

“church” refers to the mutual fellowship of those who have been summoned together and gather with Christ as their Head.

In our treatment of this subject, we neither understand the word “church” to refer to a house or building in which the congregation gathers to hear the Word of God and use the sacraments, nor to the elders of the church, or consistory as representatives of the church, such as in Matt 18:17, where we read, “ ... tell it unto the church.” Rather, we understand by “church” the congregation of the people.

We wish to establish at the outset that there are not two or more churches, but only one *Christian church*. This one church we now wish to consider together.

This one church is made up of all the elect who have been called from the beginning of the world and are yet to be called until the end of the world. They are Christ’s peculiar people (Titus 2:14). “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Heb 12:23); “... Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph 5:25). This one congregation is partially in heaven, and is called *the church triumphant*, to which reference is made in Rev 7:9-16. This, however, is not the subject of discussion here. This congregation exists also partially upon earth and is called *the church militant*. It is the church militant which is the subject of this chapter. One can view this church either in its entirety, dispersed throughout the entire world, or as individual congregations in a nation, city, or village. As such one can refer to the church of England, of the Netherlands, or of Rotterdam.

Clarification of the Invisible/Visible Church Distinction

This one church in its militant state upon earth manifests itself at times more openly in her public assemblies, confession, and holiness. She is then called the *visible church*. At other times she is more hidden from the eyes of the world by prevailing errors, ungodliness, or persecutions. Then she is referred to as the *invisible church* (Rev 12:14).

This militant church can be viewed either in her internal, spiritual frame, or in her public gatherings. Her internal, spiritual frame, which consists of faith, a mystical union with Christ, and the spiritual life of the soul, is invisible and cannot be observed with the physical eye. The gatherings where God’s Word is heard and the sacraments are used, as well as her public profession in times of prosperity, are public and visible. Thus, in some respects the church is *visible*, and in some respects *invisible*. However, one may not divide the church into a visible and invisible church. One and

the same person is invisible as far as the soul, will, intellect, and affections are concerned, and he is visible as far as his body and motions are concerned. As one person cannot be divided into an invisible and a visible person, one may not divide the church into a visible and invisible church, for then it would seem as if there were two churches, each being a different church.

One may also not divide the church into a visible and invisible church as far as the members themselves are concerned, as if the one had different members from the other. Then all the elect, that is, those who truly have been called and converted, would mentally be separated from all others in the church and constitute the *invisible church*, whereas converted and unconverted together, gathering in one church, and having only in common the external call, historical faith, confession of the truth, and the external use of the sacraments, would constitute the *visible church*. This is, in our opinion, an erroneous view, generating many confusing thoughts and expressions concerning the church. When a speaker or writer refers to the church, one will then be in doubt as to whether he is speaking of the so-called invisible or visible church.

We maintain that one may not separate the visible and invisible church in such a manner, for, first, I do not find that the terms *visible* and *invisible* church are used in God's Word with that connotation, nor do I find the description of such a distinction.

Secondly, this distinction is founded upon a false supposition—as if the unconverted are truly members of the church with equal right, that is, in its external and visible gathering, and therefore have a right to use the sacraments, something which we deny expressly below. If the unconverted are not members of the church, even when she is visible, the aforementioned distinction is of necessity irrelevant.

Thirdly, such a distinction infers the existence of two churches which are essentially different from each other. From a spiritual perspective true believers constitute the church by reason of a true, spiritual, and believing union with Christ and with each other. If the unconverted, together with the converted would constitute a church on the basis of equal rights, this would have to be of an essentially different nature, whereby members of distinctly different natures would constitute one body and one church, even though the unconverted are not spiritually united to Christ and believers. If there are two essential manifestations, there must also be two essentially different bodies and churches, whereas we confess that there is but one church.

Fourthly, if in this respect there were a visible and an invisible

church, one consisting only of true believers (due to a spiritual union) and one consisting of converted and unconverted together by way of an external union, then believers would simultaneously belong to two churches, one being invisible and the other visible. They would thus be in one church to which salvation is not promised, and in another to which salvation is promised. To hold such a view is as absurd as to propose the existence of two churches.

Objection #1: There is a twofold calling, the one being internal and the other external. There is also a twofold faith: a saving, and a historical or temporal faith. There is a twofold holiness, the one being external and the other in truth, and there is a twofold participation of benefits, the one being external and the other an internal participation in the real benefits. Consequently, there is also an external and internal church.

Answer: (1) From this proposition it must be concluded that there are two churches, which is contrary to the Bible.

(2) The external call, historical or temporal faith, external holiness, and external participation in external privileges, do not constitute true membership of the church, which is spiritual in nature. Consequently, such a church cannot be the true church of Christ.

Objection #2: We do not think of two churches when we speak of an external or visible church, and of an internal or invisible church. Rather, we understand this to refer to a twofold perspective of the same church.

Answer: (1) If one maintains that the one church consists of different members from the other, there being a different manner of being united to her, one is not proposing that there are two aspects of the same church. Rather, it is only being indicated that there are two essentially different churches, with two types of members essentially different in nature which make up the church, and two ways whereby one can be united to her.

(2) The external relationship neither makes one a true member of the church, nor constitutes an external church, just as an external relationship with a corporation or business does not make one a true member and partner of it. It also does not cause the corporation or business to be viewed in a different perspective.

(3) No external relationship to the church gives the unconverted the right to use the sacraments, and thus unconverted and converted together cannot constitute an external church. There is no true church of Christ unless all who are members of it have a right to partake of the sacraments.

(4) If one understands the differentiation between the external and internal church to be but a twofold view and perspective of

one and the same church, and does not hold to a twofold membership relationship, all is well and our proposition is confirmed: The differentiation between an external and internal church on the basis of membership and relationship is not good. One and the same church, consisting of true believers only, can either be viewed in reference to her internal spiritual condition, or in reference to her external manifestation in the world. This is what we have stated.

From that which has been said it is now evident in what manner we view the church in this treatise: We speak of a church consisting of true believers only, which on earth wars against her enemies and for the faith, being at times more and at times less visible to the human eye. As far as her internal, spiritual frame is concerned, she is invisible; but she is visible in reference to her public assemblies and members.

As we shall now consider the matter itself, we shall first give a description of the church, and subsequently give an explanation of all her elements.

The Church Defined

The church is a holy, catholic, Christian congregation, consisting of true believers only, who by the Holy Spirit have been called through the Word of God, are separate from the world, and are united to their Head and each other with a spiritual bond, and thus are united in one spiritual body. All of this is manifested by a true confession of Christ and of His truth, and in striving against their and Christ's enemies, doing battle with spiritual weapons under the command of their Head Jesus Christ to the glory of God and their salvation. Let us now consider the individual elements of this description.

The church is first of all a *congregation*. One individual person does not constitute a church or a congregation. The church is referred to as a house, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:9); as a flock, “... and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd” (John 10:16); as a body, “... and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23); as a nation, “But ye are ... an holy nation” (1 Pet 2:9); and as a kingdom, “... who hath called you unto His kingdom” (1 Thess 2:12). However, one stone does not constitute a house, one sheep does not constitute a flock, one member is not a body, one person is not a nation, one person is not a kingdom—and thus also one pope does not constitute a church, which papists claim to be the case.

The True Church: A Congregation of True Believers

The church is *a congregation of true believers*. The unconverted, even though they have made confession of faith, have been accepted

into the fellowship of the church, live without offense, and have been admitted to the use of the sacraments, the unconverted, I repeat, are not true members of the church. This is so whether the church is viewed in her internal, spiritual condition or in her public gatherings whereby she manifests herself externally to the world. The unconverted are not members of the external, visible church. Believers only constitute the true church. They alone are members of the church, regardless of how one views them.

This is clearly stated in articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, which read as follows:

Article 27

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost. This Church hath been from the beginning of the world and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which, without subjects He cannot be. And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men, to be reduced to nothing, as during the perilous reign of Ahab when nevertheless the Lord reserved unto him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit.

Article 28

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved and out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the Church, submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.

And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it; yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment.

Therefore all those, who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.

Article 29

We believe, that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true Church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church. But we speak not here of hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true Church must be distinguished from all sects who call themselves the Church.

It is first of all evident that the Belgic Confession of Faith makes no mention of an invisible church which would consist, by way of mental deduction, of none but believers only, in distinction from a visible church which would consist of both converted and unconverted. This we have rejected earlier. Rather, it speaks of a church, existing and gathered upon earth, which is more or less visible. Anyone who attentively examines the words of the confession will readily discern this, for it makes mention of that church 1) in which hypocrites are to be found (Article 29), 2) to which one ought to join himself, “wheresoever God hath established it,” subjecting oneself to its instruction and discipline (Article 28), 3) against which are magistrates and the edicts of princes, and the joining of which could result in death or any other corporal punishment during times of persecution (Article 28), and 4) which one can distinguish from other sects. All of this can only be applicable to the visible church as she gathers to hear God’s Word and use the sacraments.

Secondly, the confession states that this church, which is more or less visible, consists only of true believers, when 1) it describes the church as “a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost” (Article 27), 2) it declares that “hypocrites, who are mixed *in the church* with the good, yet *are not of the church*, though externally in it” (Article 29).

This confirms the conviction of the Reformed church that only believers are members of the church, while the unconverted are not members of the church, though they be externally in it.

Objection: The confession speaks of that church *outside of which there is no salvation*. Salvation can, however, be obtained outside of the visible and external church. Many are saved, even though they are neither baptized nor partake of the Lord’s Supper—yes, who

are as yet in the Roman Catholic Church. The confession therefore speaks of the invisible church, which consists of believers only, and thus not of the visible church.

Answer: (1) At the time of the Reformation, when there was fierce persecution, many did not dare join themselves to the congregations of believers, thus pretending (as many still do) that salvation can be obtained in every religion. This the confession here refutes.

(2) It is an obvious truth that there is no salvation outside of the church; he who does not have the church as his mother, does not have God as His Father, for the church alone has the truth and preaches the truth, without which no one can be converted and saved.

(3) The confession does not state that no one can be saved unless they have been accepted as a member, are baptized, and attend the Lord's Supper, but rather that apart from the church there is no salvation, and that outside of her neither the way of salvation is taught nor the means unto salvation are to be found.

(4) Unbaptized converted persons are saved by means of the church, which puts God's Word at their disposal and proclaims that Word to them. If someone from the realm of popery is converted, this does not occur by way of papal doctrine, but by the Word of truth which the papacy has still allowed to remain in the church.

We have thus demonstrated that the Belgic Confession of Faith declares that only true believers are members of the church, and that the unconverted within the church are not members.

The truth of the aforesaid is established by the following arguments:

First, an external covenant between God and man, of which the unconverted would be partakers, has not been established either in the Old or New Testament. Consequently, there is also no external church of which unconverted persons are members. The first proposition has been proven exhaustively in chapter 16; the second proposition is then certain, since the church is founded upon the covenant. As the covenant is, so is the church.

Secondly, all true members of the church are entitled to the use of the sacraments, whereby the benefits of the covenant are sealed to them. The bread and wine are the communion of the body and blood of Christ, which is broken and shed for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 10:16; Matt 26:26-28). The unconverted, however, have no right to use the sacraments, since they have neither part nor lot in the sealed benefits, and they thus eat and drink judgment to themselves. The Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper states: "All these, while they continue in such sins, shall abstain from this meat (which Christ hath ordained only

for the faithful), lest their judgment and condemnation be made the heavier.” Thus, the unconverted are not members of the church.

Thirdly, the very essence of the church, which gathers in an external form, is union with Christ and each other by the Holy Spirit. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). The Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper speaks of this when it quotes 1 Cor 10:17, “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” It further states, “that we by the same Spirit (which dwelleth in Christ as in the head, and in us as His members), might have true communion with Him; ... besides, that we by this same Spirit may also be united as members of one body in true brotherly love.” The unconverted, however, do not have this Spirit. “These be they ... sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 1:19). Since the unconverted do not have the Spirit, they are none of Christ (Rom 8:9). Thus, they are no members of the church, for her members are mutually united by the Spirit and are Christ’s.

Fourthly, the name “church” is not applicable to the unconverted. The church is called, “... the house of God” (1 Tim 3:15); a spiritual house, built up of lively stones (1 Pet 2:5); the fold of Christ (John 10:16); “... the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13); “the congregation of the saints” (Ps 89:5); “... the assembly of the upright” (Ps 111:1). The apostle, when writing to the congregation, denominates them as those “that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor 1:2); “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). All of this, however, cannot be stated concerning the unconverted. Thus, they do not belong to the church, and consequently are not members of her.

Fifthly, this is also evident in 1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.” Those who went out were the unconverted, who prior to their departure were in the church but nevertheless did not belong to the church. Thus, the unconverted, even though they are *in* the church, are not *of* the church, and therefore are no members of her.

Objections Answered Concerning Membership in the True Church

Objection #1: It is evident that a large multitude of unconverted persons associate with the church, are accepted as her members, remain members there, and partake of the sacraments. Therefore they are members of the church indeed.

Answer: (1) It is one thing to associate with the church and to be

accepted as members, and another thing to be *true* members. The latter does not proceed from the first, for the acceptance of men as members is performed by men, who see only what is before their eyes and cannot judge according to the heart, leaving this to Him who knows the hearts. Regeneration or the probability of regeneration has not been established as a rule by which the elders of the church accept members. Rather, they are judged by their confession of the truth and their response to this truth, and by the manifestation of a life which does not contradict their confession. The rest is left to them and to the Lord.

(2) It is one thing to join the church externally, and it is another thing to speak of an external church. Even though they are externally in the church, this does not mean that there is an external church of which they are bonafide members. Membership in an external church to which the promise of salvation is not annexed is not their objective, but rather a church as being a fellowship within which they may be saved. To this church they apply themselves, but only externally, and not in truth with a converted and believing heart. Therefore they are no members, even though men view them as such externally. They are thus within the church as a poisonous fruit which is attached to a good tree with good fruits. They are therefore within the church as strangers, who for some time dwell in a house, but whom no one deems to be family members. Because of this external association with the church there is also an external relationship to the Lord Jesus as King of His church, as well as her true members, and they enjoy the external privileges of the church. Their entrance into the church, and the church's acceptance of them does not make them true members of the church. Such can only come about by faith and repentance.

Objection #2: On a threshing floor both wheat and chaff are to be found. The church is the threshing floor, and both chaff and wheat are in an identical relationship to the threshing floor. In like manner the unconverted and the converted belong to the same church.

Answer: There is no argument over the fact that both good and evil men are to be found in the church. We are not proposing, however, the chaff to be a "member" of the threshing floor, that is, the church. Chaff is present on the threshing floor as chaff and not as wheat. All who are in the church are not therefore of the church.

Objection #3: Consider Matt 13:24-25, 47. On the same field good fruit and tares were to be found, and the same net contained good and bad fishes. Thus, in the church both the good and the evil are equally members of the church.

Answer: The field does not represent the church, but the world

(vs. 38), upon which both good and evil men reside. The fish net which gathers all fish, is examined by the fishermen, and only the good fish are placed in the barrels. One must keep the objective of the parable in view, which is not to show who are true members of the church, but what the end will be of the good and the evil. This passage is therefore not applicable here.

Objection #4: One could object by referring to 2 Tim 2:20: “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.” The house is the church, and the vessels are the members of the church. Among these members are also the unconverted, who are referred to as vessels of dishonor.

Answer: (1) The vessels in a house are not household members. Likewise the vessels of dishonor—the unconverted—are not members; they do not truly belong to the household.

(2) Again, one should not become entangled in details, but take note of the objective, which is to demonstrate who are the good and the evil within the church, a fact we readily admit. Not one word is mentioned here, however, whether or not they are true members of the church. Even if they are *in* the church, they are not therefore *of* the church.

Objection #5: If one maintains that only the converted are members of the church, one proposes that there is a pure church upon earth, which is contrary to the Bible and experience.

Answer: (1) True believers themselves are still subject to many impurities, and are far from being perfect.

(2) By maintaining that only true believers are members of the church, we do not claim that there are no unconverted in the congregation, but that they are not present as true members there. There neither has been nor will ever be a church upon earth in which there are no unconverted, that is, those who merely travel along; yes, the latter are generally in the majority. There is a significant difference between being *in the church*, and being *of the church*.

Objection #6: If only the truly converted are true members of the church, the true church which we need to identify is not recognizable, since one cannot be certain of the conversion of others.

Answer: One ought not to identify the church by regeneration, but by the true doctrine, and the sanctification of the confessing members conjoined with this true doctrine. These two are identifiable, and wherever these two are present, the true church is to be found. Whether someone possesses these two in truth or in pretense is a personal matter, however, and is not to be a distinguishing mark for the church for others.

It thus remains certain that only true believers who congregate upon earth are members of the church, it being more or less visible. The unconverted are therefore not members of the church, though they be externally in her.

The Characteristics of the Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Christian

We have thus observed that the church is a congregation—a congregation consisting of true believers. We shall now proceed with further analysis of the description previously given, and present the characteristics of the church; she is *one, holy, catholic, and Christian*.

First of all the church is *one*. This does not refer to locality, she being dispersed to many places upon earth, consisting of many individual churches—and thus not limited or bound to one particular place, be it Jerusalem, Rome, or any other locality. Her *oneness* does not relate to her external manifestation in the world, for she is like the moon which increases and decreases. Sometimes she manifests herself with more luster than at other times; sometimes she is more dispersed, and at other times occupies much less territory. The church is one, however, in nature and essence, being identical at all times and in all places, wherever that may be. She is one in reference to the same doctrine of immutable truth, and to the same faith, Spirit, and holiness. This is confirmed in Holy Writ. “My dove, My undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother” (Song 6:9); “... and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd” (John 10:16); “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:4-6). This unity is manifested when she assembles to hear the Word of God, in her use of the holy sacraments, in her separating from all other assemblies which do not have pure doctrine, and in barring entrance to and expelling all with whom she differs in doctrine. “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed!” (2 John 1:10).

Secondly, the church is a *holy* gathering. She is denominated as such. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9); “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). In the salutations to the congregations unto whom the apostle Paul wrote his letters, he calls them *saints* (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:2). As the church, from Adam to the day of judgment, has at all times been one, she will likewise be holy at all times.

One ought not to be of the opinion that the holiness of the Old Testament church was but a typical holiness, a depiction of the true holiness of the New Testament, consisting only in separation from other nations, in washings, in abstinence from unclean and the use of clean food, etc. Rather, true regeneration and sanctification were a reality in the Old as well as in the New Testament church.

(1) Peter calls the prophets *holy men of God* (2 Pet 1:21).

(2) In the Old Testament they had true faith in the Messiah (cf. Ps 16:10; 2 Cor 4:13). Paul gives an account of an entire listing of believers from the Old Testament in Heb 11. Where there is true faith, however, there will also be true holiness, for faith worketh by love (Gal 5:6), which is the fulfillment of the law.

(3) Believers in the Old Testament were exercised as far as true sanctification is concerned; they prayed for strength and were engaged in spiritual warfare and in ordering their life according to the Lord's commandments (cf. Ps 51:12; Ps 43:3-4; Ps 119 in its entirety).

(4) The uncircumcised in heart (as far as they themselves were concerned) were no less permitted to come into God's house than were the uncircumcised in the flesh. "No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into My sanctuary" (Ezek 44:9).

(5) Those ceremonial cleansings were meant for them, and not merely given to typify the true holiness which people would have in the New Testament. We may still profit from these ceremonial cleansings, and by them be stirred up to internal and external holiness. They were, however, primarily intended for the believers of the Old Testament, pointing them to their pollution and directing them to the Messiah, in order to be cleansed in His blood. These ceremonial cleansings obligated and exhorted them to true purity, both internally and externally, to cleanse them "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1).

Objection #1: This contradicts what Paul states in Heb 9:9-10, 13-14 "Which was a figure for the time then present ... that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Answer: This text does not contradict what has been said.

(1) It does not state that they had but ceremonial holiness.

(2) The text states that all these things in and of themselves did not constitute true holiness, which we readily admit. Just as at present external church attendance, the water of baptism, the bread of the Lord's Supper, and the external use of the sacraments do not constitute true holiness; both then and now these external matters must by faith be united to Christ Himself.

(3) This text does state that these things pointed and led them to Christ, but not that these things were examples, typifying the true holiness which the church of the New Testament would have.

In calling the church *holy* we do not refer merely to her separation from all assemblies other than the church, but to her belonging to God. It also does not only refer to the imputed holiness which the church has in Christ; rather, the reference is primarily to inherent holiness and godliness. As such the church is *holy* 1) because she consists of truly converted and believing members only, 2) because only there they are instructed concerning and exhorted to true holiness, 3) and because there true holiness is to be found, manifesting itself before the eyes of all who are able to distinguish true holiness from the counterfeit holiness which may manifest itself in other assemblies.

This is not to suggest that the church is pure and perfect, for all her members have but a small beginning of this holiness and still have much corruption within themselves. Furthermore, there are many in the church who are unconverted and thus are not true members of the church. There are always ungodly individuals in the church—chaff together with the kernels, and tares among the wheat. Consider the church from Adam to Christ and you will discover that God was not pleased with most of our fathers (1 Cor 10:5). During the time of Christ the Jewish church was very corrupt. Even baptized disciples turned away from Christ in multitudes (John 6:66). Paul declared that the congregation in Corinth was carnal (1 Cor 3:3), fornication being practiced among her (1 Cor 5:1). Some attended the Lord's Supper while drunk (1 Cor 11:21), and some did not have knowledge of God (1 Cor 15:34). In the congregation of Galatia there were such who should have been excommunicated but remained in the congregation (Gal 5:12). The apostle Paul declared of many in the church, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil 2:21). Jude said concerning the church, "For there are certain men crept in unawares ... ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus

Christ ... for they have gone in the way of Cain. ... These are spots in your feasts of charity ... clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead ... raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars” (Jude 1:4, 11-13). The Lord Jesus said concerning the congregation of Ephesus in Rev 2:4, that she had left her first love. Of the congregation of Pergamos He said, “Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam. ... So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” (Rev 2:14-15). In the congregation of Thyatira they permitted that woman Jezebel to teach, who seduced the servants of Christ to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (vs. 20). The congregation of Sardis had the name that she lived, but she was dead, there being but few who walked with Christ (Rev 3:174). The congregation of Laodicea imagined that she was rich and increased with goods, but meanwhile she was “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17). These matters serve us as warnings to keep ourselves from partaking of these sins. They also teach us that impurity ought not to motivate us to defect from the church and attempt to establish another, purer church. At all times and even in our days, such have not fared well and have given cause for offense, there being a manifest token of God’s wrath, as we can observe with the *Labadists*, etc.

The third characteristic of the church is her *catholicity*. There are many who are very fond of the word “catholic,” as if the word were synonymous with the true church. “Catholic” is a derivative of a Greek word which, however, is not found in the Bible. It neither means “orthodox,” nor “true,” but “universal.” In Heb 12:23 we find the word πανηγυριω (*paneguris*), which is translated as “general assembly.” Thus, the church is universal.

This is first of all true relative to the number of the elect to be gathered from the beginning to the end of the world, consisting of both the triumphant and militant church. Scripture speaks of the church in this manner. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22-23); “... and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23); “... Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it” (Eph 5:25-26).

Secondly, the congregation of the New Testament is called

universal in distinction from the church of the Old Testament. The church was then limited to one nation: the seed of Abraham. If someone from another nation became a true believer, he would be incorporated into the nation of Israel and be called a Jewish proselyte. That church was limited to Canaan and the seat of its religion was in Jerusalem. In the New Testament, however, the church is catholic, that is, universal as far as locality, nationality, and time is concerned. She is now dispersed over the entire world, and is found now here and then there. She consists of various nations, and it is immaterial whether one is a Jew or a Gentile. She will never cease to exist, but will endure until the coming of Christ on the day of judgment.

Thirdly, the church is universal as far as doctrine is concerned, which always has been and will be the same. The external practice of religion was once and for all changed by Christ, for prior to the advent of Christ, it was practiced by way of shadows which gave instruction concerning Christ. After Christ the external practice of religion was without shadows, consisting only in Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, along with water, bread, and wine, as signs and seals of the covenant of grace—all ratified by the blood of Christ.

The fourth characteristic of the church is that she is *Christian*, being thus called: (1) after Christ, who is the singular and only Head of the church. "Christ is the Head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the body" (Eph 5:23). Christ is King of His church. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion" (Ps 2:6). (Having extensively demonstrated in the foregoing that Christ is the King of His Church, we shall not discuss His headship over the church any further here.) Christ is the Bridegroom of the church, she being continually presented as the bride in the entire Song of Songs. Consider also John 3:29, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom." As Eve was called *Manninne* after the man—and every woman is named after the man—the church likewise is called "Christian" after Christ, and thus each believer is called a Christian (Acts 11:26). "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28); "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian" (1 Pet 4:16).

(2) She is named "Christian" because she alone embraces the doctrine of Christ, and the life of Christ manifests itself to some degree in her life. "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection" (Heb 6:1); "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 1:9); "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). As the church has the doctrine of Christ, she likewise gives expression to His life to some degree. "Be ye followers of me, even as I

also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1); “... leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet 2:21).

Many assemblies conceal their errors by the use of the name “Christian.” To distinguish these from each other, it has been determined by divine providence that each assembly would be called by a specific name, be it that they call themselves by this name, or that others call them such as an expression of rebuke, which generally was the case with those who initially propagated error. Thus, *Papists* are called after their head, the pope, or *Roman Catholics* after the city of Rome where his residence is and from where he propagates his errors. *Mennonites*² (*Anabaptists*) are named after Menno Simons, an expelled monk from Witmarsum in Friesland, the Netherlands. *Arminians* are named after Arminius, the deposed professor of the university of Leiden, *Socinians* after Socinus, and *Lutherans* after Luther.

The True Church Refers to Herself as Reformed

To distinguish the true church from all erroneous assemblies, we call ourselves Reformed—not, however, in reference to doctrine, as if we had changed or improved the same. No, according to God’s Word the truth remains impeccably preserved. We do so, however, in reference to errors which permeated the church. These the church has cast out, departing from Roman Catholic heresy by which she had been so long oppressed, and reforming the church according to the precepts of God’s Word. Certain parties reproachfully call members of the true Reformed Church *Calvinists* after Calvin, minister in Geneva, who was one of the first to oppose Roman Catholic error. We say, “among the first,” for neither he nor Luther, but Zwingli, was the first. We acknowledge Calvin as a member of the true church. He has done much to promote the truth, but he is neither the head of the church nor the one who prescribed the rule for life and doctrine. We neither magnify nor lean upon man. We do not follow human inventions nor call ourselves after men. If someone desires to name us after a man, he does so at his own peril. If in doing so he wishes to distinguish us as the true church from the false church, the *matter* itself is good, but not the *manner*.

The True Church Is Separated from the World and United Internally

This church, whose true characteristics we have presented, we previously described as an assembly *separated* from the world.

² Hereafter referred to as Anabaptists.

Every kingdom has its borders and border markings within which its subjects reside and by which they are separated from others. The kingdom of heaven is likewise separated from all nations, and functions independently without intertwining itself with other spheres of sovereignty. This separation does not pertain to locality, region, or city, as was true in the Old Testament, but she is separated from others by fellowship and confession. Thus, the church does not wish to have those within its community who still belong to the world or embrace a false religion. The church wishes to be separate in order that the kingdom of Christ may be all the more evident.

This separation is expressed (1) in the following Old Testament texts: “Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num 23:9); “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). This is likewise true in the New Testament: “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them” (Acts 5:13); “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17).

(2) The church is therefore presented to us as being fenced in and enclosed by walls. “And He fenced it” (i.e., His vineyard) (Isa 5:2); “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem” (Isa 62:6).

(3) For this reason the church has elders who preserve her separation, and keep her from intermingling with the world. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28); “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls” (Heb 13:17). This is also confirmed by her orderly structure: “beholding your order” (Col 2:5).

(4) The church has keys to shut and to open (Matt 16:19). “... if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt 18:17); “But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor 5:13).

As the church is separated from the rest of the world, she is likewise *united* internally, which is evident from the word congregation itself, it being expressive of her internal fellowship. This is evident by virtue of her separation, and by way of comparison she is called a *house* which is built by the uniting of individual stones. She is called a *body*, consisting of many united members; a *flock*, consisting not of sheep who are dispersed but who are gathered together; and a *kingdom* in which the subjects are united for mutual protection.

This union is realized first of all by the embracing of the same truth. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41).

Secondly, this union is realized by uniting with all those who embrace and confess the same truth. If someone confesses this truth only with his mouth, he himself is accountable. Those who desire a true unity have as their objective and heartfelt desire the uniting themselves with them who confess and experience the truth. “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32); “... and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God ... they clave to their brethren” (Neh 10:28-29); “That they all may be one” (John 17:21); “... that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

Thirdly, this union comes about by the same Spirit. “We having the same Spirit of faith” (2 Cor 4:13); “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). They are all indwelt by one Spirit, who inspires, illuminates, regenerates, and sanctifies them all. They consequently have the same nature. As birds of a feather flock together,³ they will of necessity unite together.

Fourthly, they are united by mutual love and peace. “... forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2-3); “Put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Col 3:14).

Fifthly, they are united by having the identical objective: to promote the honor of Christ their Head. “... they are ... the glory of Christ” (2 Cor 8:23).

Sixthly, this engenders a mutual willingness to assist each other, to endure everything with each other—yes, to die for each other. “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth” (1 Cor 10:24); “We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

The church does not spontaneously unite. It is not the result of human wisdom, but it is God, and God alone, who unites His own and gathers them together as a people, as a church. “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47); “Who ... hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13). “Them also I must bring” (John 10:16).

The means by which the Lord gathers His church is the Word. “They shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one

³ The Dutch reads, “gelijk nu zoekt gelijk,” which in our opinion is best translated with this well-known English proverb.

Shepherd” (John 10:16); “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth” (James 1:18); “... holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). Whenever the Lord sends a servant or specific individual to a locality with the gospel, He holds Christ before such a nation by means of His Word. If someone is illuminated, believes, and is converted, he will immediately cleave to the one who preached Christ to him. These two will become the means of the conversion of a third person, and likewise of others. Such converted individuals will immediately join themselves to the others and become as one soul with them. Thus this congregation will grow and will manifest itself as a light in the darkness and as a city upon a hill. Everyone will hear her powerful testimony and observe her holy walk. This will engender esteem for this congregation in both hearers and observers. They will become internally convicted that they are not thus, and they will be convinced; or it will motivate them to oppose and eradicate her, not being able to endure this light which rebukes them, and consequently they will hate this congregation. Due to the luster of the church, the esteem which she enjoys among the population, and the mutual love observed within her, many will be attracted whose hearts are not true within, and they, though unconverted, will join themselves to this congregation, doing so in such large numbers that they become the majority. Such individuals are friends in public but enemies at heart. For when they, being within the congregation, perceive that the godly begin to know and rebuke them with words and deeds, they will manifest their nature and oppress the godly in the church more than the wicked will do from without. This oppression will unite the godly and engender strife without and within.

God, the Keeper of His Church

As God gathers the church, He likewise also *keeps* her, so that the church is not eradicated. There has always been and will be a church upon earth as long as the world exists. Certain denominations in various localities can either become fully apostate concerning the faith and become heretical or be eradicated by persecution, but the church itself cannot be eradicated. If she is eradicated in one locality, she will grow again in a different locality. This is abundantly confirmed by experience. We do not merely maintain that there will always be believers and elect, who are dispersed in various places and living in isolation, but that there will always be a congregation—this not being due to the steadfastness and strength of the church itself, but by the will and preserving power of God—a church in which both visibility and corruption will fluctuate.

Question: Will there always be a church upon earth?

Answer: Yes. This is evident, first of all, from the promises of God. “Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). If ever the church would be eradicated, the gates of hell, that is, the might of the devil, would have prevailed against her. This, however, will never occur, and thus the church will always remain. This is also evident in Matt 28:20, where we read, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” The apostles would not live that long, but their spiritual seed (that is, their children, the one generation after the other), and the Holy Scriptures recorded by them, would remain. Christ promises His assistance to these all the days until the end of the world, and in these children and by their writings they still live and speak. Thus the church continues to exist and will always remain in existence.

Secondly, this is also confirmed by the offices of the Lord Jesus. As Prophet, Priest, and King, He will endure forever. There can, however, be no body without a head, no king without subjects, no teaching prophets without pupils, no priest without a people for whom he prays, and no bridegroom without a bride. “Thou art a priest for ever” (Ps 110:4); “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (Dan 2:44); “For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:25-26).

Thirdly, add to this experience that the Bible reveals to us the church from Adam to Christ, and after Christ, during the time of the apostles. Both church and secular history bear witness to the fact that the church has existed from the time of the apostles until now. Since she still exists, we therefore conclude that she will continue to exist in spite of all those who wish the contrary.

Objection #1: “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth” (Luke 18:8). Is this not as much as saying, “I shall find no faith, and thus there will be no church”?

Answer: It is not inferred here that there will be no believers: this will most certainly be the case according to the words of the apostle in 1 Thess 4:15-17. Rather, it means that there will be so few that it will be amazing indeed.

Objection #2: “That day shall not come except there come a falling away first” (2 Thess 2:3). Total apostasy implies of necessity total eradication of the church. “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the beast]” (Rev 13:8). Where then will the godly be?

Answer: These and similar texts express the generality and magnitude of this apostasy, but do not include all without exception, for even at the time the church will be in the wilderness (Rev 12:17); a seed will remain (Rev 12:17). It is thus confirmed that the church will always remain, and will never be entirely eradicated.

The Marks Whereby the Church Is Distinguished

Having considered the essential nature of the church, it is necessary to define some of the distinguishing marks whereby one may discern which is or is not the true church. I repeat, may *discern*; for all men are not acquainted with these marks, as there would not be so many who exclaim, “The church is here!” Not everyone has eyes to discern these marks of distinction. Many have no concern regarding them, and without due consideration follow their parents. Others simply have no desire to either know or examine them, even though it is of such crucial importance, for only in the true church is Christ present with His blessings. There the pure Word of salvation is to be found; there are the faithful pastors and teachers unto the perfection of the saints; there souls are converted, comforted, and grow in sanctification; there the Lord Jesus is confessed; there one will go to heaven. In one word, only there the Lord commands His blessing, even life forever more (Ps 133:3). Therefore all who know the joyful sound will turn to her; the Lord gives His own a heart and a desire to join themselves to her. This is the duty of all who wish to be saved.

Since there are so many assemblies claiming to be the church, who nevertheless promote doctrines which deceive and damn the soul, it is necessary to know whereby true and false churches may be identified, thus enabling a person to join the true church and rejoice in belonging to her.

Distinguishing Marks not Applicable to the Church

We shall first present those matters which the false church proposes as being distinguishing marks so that, due to conformity to these false marks, she would appear to be the true church.

The Roman Catholic Church would prefer that we put God’s Word aside, and only rely on her pronouncements or the pronouncements of her head, the pope. They know that then they will prevail. Since there are, however, other assemblies which call themselves churches who are also false, and yet who with the true church declare the pope to be the antichrist, we neither can nor may be satisfied with such a declaration. There are so many assemblies which bear the name “church,” the one being opposed to the other; thus we cannot accept anyone’s declaration—including

that of the true church—as authoritative, without there being another criterion by which a determination is made between all these parties. Since such a requirement is fair, even in the judgment of those who are impartial, one will embellish some things which are clearly consistent with their assemblies. These they wish to have considered as distinguishing marks, which they are not. We shall present the most significant of these false distinguishing marks and expose them as having no foundation.

First, the false church proposes the word *catholic* as one of the distinguishing marks of the church.

(1) This word, however, is not found in the Bible. Would one then boast of a word which has been contrived apart from Scripture?

(2) The Novatians, Donatists, Arians, and other heretics have formerly also been referred to as “catholic.” That to which many false churches lay claim cannot be one of the distinguishing marks of the true church.

(3) If the word “catholic” were one of the marks of the true church, no one would be able to boast of this title except those who not only have the name but also the matter itself. One can have a good name, but nevertheless be evil. What benefit was there for the congregation of Sardis to have the name that they lived and yet to be dead (Rev 3:1)? Those who boast of the name “catholic” are not catholic in deed or doctrine, since her doctrine is not consistent with the Word of God, with which the doctrine of the true church always has been and must be in agreement. Neither is this true chronologically, for they are new; that is, they primarily came into existence after 606 A.D. This is also not true as far as location is concerned, for her church is not everywhere. The Mohammedans and the heathen occupy much more territory. Likewise, all Protestants combined during some periods have been as great in number as they. They also rob the word “catholic” of its meaning when they define their church in reference to the pope and restrict the church to the city of Rome. By using the term “Roman Catholic” it is as if one would say that white is black; that which is catholic is not Roman, for the word “Roman” limits the church to a city, and that which is Roman is not catholic.

(4) The church of the Old and New Testament is one church. The church of the Old Testament was not catholic, however, for she was limited to Canaan and Jerusalem; yet she was the true church. From all of this it is evident that the word “catholic” is not one of the distinguishing marks of the true church. Therefore, even though the Reformed church is the true church and she calls

herself “catholic,” she will not boast of a word which is not a distinguishing mark.

Secondly, the false church proposes *age* to be a second mark of distinction. However, this is not one of the distinguishing marks whereby everyone may know the church, for:

(1) the kingdom of the devil commenced at the fall of Adam, and therefore it is not the church alone which is old. Thus age is not one of these marks.

(2) Age was not a factor when the church began. How could age be a factor in reference to the true Christian church at the time of the apostles? She was nevertheless the true church; thus the Jews, after this era, could not boast to be the true church simply on the basis of age. Age has nothing to do with truth, for a lie is not transformed into truth by age.

(3) Those who claim to have age on their side and thus establish age as one of the distinguishing marks of the true church, contradict themselves; they are relatively new, not having their origin until AD 606. Only the church which dates from the time of the apostles and has remained true to their doctrine can truly lay claim to age. True age must be determined by way of doctrine and not by the locality where the church originated. If age were to be determined by locality, the Mohammedan religion would be the true religion. Those localities did not preserve the true Christian doctrine, and the church has thus been eradicated there. Rome likewise did not preserve true Christian doctrine, having gradually embraced a new and idolatrous doctrine. Therefore, the fact that the true church has formerly been in Rome is not a matter to be boasted of. Rather, she is to be blamed that she has not preserved the truth and thus also did not remain the true church. If the true church is established in a locality where it had previously not existed, this congregation would not constitute a new church, as it would have, confess, and experience the old truth. From all of this it is evident that even though the church dates back to Adam or to the time of the apostles, age cannot be one of the distinguishing marks of the true church. This is even more true for a location where the true church has formerly been, since individual churches in various localities degenerated through error, and can change or have been changed into heretical or heathen religions.

Thirdly, *durability* is proposed as a distinguishing mark. To this we reply that the church is indeed durable, never entirely ceases to exist, and with uninterrupted durability will continue from the time of Christ to end of the world. This truth we have confirmed earlier. Durability can, however, not be one of the distinguishing

marks of the true church, since the kingdom of the devil has also endured since Adam, and many heresies have endured. The Jews are still a separate people, and are thus durable. That which the church has in common with other groups of people is not one of the distinguishing marks of the church. Moreover, one ought not to relate durability to locality: in places where the church has previously been, she now no longer is, and in places she has previously not been, she now exists. Rather, durability must be judged in terms of the truth of the doctrine to which the church has steadfastly adhered, no matter where she exists.

Fourthly, *the number of professing members* is also proposed as a distinguishing mark. This, however, has not so much as a semblance of validity. The Mohammedan religion has incomparably more professors. At the time of Arius, everyone was amazed that the world had so soon turned Arian. In Rev 13:3 we read that the entire earth will follow the beast. The church, on the contrary, is most often a little flock (Luke 12:32), and the way to heaven is traversed by only a few (Matt 7:14).

Fifthly, *the succession of bishops* and other members of the clergy is deemed to be as such a distinguishing mark. This is unfounded, for:

(1) whatever is a mark of the true church must always and uniquely be true. This succession is, however, not a unique distinction of the church for there was no succession of the apostles. Such succession is not unique to the church, for Mohammedan and heretical teachers also have their successors. Thus, doctrine is once more the real issue, for what is the value of succession without truth?

(2) Individual churches, in which there has been a good succession since the times of the apostles, can degenerate. A “wolf,” that is, a heretic, can take the place of an orthodox minister, so that subsequent succession is tainted by heresy. To what avail then is succession? The papists who deem succession as one of the distinguishing marks of the church, condemn themselves, being unable to prove infallibly their succession. Particularly in the first two centuries, the succession which they did have has degenerated and become heretical.

Sixthly, *miracles* are proposed as one of the distinguishing marks of the church. To this we reply:

(1) Miracles do not belong to the distinguishing marks of the true church. This is nowhere to be found in the Word of God.

(2) Miracles are not intended for believers, but for unbelievers; thus the church has no need of them. If one were desirous of bringing an unbeliever into the true church, one would have to

perform a wonder time and again, which, however, the proponents of this mark do not do.

(3) The performance of and boasting in miracles in the post-apostolic era, as a means of the confirmation of doctrine, is a distinguishing mark of the anti-Christian church. “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess 2:9). This certainly confirms that the performance of miracles does not belong to the distinguishing marks of the church.

Seventhly, one proposes *external luster* and *prosperity* as being a distinguishing mark of the true church. The basis for this has no more validity than the previous arguments. Not one text supports this, and it is entirely contradicted by experience. The church, like the moon, is subject to successive changes in appearance. Consider for a moment the condition of the church in both Old and New Testaments. Where was the luster of the church at the end of the first world—when the entire world had corrupted its way, was filled with violence, and only Noah and his family were preserved in the ark? Where was the luster of the church in Israel when Elijah was of the opinion that he alone had been left (1 Kings 19:14)? How often did not the ungodly kings of Judah rob her of her luster in closing the temple and instituting nationwide idolatry? Where was the luster of the church when the Lord Jesus came into the world, finding the church to be thoroughly corrupted?

Such was also the case with the church of the New Testament which, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, manifested itself so gloriously over the entire earth. During the first three hundred years she was frequently so ravaged that a visible church could hardly be distinguished, the name “Christian” was regarded with utmost contempt, and the church had to hide in forests and valleys. It has also been clearly prophesied that the church would flee into the desert during the reign of the antichrist and for a period of twelve hundred sixty years would be in hiding there (Rev 12:14). We have thus observed various proposals which are not distinguishing marks of the true church. Some add even more marks to this; however, they are insignificant and not worthy of notice.

True Distinguishing Marks of the Church

Having refuted the false distinguishing marks, we shall now proceed to present the true distinguishing marks which will manifest themselves always and only in the church, regardless of what her external condition may be.

The primary and most eminent distinguishing mark is *purity of*

doctrine—doctrine consistent with the Word of God. We are not now dealing with those who deny fundamental principles, but with those denominated as Christians who acknowledge God’s Word to be the infallible truth. We must therefore consider how God’s Word defines the distinguishing marks of the true church. Let him depart who does not wish to conduct himself according to God’s Word. However, he who wishes to esteem the Word of God as the only rule of life and doctrine will be able to perceive from this Word that only that church is the true church which has the true doctrine, consistent with the Word.

This is first of all confirmed by such texts where the Word of God is stated 1) to be the means whereby the church is gathered, preserved, and built up; 2) to be a treasure entrusted to her protection; and 3) to be a matter for which she must do battle.

(1) Concerning the first, we read: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:19-21); “That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word” (Eph 5:26); “Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth” (James 1:18); “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth” (1 Pet 1:22).

(2) Concerning the fact that the church must protect the Word as a treasure entrusted to her, we read: “... because that unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:1-2); “... which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

(3) Finally the church must do battle to maintain purity of doctrine: “It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

That which we have stated concerning the Word is irrefutably confirmed by the texts mentioned. From these texts it is also evident that these matters are distinguishing marks of the true church, since they are regarded as being characteristic of the church. Inasmuch as a matter is identified by its distinguishing marks, the pure doctrine of God’s Word is therefore a distinguishing mark of the church.

Secondly, add to this that the Word of God is the means whereby false churches are exposed. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that

abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house” (2 John 1:9-10). If the Word is the means whereby false churches are exposed, the Word by the law of opposites is a distinguishing mark of the true church.

Thirdly, that assembly in which God and Christ make their abode is the true church. “For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20); “God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Cor 6:16); “These things saith He ... who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (Rev 2:1). The Father and Christ, however, dwell wherever their Word is received and preserved. “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me. ... If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:21, 23). Thus, the possession and preservation of the Word are thus distinguishing marks of the true church.

Fourthly, this is confirmed by such texts in which the church is described as submitting itself to this Word only. “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42); “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:26-27). The Lord Jesus shows here that those who do and do not belong to His stable are only distinguished by the fact that they hear His voice; that is, they either do hear and receive His Word, or do not hear and receive it. Inasmuch as sheep are distinguished by this, however, this is true for the entire church. The church is identical in nature, since it consists of sheep.

Objection: Hearing or not hearing pertains to believing and receiving. This is a work of the heart and thus not obvious to others; therefore it cannot be a distinguishing mark of the church.

Answer (1) Christ speaks here of that which is very obvious. It was evident who did hear and receive Him, and who did not.

(2) There can be no true receiving unless this be wrought by the hearing of the Word (Rom 10:17), and wherever there is a believing reception of the heart, there will be a confession of the mouth (Rom 10:10).

This is also confirmed by John 8:31-32, “If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Here it is clearly shown whereby a disciple may be known and what his nature is. This is nothing else but a knowing of and continuing in the Word. It is

thus very evident that the church is identified by her reception, preservation, and experience of the Word, and therefore the Word is the distinguishing mark of the true church.

Objection #1: Everyone boasts that his doctrine is in accordance with God's Word. Doctrine can therefore not be a distinguishing mark, for it remains a matter of debate who has the support of the Word of God.

Answer: (1) This obviously confirms that everyone is convinced that adherence to true doctrine is characteristic of the true church, since everyone wishes their doctrine to be in harmony with this Word.

(2) To boast of something or to be something is essentially different. Everyone's doctrine must therefore be examined by way of this touchstone.

Additional Objection: Would it not be safer to subject oneself to the declaration of the church or of her visible head, the pope, since there remains so much difference of opinion concerning the exposition of God's Word? The question as to which is the true church is neither answered nor eliminated in this way.

Answer: (1) The pope and his followers are one of the parties who boast of being the true church. A party, however, cannot make an objective declaration concerning itself, even if they were the true church—which they are not. In doing so, they would consequently make a false pronouncement in the matter.

(2) The Word itself makes this pronouncement and resolves this point of contention with sufficient clarity. He who does not wish to subject himself to God's own pronouncement in His Word, but opposes it instead, will do so at his own peril and will bear his judgment.

(3) The apostle states, "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor 11:19). Thus, one ought not to expect that there will come an end to all controversy, but one needs to hold to the law and the prophets, and proceed according to that rule (Luke 16:29, 31; Isa 8:20; Gal 6:16).

Objection #2: An unlearned person cannot search the Bible, and can also not know the foundational doctrine of each church. Thus, consistency between doctrine and the Word of God cannot be a distinguishing mark of the church.

Answer: Since either a blind or ignorant person cannot examine gold by means of a proper touchstone, is such a touchstone therefore not a touchstone? Does this mean that gold cannot be identified? Such is also true here. If someone with a darkened understanding cannot comprehend the things of God's Spirit, this

does not negate the fact that God's Word is a touchstone. He who is illuminated knows it to be such, being assured of this.

Additional Objection: How will such poor people determine to whom they ought to join themselves? They can only proceed blindly. If they have joined themselves to a congregation, how will they know whether they are in the true church?

Answer: (1) This question will always remain, no matter what distinguishing mark one proposes regarding the church.

(2) Their duty is to pray and to search the Word, examining all things by means of this Word. It is pure grace if it pleases God to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to someone (Matt 13:11).

(3) Even if someone joins himself to the true church and remains blind and unconverted, he will not benefit thereby. When God converts and illuminates His elect, however, they know which is the true church, and rejoice in the fact that they are members of her, exclaiming, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem" (Ps 122:1-2). If someone blindly joins himself to the popish church, he will certainly join himself to the false church.

Objection #3: In the church there can be many errors so that the true doctrine is not always there, nor to be known. Consequently true doctrine cannot be the infallible distinguishing mark of the true church.

Answer (1) Even though there sometimes are many errors in the church, and even if she is inundated with errors (as will be true at the time of the antichrist), the Word and true doctrine can still be found there. And there will always be those who will defend the truth and oppose error.

(2) All errors do not pertain to the foundation of truth, and thus the truth by which one can be saved can remain there in its essence. If an assembly is inundated by foundational errors, however, and but a few truths remain which are not saving in nature (as is true for all heretical assemblies where some truth is to be found), that particular church ceases to be a church, and all true believers are then obligated to separate themselves from that assembly. God will then also draw His own out of such a church.

Objection #4: The church can be much more readily distinguished than the Word, and thus not the Word, but the church itself ought to be a distinguishing mark.

Answer: The external assemblies themselves can be distinguished much more readily than the Word. However, which of these assemblies constitutes the true church is not more readily

distinguished than the Word itself. Rather, the Word is more readily distinguished than such assemblies, since they can only be identified by the Word as has been shown above.

Additional Objection: One ought to consider the age and the luster of the church. Wherever this is most evident, one must conclude that the true church is to be found there.

Answer: That this is not characteristic of the church has been shown earlier. The church which in one locality is the oldest church, is the newest church in another locality. The church which in one locality is the most public and illustrious is most obscure in another locality. An old lie is never the truth. External and worldly luster in churches is not characteristic of spirituality, but generally characteristic of the world and the false church.

Objection #5: In identifying the church by means of the Word, one can be in error. Thus the Word cannot be the distinguishing mark for the true church.

Answer: The Word, being eternal truth, can neither be in error nor cause anyone to err, but man's understanding can err. Even though it can err, it does not always err, nor does man always remain in uncertainty whether he is in error or not. He is capable of both understanding and perceiving things so that he knows that he is not in error concerning a certain matter. "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ" (John 6:69); "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor 2:12); "And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6).

Secondly, one would be in much greater danger of error if one were to depend on the mere testimony of an assembly, since false churches also claim to be the true church. Consequently one must have an infallible and dependable distinguishing mark which is free of error and cannot cause one to err. This is only true of the Word of God. If one therefore hears a church claim to be the true church, and examines doctrine and life by this Word and finds them to be in harmony with it, he can say with the believing Samaritans, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). It thus remains certain that the Word is the true distinguishing mark by which it is ascertained which church is true.

The *second* distinguishing mark of the true church is the *holiness* of her members. The doctrine which is in harmony with God's Word is the preeminent distinguishing mark and sufficient in and of itself. All other distinguishing marks must likewise be tested by

God's Word. In order to expand this subject further, however, and to identify the church more clearly, we shall consider three other distinguishing marks, establishing the holiness of her members as the second distinguishing mark of the church. Above we have shown that only the truly converted are members of the church, and that *holiness* is a distinction of the true church according to the apostolic confession, *We believe an holy church*. If holiness is a distinguishing mark of the church, we shall be able to identify the church by it, and thus a church where true holiness is absent is not the true church. Other churches also boast of holiness, but all that is called holiness is not holiness. Therefore we must first determine from God's Word what true holiness is.

(1) True holiness springs forth from true faith. Where true faith is absent, true holiness will likewise be absent. Faith receives Christ as Surety unto justification and sanctification (John 1:12). By faith the soul is truly united with Christ (1 Cor 6:17). By faith Christ, who is her life, dwells in her heart (Eph 3:17). Faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9). Faith works by love (Gal 5:6), and faith causes her to bring forth good works (James 2:18).

(2) True holiness consists of our will being in harmony with God's will (Eph 6:6) and God's law (Matt 22:37), and in the restoration of God's image (Eph 4:24).

(3) Holiness in all its activity does not seek its own honor, but the glorification of God (1 Cor 10:31).

This holiness is only taught and practiced in the true church. Other assemblies, whether they claim or pretend to have such holiness, practice nothing but a natural virtuousness in which even some pagans have excelled. This is neither the true holiness which the Word of God requires nor that which we have just briefly described.

In maintaining that true holiness is a distinguishing mark of the true church, we do not suggest that all who are in the church are partakers of this holiness. What we are saying is that it is to be found there for those who are acquainted with true holiness and seek for it, and that true members are partakers of it. The church can be filled with so many unconverted members that they constitute the majority and dominate, thus oppressing the godly. Also here it is true: Many are called, but few are chosen. In stating that holiness is a distinguishing mark of the true church, we do not understand this to have reference to this or that specific church in a given city or village, but rather to the church in general as she is dispersed throughout the world, being the total sum of all individual churches. I do not dare to claim that true godly members are

to be found in every individual church, for individual churches can degenerate in doctrine and life and die out.

We hold the *third* distinguishing mark of the true church to be *the proper administration of the sacraments*. Again this must be determined from the Word of God, and thus not be viewed independently but in conjunction with the other distinguishing marks. Wherever the first distinguishing mark is to be found, the others will be found likewise. The sacraments have been instituted in the church by Christ, and are presented in the Word as to the manner in which they are to be administered. The nature and administration of the sacraments will be discussed later in chapter 37. (Cf. Gen 17:14; Num 9:12; Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23-30.) The sacraments are seals of the covenant of grace and are intended for partakers of the covenant alone. As each family is distinguished by its own coat of arms or seal, the church is likewise distinguished by the sacraments. Even though each assembly claims to have the sacraments, the correct administration of them is not necessarily to be found there. One church uses them either as a symbol of unity or as a mere external commemoration of the suffering of Christ, while another church assumes the external signs to be Christ Himself, attributing Christ's efficacy to them, thereby negating the nature of the sacraments.

We consider the *fourth* distinguishing mark to be the *use of the keys of God's kingdom*. The Lord Jesus has given keys to the church in order to include and exclude those whom He has commanded to include or exclude. These keys are the proclamation of the Word of God and Christian discipline, of which we will speak in chapter 29. The church is an assembly which is separated from the world and mutually united as one body under her Head, Jesus Christ, all of which we have discussed previously. For this purpose the Lord Christ has given keys, commanding to keep out and to cast out those who neither hold to true doctrine nor live in accordance with it (cf. Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:13; 2 Thess 3:14). As the lock is known by the key which fits it, the church can likewise be identified by her keys. These keys must not be used independently, however, but in conjunction with all the other distinguishing marks; their correct use must be determined by the Word of God. If those who err in doctrine and lead offensive lives are excluded, while those who are orthodox in doctrine and godly in their walk are included, the keys are used correctly; and by this one will be able to identify the true church. If anyone is included, however, regardless of what his doctrine and life may be, or if those are excommunicated who are orthodox in doctrine, while including in the

fellowship of the church those who err, such a practice is very evidently a mark of the false church. As imperfection is to be observed everywhere, and since this accompanying imperfection does not nullify the matter itself, there is also imperfection in the use of these keys. Although in one particular church these keys are used more consistently than in another, the proper use of the keys will be found in the true church.

In considering all these distinguishing marks together, one will clearly observe which church is the true church, and will publicly have to declare that only the Reformed Church is the true church, in contradistinction to all so-called churches, whatever name they may bear. The world is filled with books in which writers demonstrate irrefutably that these distinguishing marks are only applicable to the Reformed Church, and we are able to demonstrate this to all who would like to contradict this. We therefore rejoice in the grace of God: His holy Name be therefore praised and glorified for this to all eternity!

The Reformed Church Vindicated as the Continuation of the True Church

There are parties, not being able to refute this by means of the Word of God, who have contrived two objections in their own minds by which they wish to show that the Reformed Church is not the true church.

Objection #1: The Reformed Church is new, having only come into existence in the previous century,⁴ whereas the true church is of unchangeable durability. *Where was the Reformed church prior to Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin?*

Answer: First of all, the true church remains steadfast by reason of her durability—a durability which does not fluctuate. True doctrine is an infallible distinguishing mark of the church, which always remains true for her, as has also been shown above. Wherever true doctrine resides which the prophets and apostles by God's Spirit have presented in His Word, there is also the church. Inasmuch as she holds to this enduring true doctrine, the Reformed Church is therefore the true church. Prior to Luther this church existed wherever this true doctrine, which never ceased to be, was to be found.

Secondly, the Reformed Church, having the apostolic doctrine, is therefore also the apostolic church.

⁴ One must again bear in mind that this work was published in AD 1700.

(1) During the time of the apostles this church was dispersed throughout the entire world.

(2) After this she existed within the territory of pagan emperors, who, until Constantine the Great, that is, until AD 300, have cruelly persecuted her with fire and with sword—not being able, however, to destroy her.

(3) Subsequent to this she existed in the territory which was infiltrated by the antichrist of whom the apostle speaks when he states, “So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess 2:4). This is to say that the church was in Rome and primarily in Europe. It was this church which was infiltrated by popery, and thus gradually and increasingly permeated the church with errors. Popish religion has not always been what it now is, for her errors have gradually developed over time. At first there were but few, so that one could endure being in her midst, albeit with much sorrow and grief. Subsequently the errors were multiplied so that one could no longer bear to stay in it. For this reason the church, upon God’s command, separated herself from it, and departed out of her midst. Popish religion and its adherents were in the church and oppressed the church. We maintain that the church existed where popish errors were gradually introduced and corrupted the church. She existed wherever the popish church existed. She was not in the popish church, but the popish church was in her.

(4) She existed wherever the two witnesses were (Rev 11:3), that is, wherever there were few, but yet a sufficient number. Since Constantine there have always been some who, both orally and in writing, have opposed the errors which were surfacing. One particular church remained pure in doctrine longer than another and those who were pure in doctrine bore witness against the errors.

(5) The church existed in several independent churches which maintained separation from popery, against which former popes have initiated persecutions and have periodically eradicated some. Such churches existed since early times in the southern parts of France, as well as in some parts of England, Scotland, Bohemia, and also in Piedmont. Against these churches popes have initiated many persecutions, but they continue to exist until this day. History books bear abundant witness to all this. Several popish authors, such as Thumanus, Aeneas Sylvius, Eckius, and Tochlæus, have particularly written about the residents of Piedmont, referring to them as heretics. They declare that prior to the time of Zwingli and Luther there had been very many who adhered to the same doctrine—

which they refer to as heresy—and that Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin had by renewal brought this doctrine to light.

Particularly, there are two popish writers who in a noteworthy manner have written concerning the Waldenses. I shall trouble myself to translate something from each writer into our language, since their witness is of such importance.

Reynerius, one of the leaders of the Inquisition, who did some writing prior to the year 1400, writes concerning the Waldenses:

Among all sects that either are or have been, there is none more detrimental to the Roman Catholic Church than that of the Leonists (that is, the poor men of Lyons—the Waldenses), and that for three reasons. The first is, because it is the sect that is of the longest standing of any; for some say it has existed continually since Pope Sylvester, whereas others since the time of the apostles. The second is, because it is the most general of all sects; for scarcely is there any country to be found where this sect has not been embraced. The third is, because, while all other sects frighten their hearers by the abominable nature of their blasphemies against God, this sect has a great appearance of godliness, since they live righteously before all men, believe all that God has said, and maintain all the articles contained in the “sybolum” (the twelve Articles of Faith). They do, however, speak evil of the Roman Catholic Church and its clergy, that is, the pope, cardinals, bishops, and other so-called clergymen.

Archbishop Sessellius writes in his book against the Waldenses:

The Waldenses originate from a religious man named Leo, who lived during the time of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great. This Leo despised the miserliness of Pope Sylvester and the excess of liberty enjoyed under Constantine. He would rather endure poverty in pursuance of the simplicity of faith than to remain loyal to Sylvester and be polluted by the lucrative benefices which were the portion of those who were sympathetic towards the faith.

Such is the witness of these parties. Do you yet ask whether the Reformed Church existed prior to Luther? To this I reply that she was to be found among those whom we have just mentioned; that is, those residing in Piedmont among the Waldenses. Our doctrine is identical with theirs, being in all aspects in agreement with the Word of God.

Objection #2: This objection relates to the sending forth of ministers. There is no true church unless the clergy is commissioned by the pope or other members of the clergy. Since the ministers of the Word in the Reformed Church are not sent forth in such a manner, their church cannot be the true church.

Answer: First, we deny that being commissioned by the pope is

an essential element of the true church. Indeed, we maintain that after the true church departed from the popish church, this commission is of no value, since the antichrist has no power to ordain ministers. Their commission prior to the exit of the true church may be recognized, since they were in the church, and thus their commission originated with the church.

Secondly, the succession of ministers is no distinguishing mark of the true church as we have previously proven. The commission of ministers is also not a sacrament, so that for a season the true church could exist entirely without the service of ministers.

Thirdly, in case of necessity the church is authorized to call those to the ministry of the Word whom she deems fit for this, even though the circumstances and ceremonies which are normally observed in an organized church are set aside at such a time. The commission is of God and derives its authority from Him. Men are but the means by which such a commission is executed. This is true for ministers in an established congregation or for the congregation itself during unsettled times when the corrupted church is being restored. The congregation of one hundred twenty persons (Acts 1:15) appointed two candidates for the apostleship, choosing one by means of the lot (vs. 23). From city to city elders were appointed by a show of hands by the congregation (Acts 14:23). In like manner the church may also in case of necessity appoint ministers.

Additional Objection: This would constitute an extraordinary commission and they would then be required to perform miracles.

Answer: This is not a new, but the old administration. It is not a new doctrine or religious practice, but only the circumstances are extraordinary. All prophets did not perform miracles, and the miracles of the apostles have validity for us as well, for it is the same doctrine and the same administration.

Fourthly, the Reformed Church at the outset of the Reformation and upon her departure from [popery], had many priests in her midst who left popery, transferred to the true church, went in and out with her, and preached the truth. They in turn were able to commission others in the ordinary manner. If you insist on commission, here it is.

Objection #1: They were commissioned to teach popish doctrine and to administer the ceremonies.

Answer: They were commissioned by the true church (which at that time was overrun by popery), to preach true doctrine. This was the purpose of the divine commission, and thus the commission of the church. Papists will not dare to contradict this. They

would not dare to maintain that they were sent forth to preach idolatry. Thus, the commission of the priests who departed was both lawful and with the proper objective, as they were not commissioned to promote idolatry.

Objection #2: Their commission was taken away from them.

Answer (1) After the church departed out of the midst of popery, only anti-Christianity remained. It was no longer a church, and it thus had no power over those who had departed.

(2) It was unjust to depose faithful ministers, and thus because of the common commission they lawfully remained pastors and teachers.

Objection #3: The commission of popery is no longer considered lawful, for a priest who now comes over to us, desiring to be a minister, must by renewal be commissioned. Therefore the commission of those who initially departed from the church is not lawful.

Answer: There is a significant difference between the two. At that time the church was still subject to popery and the commission derived its validity from the church. After the true church departed, however, her commission was no longer that of the true church, but rather of a false church. Therefore her commission which previously was lawful is now invalid.

The True Church Confesses Christ and His Truth

We now return to our description of the church as previously proposed, where we stated that *the Church manifests itself by a true confession of Christ and His truth*. When considering the church, a distinction is generally made between the *visible* and *invisible* church. This distinction does not pertain to her nature, as if there existed two essentially different churches, the one having different members from the other, for there is but one church. This distinction, however, relates to her external condition which sometimes is more and at other times less visible due to errors, ungodly practices, and persecutions. We have considered all this above. There is nothing the church fears more than that these matters will obscure and conceal her existence, and yet this is at times her lot. Nevertheless, she is like light and fire which always strive to manifest themselves, and to be publicly observed. She fears neither sword, nor fire, nor the gallows, and she boasts of the martyrs who, by their death, seal the truth. She views such occasions as so many victories. Her sole desire is that she may be visible: For this reason she continually strives to manifest herself, not with a sword in hand but by a faithful confession of Christ and His truth. She confesses that Christ is the only and all-sufficient Savior who as Surety, by His suffering and death, has satisfied the justice of God

for the sins of His people and has reconciled them with God. He also by His active obedience and fulfillment of the law—doing so as Surety on their behalf—declares them righteous in Him and heirs of eternal life. She confesses that only those can be saved who receive Him as such by a true faith, are spiritually united to Him, live in Him, manifest His nature by way of a holy life, and walk as He has walked (1 John 2:6).

It is for this purpose that they gather together to hear the Word of God and to use the sacraments; they keep themselves separate and distinct from the world and as a city upon a hill (Matt 5:14). They are always ready to give an answer to every man that asks them the reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear (1 Pet 3:15). They do so not as unto men but as unto God, in all humility and reverence and without undue boldness. For this purpose they have been called and gathered together. “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall shew forth My praise” (Isa 43:21); “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

The True Church Engaged in Spiritual Warfare

We also stated that, under her Head Christ Jesus the church battles with spiritual weapons against her and Christ’s enemies. In this respect a distinction is made between the church triumphant and the church militant.

The *church triumphant* is in heaven, consisting of such who in the way of faith, sanctification, and spiritual warfare have gained the victory and subsequently received the crown. “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number ... stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; ... These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them” (Rev 7:9, 14-15).

The *church militant* is upon earth having the *devil* and the *world* as her external enemies, and her *flesh* as her internal enemy. The *devil* is a murderer from the beginning, who from the moment that the promise concerning the Seed of the woman was given, has with evil hatred opposed it and all those who believe in it. He does all in his power to torment them, and if it were possible, to prevent them from coming to Christ. And if they have come, he strives to

draw them away from Him, thereby obscuring the glory of the church. Against this the church puts itself in array, battling these enemies with spiritual weapons as described in Eph 6:11-18.

The church and the world bear mutual contempt for each other for several reasons: the members of the church are of a more excellent spirit than those who belong to the world; they convince and condemn the world by the truth, and with their holy lives; they desire to dwell alone, separating themselves from the world, unwilling to intermingle with the world. In fact, in all aspects the church and the world are a contrast to one another as far as nature, objectives, and manner of life are concerned. All of this results in activity whereby both parties seek to mutually protect themselves from the other and to prevent being adversely affected by each other.

The world uses physical weapons, inflicts damage to property, scorns and taunts the reputation of the godly and uses fire and sword against them, doing all this to draw them away from the faith and the practice of godliness. The world seeks to bind the church in every respect to itself, and thus make the church conformed to itself.

The church seeks the salvation of the world, and by way of faith and repentance to draw it to herself. To this end the church does not use physical weapons, which as the church she does not possess. Rather, she uses spiritual weapons: the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, the totality of her confession, a sanctified life, a vigorous protection of the truth, and a steadfast patience to endure everything for Christ's sake. God's Word makes very frequent mention of this warfare: "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12); "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 2:3); "After ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions" (Heb 10:32). The *flesh* within is the enemy which does most harm. Without its cooperation the others would not gain a foothold. While holiness is the ornament of the church, sin disgraces the church. Every true member of the church, due to having Spirit and life, hates sin, and sets himself in array against it so as to conquer rather than be conquered by sin. Paul speaks of this when he writes, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal 5:17). Peter exhorts to engage in this battle, "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11).

The Antichrist: The Foremost and Most Formidable Foe of the Church

Among the enemies which the church has here upon earth,

the *antichrist* is the most significant and primary cause of all the persecutions of the church.

The word “antichrist” consists of two words: ἀντι: (*anti*), which, depending on the context, can mean either *against* or *for*, and Χριστοῦ (*Christos*). Thus the word “antichrist” pertains to someone who is against Christ but who nevertheless creates the impression as if he were for Christ.

Sometimes this word is used as pertaining to every heretic, who opposes the Person and the doctrine of Christ. “As ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time” (1 John 2:18). Generally, however, it pertains to the great antichrist, the head of the multitude who oppose the doctrine and professors of Christ. That such a person will come is confirmed by many texts in the Holy Scriptures and is a fact which is not denied by anyone.

Question: Who is the antichrist?

Answer: With all Protestants we reply: *The pope of Rome*. The papists deny this strongly.

Scriptural Proofs that the Pope of Rome Is the Antichrist

We shall first confirm our opinion, and then answer the objections of the papists. In order to perceive the force of our argumentation all the more clearly, one must view all our arguments comprehensively, that is, as one argument. Our proof will consist of several parts, each of which, when considered independently, is convincing in and of itself.

Our *first proof* is derived from the name itself, which means darkness. “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six” (Rev 13:18). In chapter 15:2 this is referred to as *the number of his name*. The Lord did not want to call him expressly by name; possibly that he be not hindered in his pursuit, or because the Lord did not wish to reveal His mysteries to everyone (cf. Matt 13:13). It is irrefutable that the reference here is to the antichrist. How to prove this, however, is not equally clear to everyone. To identify him here as such, one must note: 1) John wrote in the Greek language, and the Greek language uses its letters also as numbers; 2) the letters of this number would convey the name of a man. We also read of “... the mark of his name” (Rev 14:11); “... the number of his name” (Rev 15:2); 3) his name would be written with such letters which together would constitute the number six hundred sixty-six.

First of all, Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp who himself was a

disciple of John, arrived at the spelling of lateino” (*lateinos*), and concluded thereby that the antichrist would come forth from Italy and from the Latin church. *Italy*, or at least a portion of it, had a king prior to the birth of Christ. His name was *Latinus*, who was a son of *Faunus*, the son of *Picus*, the son of *Saturnus*, the son of *Janus*, the first king of Italy. *Italy*, or that portion of Italy which surrounds Rome, is called *Latinum* after this *Latinus*, and the language spoken there was called *Latin*, which is true until this very day. *Latinus* is written in Greek as *Lateinos* and these letters irrefutably represent the number 666. Therefore, in pursuit of the antichrist one is as it were led by the hand to Rome, to the Latin church and to her bishop, who later was called *papa* or *pope*, that is, father. The pope was the proprietor of *Latinum*, where *Latinus* was king before Rome was built. He established himself in the *Latin Church*, for the Western church was long known by the name of *Latin Church*. Whenever a general ecclesiastical gathering convened, the Western bishops were referred to as *Latin* bishops, and the Eastern bishops as *Greek* bishops. Until this very day the pope still uses the *Latin language* in his directives and decrees. Throughout the entire world the church service, the mass, etc, are conducted in the *Latin language*, which must be viewed as an extraordinary providence of God, whereby it is clearly proven that he is the antichrist.

Secondly, it becomes even more clear if one compares the pope with the person whose name is expressed by 666.

(1) The seat of his residence would be in Rome, which is built upon seven hills. In Rev 17:1 it is confirmed that this refers to the antichrist, and in verse 9 his seat is identified: “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth” (Rev 17:9).

(2) According to verses 10-11 he would succeed the emperor in this territory, for the seven heads refer to the sevenfold manner of government in Rome. Five forms of government had already run their course during the time of John. The sixth, consisting of the rule of the emperors, was in place at that time, after which the seventh would follow. However, none but the pope has succeeded the emperors in governing Rome.

(3) He whose name would constitute the number six hundred sixty-six would ascend the throne upon the destruction of the empire, and ten kings would simultaneously receive power to govern with him. “And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings” (Rev 17:12). All of this transpired between 500 and 600 A.D.

(4) This person would again introduce pagan idolatry and the worship of images (cf. Rev 13:3, 12-15). The pagan empire received

a mortal wound from Constantine the Great who eliminated idolatry. This, however, was restored by the seventh head, the pope, by reintroducing idolatry and the worship of images.

(5) He whose name would be expressed by 666 would be worshipped, and receive superhuman honor (vs. 4).

(6) This person would blaspheme God and His church (vss. 5-6).

(7) He would engage and prevail in “holy” warfare (vss. 7-8).

(8) The time of His reign would be forty-two months.

(9) The entire world would be loyal to him and follow him (vs. 8).

(10) He would cloak everything with an appearance of piety; he would have the horns of a lamb, but speak as a dragon (vs. 11).

(11) He would deceive by means of lying wonders (vss. 13-14).

(12) He whose name is six hundred sixty-six would make idolatry compulsory, and put to death whoever would not comply (vs. 15).

(13) He would compel everyone to acknowledge him and to name themselves after him, or to declare their allegiance to him. They would be required to bear a mark; whoever would refuse to do so would not be able to buy or sell, and a social relationship with such would be forbidden (vss. 16-17).

When we apply all this to the pope, they resemble each other as two drops of water, as we shall subsequently demonstrate. We have thus considered the name 666 and all the circumstances related to it, as well as who would bear this name. He who cannot conclude from all this that the pope is the antichrist must be blind, since the pope’s name and activity are entirely consistent with all this.

That popery itself cannot perceive this should come as no surprise. Of necessity it cannot perceive this, for this would signal the end of popery, which still must endure for some time.

Objection: “Latinus” must be written without an “e” and thus will not be equivalent to the number 666.

Answer (1) John did not write in Latin, but in Greek. That which is “Latinus” in Latin, is “Lateinos” in Greek. Irenaeus, being a Greek, certainly knew how one ought to write this word in Greek.

(2) Latins would also use “ei” instead of “i,” as for instance in “Sabeinos,” “Antoneinos,” “Lateinos,” as well as in this phrase, *quam primum Cascei, Populei tenuere Lateinei*. This argument is therefore futile.

The *second proof* is that the antichrist must have his seat and territory in Rome. “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.” (Rev 17:18; “And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth” (Rev 17:18). The antichrist is here presented as a woman, as a great harlot (vs. 1), because of the idolatry—which is referred

to as “adultery” in the Word of God—and also due to the shameful physical adultery and lewdness which is particularly in vogue among the so-called clergy of Rome and Italy. This harlot would have possession of the great city, which at that time would hold sway over the kings of the earth. That city is Rome, the seat of emperors. There were seven hills within the confines of Rome’s walls, a fact which obviously needs no further proof. Writers prior to and during this time refer to her as the *city upon seven hills*. *Virgil*, who died approximately fourteen years prior to the birth of Christ, writes:

Georgicon, Lib. II, 534-535.
Scilicet, et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma,
Septum quae una sibi muro circumdedit arces.

Translation: Thus, Rome has become the most glorious city of all, which alone has surrounded seven strongholds with a wall.

Ovidius, who was born approximately thirty-eight years prior to Christ, writes:

Tristium, Lib. I, 5, 69-70.
Sed quae de septem totum circumspicit orbem
Montibus, imperii Roma Deut.mque locus.

Translation: Rome, the territory of the gods, which overlooks the entire earth from seven hills.

Tristium, Lib. III, 7, 51-52.
Dumque suis septem victrix de montibus orbem
Prospiciet domitum Martia Roma, legar.

Translation: I shall nevertheless be read as long as warring and victorious Rome overlooks a conquered world from her seven hills.

The pope, however, has his chair in this Rome built upon seven hills. His territory extends to the kingdoms of this earth, and there he rules over many nations (Rev 17:15). He is drunk with the blood of saints and has poured out the blood of professors of the truth as water (vs. 6). The kings of the earth surrender their power to him to this end (vss. 13-14). The pope is thus the antichrist.

Evasive Argument: Popery, in order not to apply this dreadful indictment to itself, agrees that this harlot and this great city refer to Rome, but then to pagan Rome during the time of the emperors, which became drunk with the blood of saints.

Answer: This chapter in Revelation indicates clearly that this refers to Rome after the emperors, and not while they reigned. It is a known fact that the pope of Rome has reigned after the emperors and reigns there as yet. This will be evident from the third proof.

The *third proof* we derive from the practice of persecution and

the time of its public manifestation. The beast had to succeed the emperors in the territory of Rome and the entire earth: “I ... saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns” (Rev 13:1); “And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven” (Rev 17:10-11).

“Seven heads” does not merely pertain to seven hills, comprehended within the walls of Rome, but also pertains to seven kings, that is, sovereign governments rather than specific individuals. Five forms of government had already run their course: kings, mayors, councils, governors, and dictators. The sixth form of government was in place when John wrote, for it is irrefutable that the emperors reigned at that time. During their reign this would not transpire, however, but rather under the seventh head of Rome. The beast was the seventh head which would come after the emperors as far as worldly rule is concerned, and be simultaneously also the eighth king as far as the supreme spiritual rulership which he claims for himself relative to the souls of men. This proves that the reference here is not to pagan Rome, but to Rome under the dominion of the pope.

Additionally, this seventh head would not step aside as quickly as the other heads, since the previous forms of Rome’s government were each time but for a short duration. However, this form of government would endure for some time—42 months or 1260 days. Since this refers to years this can only be applicable to the pope. Add to this what is written in verses 12-13, “And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.” This did not occur, however, during the time of the emperors, for they were monarchs, sovereign heads and rulers. Instead, this occurred when the empire was destroyed by the Goths, Lombards, and other pagan nations which divided the empire into ten kingdoms.

Approximately around the same time, the beast also arose, and gained possession of Rome, which none other but the pope accomplished. Even when these nations for some time ruled Italy, they did not have their seat of government in Rome. Ten kings, however, yielded their power to the beast who had his seat of government in Rome, the city of seven hills, desiring to be confirmed and sanctioned by him. They executed his will in doing battle against Christ and His church. Observe, that this is the antichrist who, after the emperors, had his seat of government and territory in

Rome and thus in the world—at the time when ten kings gained power after the destruction of the empire. They who are now referred to as emperors did not come to power until 325 years later. They neither exercise any power over Rome, nor have their seat of government there, and thus rule but in name. However, none but the pope has succeeded the emperors in this territory. Ten kings came to power simultaneously with the pope and ten kings have yielded their power to none other than the pope to shed the blood of the church and to persecute her. The pope is thus the antichrist.

This has even further strengthened our second proof and has answered the exception by demonstrating that the reference is not to pagan Rome but to Rome under the dominion of the pope, who would perform all that is stated in Rev 13 and 17. He must be blind who cannot see that this does not refer to the emperors, but to the pope who succeeded them. Therefore it is obvious that the pope is the antichrist.

We derive the *fourth proof* from the behavior of the antichrist.

He would first of all place himself in the temple of God. “So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess 2:4). The church is God’s house (1 Tim 3:15) and God’s temple. “For ye are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16). He would sit in the church as if he were God, viewing himself as the head and officer of the church; he would not approach the church as an external enemy and do battle against the church as such, but would rather proceed from within her and occupy the position of headship in the church. To whom but the pope does this apply, who is openly recognized as head by popery, and to whom they have given the title, “Our Lord God the pope”?

Secondly, the apostasy would be initiated with him. “Except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thess 2:3). The church has always done battle, even in its initial period, against many heresies. The church of Rome maintained its purity the longest, and this gave opportunity to other churches in whom heresies arose to take refuge to the church of Rome. The bishop of Rome in turn used this opportunity to gradually exalt himself above all churches. He wanted his declarations relative to points of contention to be accepted as divine revelation without anyone contradicting him. Since heresies arose in her as well, however, the apostasy from the purity of the faith affected the entire church that much more easily and quickly. This apostasy increased rapidly, and one error led to the next.

The fact that Rome has become entirely apostate is demonstrated

everywhere in this book. Rome places its declarations and traditions next to, and in opposition to, the Word of God. Rome forbids the reading of the Bible, commands that a piece of bread be worshipped as God, has introduced the worship of angels and deceased saints, has erected images and altars, claims authority for itself to forgive sin, promotes the apostasy of the saints, teaches that man is not only able to be perfect but can also perform superfluous works which the pope then keeps in his treasure chest and distributes according to his pleasure. Rome denies that the merits of Christ atone for all sin, original and actual. It teaches that one can and must earn heaven himself. It has fabricated the existence of purgatory, and on behalf of the living and the dead, sacrifices Christ anew in the mass. All Romish errors are too numerous to be mentioned here. These sufficiently demonstrate that Rome and its followers have become apostate concerning the faith.

Thirdly, the antichrist would exalt himself above the kings of the earth. “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped ... shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess 2:4). Kings and governments are referred to as kings and princes in Ps 82:1, 6. The pope exalts himself above all kings and princes. He is well aware of this and also exercises this power as he appoints and deposes kings, releases subjects from their oath and fidelity, and distributes countries to whomever he wills, for instance giving America to the king of Spain. The kings, however, are becoming somewhat wiser, and are not very concerned about his power of deposition. The time is near that they will despise their foolishness for having esteemed him so highly, and will hate and reject him (Rev 17:16-17).

Yes, the Pope allows himself to be carried about as if he were God, and everyone bows the knee before him. He opposes the God of heaven, establishing religious practices which are contrary to what God has instituted. He has the audacity to maintain that *even though Christ has instituted the Lord’s Supper with two signs*, bread and wine, that it will be administered with one sign—bread only.

Fourthly, the antichrist would perform wonders. “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess 2:9); “And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do” (Rev 13:13-14). Those who belong to popery are the only ones who boast of miracles, wishing to prove thereby that they are the true church. What blind ignorance this is! They thereby convey clearly that the

pope is the antichrist. Their miracles, however, no longer have the credibility they once had when thick darkness prevailed. Men now laugh at their lying wonders.

Fifthly, the antichrist would live in great luster and pomp. “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls” (Rev 17:4). There is an extensive description of this pomp and luster in Rev 18:12, 16. If one examines this text and then considers the pope and his followers, having purple as the color for himself and his cardinals, he will have to say that the pope is most certainly the antichrist described in this passage. He does not resemble Peter in the least—in doctrine or in life.

Sixthly, the antichrist would war against the saints. “And it was given unto him (the beast) to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all ... to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Rev 13:7, 15-17). Compare the pope’s activity to this, and you will observe therein as precise a fulfillment of prophecy as one could wish for. Who but the pope opposes the true church? Who but the pope murders true professors for their witness concerning the truth? How many hundreds of thousands have already lost their lives by order and direction of the pope? Who but he has become drunk with the blood of the saints? All who confess not to be Roman Catholic, who do not wish to acknowledge him as the head of the church, who do not go to mass to worship the god of bread, who do not carry a chaplet or cross or manifest in any other way that they are of popish persuasion, must be expelled and are not able to practice their business, profession, or trade. They are all subject to opposition, tortures, violence, monasteries, prisons, galleys, the gallows, theft of property, and deprivation of children. Does this not bear witness to the entire world that *the pope is the antichrist*?

Seventhly, add to this what is written in 1 Tim 4:1, 3, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.” Examine the entire world and ask who has become apostate concerning the faith and who forbids to eat. Would not everyone have to admit that this pertains to the pope who forbids male as well as female members of the clergy to marry, and who forbids the eating of meat, eggs, etc. on Fridays and during their

seven weekly fasts? We thus conclude, having the approbation of everyone's conscience, that *the pope is the antichrist*.

Objection: It is not written that the antichrist would do all these things; the pope is thus not the antichrist.

Answer: One thing is sure, however: he teaches the doctrines of devils. Furthermore, Scripture states clearly that the devil rules the antichrist, helps him and empowers him. "And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (Rev 13:2); "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan" (2 Thess 2:9). If we consider these texts, we shall observe that the forbidding of marriage and the command to abstain from meat is the work of the antichrist, and thus we conclude that *the pope is the antichrist*.

Since little can be said in opposition to the aforementioned truths, they will resort to several other evasive arguments.

Evasive Argument #1: The antichrist will be only one person.

Answer (1) He is one in the same manner as the previous six heads were one. These were one, not as far as the person was concerned, but as far as the form of government. This is likewise true for the seventh head.

(2) He already began with his activity during the time of the apostles, and would continue to stir until he would have free rein and ascend the throne. This did not occur until several hundred years later, and thus it does not pertain to one person.

Evasive Argument #2: He would come after the destruction of the empire, but the empire still exists.

Answer: The empire has already been destroyed, and was terminated with *Augustulus* who was the last emperor in the fifth century. He who now bears the title "emperor" was not denominated as such by the pope until the year 800. He has no authority in Rome nor in Roman territory. The kings of Spain, France, England, Scotland, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Poland—who formerly all belonged to the empire—refuse to acknowledge him as such.

Evasive Argument #3: The antichrist will only appear at the end of the world and will be destroyed by Christ's coming unto judgment (2 Thess 2:8).

Answer: It is not true that he will appear near the end of the world's existence. This is nowhere written in Scripture. "The last days" refers to the entire New Testament dispensation (cf. Acts 2:17; Heb 1:1-2). The time of his fall will come, and Christ will come with His judgments to destroy him even prior to His coming in judgment. If this text is understood as referring to the final judgment, one ought to know that even after the destruction of the

antichrist, which will occur prior to the millennium⁵ (Rev 19:20; Rev 20:4), his spirit will nevertheless prevail in many. He will only be destroyed when Christ comes in judgment.

Evasive Argument #4: He will only reign forty-two months, or 1260 days, which is three and one half years.

Answer: Those days are representative of years. Thus, Jacob's service of one week consisted of seven years (Gen 29:27), and the seventy weeks of Daniel represented seventy year-weeks (Dan 9:24). Such is also the case here, for it is impossible that the antichrist would perform and accomplish all that in such a short period of time.

Evasive Argument #5: He must be a Jew, will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and reintroduce circumcision. Enoch and Elijah must first come from Paradise to oppose the antichrist and ascend to heaven again.

Answer: These are fabrications which are contrary to the Word of God.

Evasive Argument #6: The antichrist will deny Christ.

Answer: The pope has always done this, and still does so by way of his doctrines and institutions, just as the Jews made the commandment of God of none effect with their traditions (Matt 15:6). It thus remains certain that *the pope is the antichrist*.

How correctly our forefathers have acted when they, upon God's command, departed from Babylon! It is everyone's duty never to have fellowship with the antichrist, and to die as martyrs for the cause of Christ rather than to be in the least manner polluted by him and his activities.

The True Church Glorifies God

We have previously stated that the primary *purpose* of the church's existence is *the glorification of God*. Since the church is the kingdom of heaven, and the people of God have God as their Father and the Lord Jesus as their King, so the glory of God can be observed when these people live in the love and fear of God. This is true when they are obedient to Him as their Lord, trust in Him as the almighty and faithful One, and live pure and holy lives personally among each other and towards others. The Lord's Name is desecrated, however, when this people who are called after His Name do not conduct themselves accordingly. It is the Lord's will that His Name be hallowed by the coming of His kingdom (Matt 6:9-10). He has

⁵ à Brakel adhered to what today is referred to as "post millennialism," a view which he clearly expresses in his commentary on the book of Revelation.

formed that people to show forth His praise (Isa 43:21); to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them (1 Pet 2:9); to be to the glory of Christ (2 Cor 8:23); and to “be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God” (Isa 62:3). Therefore “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

The secondary objective is the *salvation of the elect*. The church functions as a mother (Gal 4:26), and has within her the Word of God as an incorruptible seed (1 Pet 1:23). As such she is fruitful unto the conversion of many souls, “And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her” (Ps 87:5). By means of the preaching of the Word, the Lord will add to “the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The Duty to Join the Church and to Remain with Her

In the previous chapter we have defined the nature of the church. It is, however, not sufficient to be acquainted with her as such, but everyone with a desire to be saved is obligated to *join* the church, to remain with her, and not to separate himself from her in order to establish a more orthodox church. Furthermore, he who wishes to remain with her must also persevere in having fellowship with her by the use of the holy sacraments. We shall now discuss each of these matters in detail.

It is the duty of everyone who desires to be saved to turn to the church, making diligent effort to be accepted as a member of the church community.

First, this is God's way whereby He leads the elect unto salvation. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47); "Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people" (Isa 56:3).

Secondly, this has been the task of the apostles in accordance with their commission (Matt 28:19), as is to be observed in the entire *Acts of the Apostles*.

Thirdly, this is consistent with the nature of God's children. As soon as they are converted, they cannot rest until they have been received into the bosom of their spiritual mother (Gal 4:26).

Fourthly, this is the consistent confession of the church of all ages, and particularly of churches of the Netherlands. In article 28 of the Belgic Confession we read: "We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and that out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or

condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it.” We have elaborated on this in chapter 24.

Fifthly, the church is the glory of Christ. It is there that Christ is confessed and proclaimed throughout the world, being held forth as a banner upon a hill around which one must gather himself. This is the city upon a hill, and a light shining in the darkness. She is the means whereby the truth is made known and preserved, and the means unto the conversion of souls. Everyone is therefore obligated to facilitate this by joining himself to the church.

Motives for Joining the Church

In order that you may be stirred up and be active concerning this, calmly consider first of all that there are but two kings in this world, each having a kingdom: the kingdoms of Christ and of the devil, which are mortal enemies to each other. A third kingdom does not exist. Every person upon earth is either a subject of King Jesus or of the devil, the prince of darkness. No matter who you are individually, you are truly a subject of one of these two kingdoms. You are neither neutral nor a subject of both kingdoms simultaneously. Therefore, to which kingdom do you presently belong? What do you have to say for yourself? If you neither know nor have ever given this any thought, come and sit next to me for a moment; let us consider this matter, and then make a heartfelt and eternal choice. Whose subject do you wish to be? Whom do you choose to be your king?

If you choose the devil to be your king and to be subject to him—to do his will, to indulge in your lusts, to wallow in your sins as a swine in the mire, to seek those things which are upon earth, to satisfy your lusts, as well as for leisure and entertainment—o let it be. Enjoy it to the fullest as long as you have the opportunity. “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes” (Eccles 11:9); “... love the world ... all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life ... ” (1 John 2:15-16). If therefore by your very deeds you reveal yourself to be a subject of the devil, be also not ashamed to bear the name of such a subject. Own, acknowledge, and confess the devil to be your lord and master. Trust in him, and delight yourself in the fact that you will eternally be with him in the lake that burns with brimstone, where the smoke of torment will ascend forever and ever.

Someone may think, “This is stated too blatantly. Christ must be

our King. Even if we seek our own pleasure, conform to the will of Satan, and live a distinctly worldly life, the devil is not therefore our king.” To this we respond, “He most certainly is!” If you in turn respond, “Christ is nevertheless our King,” we reply, “He most certainly is not!” Listen to what Paul says: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Rom 6:16).

Therefore, if in truth you neither wish the devil to be your king nor to have your portion with him in outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 25:30), then resolutely, without reservation, and without recantation resign from his service, and with all your heart bid the devil’s kingdom farewell, forsake all sin and the lusts of the flesh, and enter into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Receive Him as your sole and sovereign King. Do this not only verbally, externally, by way of approximation or by way of sudden impulse, but consciously and in truth.

Sit down and take time to count the cost. Consider whether, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, you are willing to part with all your fleshly thoughts and lusts, all your worldly pleasure, your friends, and your life. Consider whether you would be willing to follow Him in hunger, nakedness, and shame, being steadfast unto death—and be obedient to Him in all things. If your heart has been illuminated, and in the presence of God you can truthfully answer in the affirmative, come to a full resolution and turn to this King. Bow before Him, offer yourself to Him, enter into covenant with Him, and thus become His subject. In order that you may be exercised in this in a more clear and heartfelt manner, give further consideration to the following matters.

Love itself towards the Lord Jesus ought to motivate you to do so, since He is so precious, glorious, and full of salvation for all who come to Him. It has pleased God that all fullness should dwell in Him; He is a complete ransom. He is mighty to reconcile enemies with God, to make peace, to purify the conscience, to deliver the soul from all guilt and punishment as well as from the devil and hell, to unite her with God, to give her the Holy Spirit, and to sanctify, preserve, and lead her to eternal felicity.

If all this does not motivate you, and you cannot think of one reason which would make you active in this regard—if only then you would reflect for a moment! Would that it were your heartfelt inclination and joy that all men would bow down before Jesus, acknowledge Him as King, and surrender to His rule! This would be suitable to exercise a desire in you that He who is worthy to rule

would also rule in your heart, that you would also belong to those who exclaim, “Jesus is King!” and that with you the number of His subjects would be increased.

The Glory and Elegance of the Church

In this church there is both glory and elegance. For a moment give attentive consideration to the glorious state of that kingdom and its true subjects. The earth and the nations are enveloped in darkness; however, wondrous light is to be found in the church. The glory of the Lord illuminates this city of God and the Sun of Righteousness enlightens it with His light. Outside of her is nothing but pollution, abominations, and ungodliness; however, within her there is holiness, purity, and glory. The church is called, “The perfection of beauty” (Ps 50:1-2); “an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations” (Isa 60:15); “a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God” (Isa 62:12; “The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord” (Isa 62:12); “the Lord ... will be the glory in the midst of her” (Zech 2:5); “And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God” (Ezek 16:14). Consider attentively how delightful and desirable each true subject is to God. “Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee” (Isa 43:4); “Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee” (Isa 62:4); “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child” (Jer 31:20). Therefore we must exclaim with Moses, “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!” (Deut 33:29). There is reason to exhort one another, “Walk about Zion, and go around about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces” (Ps 48:12-13). Ought not everyone therefore to delight himself in Zion, and be desirous to be a member of this church, a fellow citizen of the saints, and a member of the household of God? Should not everyone be desirous to submit himself to the protection and government of this King? For not only are all of these things said concerning this kingdom and this King, but all are most certainly true.

There is safety in this kingdom. Consider the faithful protection which this King affords to all His subjects in general, and to each subject in particular. The Lord speaks thus: “I have laid help upon One that is mighty” (Ps 89:19); “He is just and having salvation” (Zech 9:9); “And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of

mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain” (Isa 4:5-6); “For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about” (Zech 2:5); “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day” (Isa 27:3). Here we may behold these truthful promises and the actual protection afforded. Is not he then entirely secure who enjoys the protection of such a King, and who may belong to a people upon whom the eye of the Lord is continually? “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps 91:1). You therefore, whoever you may be, flee to this strong tower and join yourself to Zion, for “the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall trust in it” (Isa 14:32). Seek refuge under the wings of this King who will redeem the souls of His subjects “from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in His sight” (Ps 72:14).

In this kingdom there is truth, light, life, joy, and whatever else may rejoice a soul and make it happy. Furthermore, the blessings with which this King favors His subjects are inexpressibly glorious. He fully forgives all their iniquities. “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (Isa 33:24). He is the “fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech 13:1). He gives them peace and joy. “He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth” (Ps 72:6-7) His name is “the Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6); “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (John 14:27); “For the kingdom of God ... is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17). God Himself is their portion and complete joy. “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him” (Lam 3:24). He gives them His Holy Spirit who quickens, teaches, guides, and sanctifies them. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father” (John 15:26); “But if I depart, I will send Him (the Comforter) unto you” (John 16:7).

Yes, if I had to relate to you all blessings, I would have to enumerate all the benefits of the covenant of grace. In a word, the Lord blesses them “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). The Lord says, “All My springs are in thee” (Ps 87:7); “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the

city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High” (Ps 46:4); “For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Ps 133:3); “Oh how great is thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!” (Ps 31:19).

He who may be acquainted with these benefits, and who may have tasted or anticipated their sweetness, cannot but with utmost urgency make haste to become a subject of this King, and to rejoice if he may be a subject of this King. Apply these matters to your heart, and act wisely and in uprightness. Enter into the covenant, or rather, by faith embrace this covenant of grace which is offered to you, and join yourself to the church.

Degeneracy Within the Church: Not a Reason to Separate from the Church

It is not sufficient merely to join the church, to remain with her for some time, and thereafter to separate from her. One ought never to break away from and leave her under the pretense that the church is degenerate, in order to establish a pure church, for: First, the Lord has never blessed such endeavors. There have always been those (in the first church, both prior to her oppression by the antichrist as well as since the time of the Reformation) who under this pretense have broken away from the church. The Lord, however, has always overturned such endeavors, and such undertakings have collapsed of themselves when the initial instigators died. Due to a just judgment of God, however, such individuals have rarely perceived their errors and made confession of them, and have rarely rejoined the church. Rather, having been given over to their own stubbornness, they have remained independent as people without any religion, or they have succumbed to heresy and have joined themselves to such assemblies which most fully agreed with their errors. Such was the case with the Brethren in Hungary, and in our days the Labadists have arisen who have boasted of great things.

De Labadie called himself the shepherd of the church which was truly separated from the world, and initiated assemblies in order to create truly Reformed Churches. His successor *Yvon* further enlarged upon this title by sending some followers to America in order to engage in the plantation business, under the pretense of converting the heathen. However, they did not engage in this at all. They did not even make an effort to teach their slaves the Christian religion, but instead abused them cruelly. Their slave trade made them abominable in everyone’s eyes. Then, in the literature which he published, he called himself, *Shepherd of such and such a flock*,

partially gathered in Wiewert. He thus established himself as bishop whose territory included Wiewert in Friesland, and extended itself to America.

There came division among them, however, due to envy, discord, and the promotion of personal opinions. When the supply of money was depleted by which their church was supported and by which some had been enticed to join this church in order to enjoy carefree provision of daily needs, their church was likewise destroyed. This did not occur without some manifestation of divine wrath towards them, and the few who as yet remain loyal to Yvon, will soon cease to assemble after his departure, which has already occurred. Yvon taught many errors, was always unstable in doctrine and inconsistent in speech, frequently making ambiguous statements, and using the Jesuit trick of clever word manipulation. He accommodated himself to the occasion, having the proverb in his mouth: *dies diem docet*, that is, one day provides instruction for the next. We have written more extensively concerning these matters in our publications, *A Faithful Warning, Doctrine and Government of the Labadists*, and *Yvon Accused of Many Errors*.

Someone by the name of *De Herder* also left his congregation in Bleiswijk to establish a pure church in Rotterdam, doing so, however, without espousing the errors of the Labadists. In the beginning he also had a large following, which, however, came to nothing and completely disappeared. Such was also the case with *Bardowitz* in Amsterdam, who had similar leanings, but was neither in full accord with de Labadie nor De Herder. I have recited these cases to warn everyone against departing from the church for the purpose of establishing a pure church. If someone were nevertheless to proceed with such an endeavor, he would, likewise experience what they have experienced. If it pleases the Lord to purify His church, He will do so Himself by pouring out a richer measure of His Holy Spirit upon His church.

Secondly, it is a dreadful sin to depart from the church for the purpose of establishing one which is better, for the church is one, being the body of Christ. To separate ourselves from the church is to separate from the people of Christ and thus from His body, thereby withdrawing from the confession of Christ and departing from the fellowship of the saints. If we indeed deem the church to be what she really is, we shall then cause schism in the body of Christ, grieve the godly, offend others, give cause for the blaspheming of God's Name, and cause the common church member to err. By maintaining that the church is no church, we thereby deny the church of Christ, and therefore are also guilty of the sins

just mentioned. We thereby displease God, who will not leave this unavenged, regardless of how much we please and flatter ourselves. Such activity the apostle opposes when he refers to such individuals as being carnal in 1 Cor 3:1, 3. He warns against this when he writes, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor 1:10); “I hear that there be divisions among you” (1 Cor 11:18).

Thirdly, the Reformed Church is the only true church, albeit that her purity varies with locality. The truth is still preached purely there, sins are rebuked and resisted, and there is both the teaching of and exhortation to godliness. Thousands of godly persons are to be found there who practice holiness in a much purer fashion than those who have separated themselves. Christ dwells and walks among them. The Holy Spirit is still active by means of the Word, still converts souls daily, comforts the converted, and causes them to grow. Discipline is still exercised towards those who err in doctrine and life. In some localities this is practiced more consistently than people may perceive and be aware of. What foolishness it is, therefore, to leave the church and to enter into a barren wilderness!

Fourthly, to depart from the church is to retract and break the solemn promise which was made before God in the presence of the congregation upon being accepted as a member. If one esteems this to be but a light matter, seeking refuge in the excuse that he did not know any better at the time, the Lord will nevertheless search it out. Who will break the covenant and be held guiltless?

Objection: The church is corrupt, and God commands us to depart from a degenerate church. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor 6:14, 17).

Answer: This text neither speaks of the church, nor of the church in a very degenerate condition. There have at all times been many unconverted in the church and this engenders degeneracy in her, be it at one time more and at another time less. The text, however, refers to paganism with which one may not have communion, but from which one ought to depart and be separate.

There are some in our day who do not entirely separate themselves from the church, and maintain that they remain with her. They come to hear the Word of God and to have fellowship with the godly of the church, but abstain from partaking of the Lord’s

Supper. They do so due to the fact that so many who are unconverted and lead offensive lives partake of this sacrament, and they are of the opinion that to partake of the sacrament with them means that they would have fellowship with such individuals. In order to instruct such, most of whom we deem to be doing so due to tenderheartedness and an erring conscience, we shall present and answer the following question.

Degeneracy Within the Church: Not a Reason to Abstain from the Lord's Supper

Question: Is a Christian permitted, yes, is it his duty to abstain from partaking of the Lord's Supper so long as the church is corrupt—however, without separating himself from the church?

Answer: Definitely not, and we shall prove this as follows:

Proof #1: It is God's express command to use the sacraments, regardless of how degenerate the church is. This is true for holy baptism: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing ..." (Matt 28:19); "Repent, and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2:38); "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16); "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). If a believer refuses to be baptized, he resists the ordinance of God, refuses to be a member of the church and to confess Jesus in union with His people and congregation. Those who are pessimistic by nature must be convinced of this. If an adult, truly converted and unbaptized, he may not keep himself apart because of offense within the church, but must allow himself to be baptized. In partaking of the sacrament of holy baptism, however, he does not have fellowship with the unconverted who are in the church. Therefore, having been baptized he has no reason to abstain from partaking of the Lord's Supper due to offenses, since partaking of both sacraments constitutes communion with one and the same church. Yes, such pessimistic individuals will even have their children baptized, thus having fellowship with the church; they thus pass sentence upon themselves by abstaining from partaking of the Lord's Supper. Or would they also be inclined in the future to abstain from using the sacrament of baptism?

God's command concerning the Lord's Supper can be observed in the following passages: "Take, eat ... Drink ye all of it" (Matt 26:26-27); "This do in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor 11:24). Who dares to ignore such express commands of Christ? Who dares to suggest that to partake or not to partake is a matter of indifference? What mention is made here of any limitation—a limitation contingent upon the condition of the church?

Add to this that the use of the sacraments was commanded in the Old Testament, with the punishment of excommunication imposed upon those who would neglect them. Observe this in the following passages: “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” (Gen 17:14); “But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the Passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people” (Num 9:13). This meant that his name would be erased from the genealogy of his tribe; that is, he would be eliminated as a member of the church. He would thus no longer be considered as a member, but as a heathen and a publican (Matt 18:17).

Evasive Argument: In the Old Testament the covenant was external, national, and typical. Circumcision and the Passover then also served other purposes: as an acknowledgment that they were Abraham’s seed and as a commemoration of their exodus from Egypt. Therefore one cannot by way of the Old Testament sacraments draw conclusions about the New Testament sacraments.

Answer: The covenant of the Old Testament was not an external covenant, but was none other than the covenant of grace, having the promise of both this present and future life, that is, of both spiritual and temporal benefits, such as is presently the case. If one wishes to refer to this as a *national* covenant, one is merely saying that the covenant of grace was established with that nation. That it is called a *typical* covenant is in consequence of it typifying the entire ministry of the coming Messiah. If one wishes, however, to refer to this covenant as *typical* in reference to the church of the New Testament, our proof is further confirmed by their own argument. If the use of the sacraments was so essential in the typical context, this is much more so in the anti-typical setting. Allow that circumcision and the Passover also served other purposes. However, they were never used, nor were they permitted to be used, for such purposes only; that is, distinct from their function relative to the covenant of grace, which irrefutably was the most significant objective in the administration of the sacraments. Other matters were but subordinate and were comprehended in it. We are of the opinion that the other aspects were in a certain respect elements of the covenant of grace. To belong to Abraham’s seed was to be a partaker of God’s covenant with Abraham—“to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen 17:7).

If the unconverted were but externally included in this, then this was true as far as individual persons were concerned, as is likewise true in the New Testament church. The exodus from Egypt belonged

to the spiritual deliverance wrought by the Messiah (1 Cor 10:1-11). For this reason the Lord Jesus is called the Passover (1 Cor 5:7). It can therefore be observed that this objection is unfounded, and thus our proof derived from the sacraments of the Old Testament stands, as well as our proof derived from the New Testament.

Second Proof: The sacraments are seals of the righteousness of faith (Rom 4:11), and the communion with the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). It is the duty of each Christian to give diligence to make his calling and election sure (2 Pet 1:10). To this end all means, and the way which the Lord has ordained unto that end, must be utilized. Since the sacraments are seals engendering communion with Christ, each believer is obligated to make use of them. At this point I wish to remind believers of the precious, spiritual frames which the Lord at times grants during, before, and after the use of the Lord's Supper. Even those of a pessimistic disposition may have enjoyed them: They are the deep humiliation of self, an intimate view of the Lord Jesus in His suffering and death, the mysteries of the covenant, an earnest renewal of the covenant, the strength of faith, the assurance of salvation, peace and joy in God, the resolution, yes, the lofty frame of mind to be more pure and steadfast in the way of sanctification, etc. For he who may possess spiritual life even in the least degree, will be enamored with these blessings when he perceives that the Lord grants these blessings by way of partaking of the Lord's Supper. Who would not long for this? Having demonstrated one's obligation to use all means to promote his spiritual growth, who would then not deem himself obligated to partake of the Lord's Supper?

Third Proof: To confess the Lord Jesus Christ, His doctrine, and His church belongs to the most significant objectives of the Lord's Supper. Observe this in the following passages: "This do ye ... in remembrance of Me ... ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor 11:25-26); "For we being many are one bread, and one body" (1 Cor 10:17). It is an absolutely necessary, appropriate, and Christ-glorifying duty to confess Christ, for this duty builds up the congregation and refreshes the soul. "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny" (Matt 10:32-33). As it is the objective of the Lord's Supper to confess Christ, He is confessed in a most public and powerful manner by all who partake of the Lord's Supper. To enter the church with the multitude which will partake of the Lord's Supper, to join them in going to the table, to sit at the table with them, and to receive the bread and the wine as signs and seals

of the covenant (which are ratified by the death of the Lord Jesus) is a loud declaration in everyone's ears, "I esteem and confess the Lord Jesus to be the only true Savior. In Him I seek my salvation, with Him I enter into covenant, on Him I depend, for Him I wish to live and die; the Reformed doctrine is the only true and saving doctrine of Christ, and the Reformed church is the only true church of Jesus Christ upon earth. These truths I confess when I partake of the Lord's Supper."

If someone therefore withdraws himself from the use of the Lord's Supper, he abstains from confessing Christ, His doctrine, and His church. Thus, we agree with our Belgic Confession, article 28 [Bel Con 28]:

We believe ... that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church. ... And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wheresoever God hath established it, even though magistrates and edicts of princes be against it; yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those, who separate themselves from the same or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.

Evasive Argument: One who has left the church may say, "I confess to be a member of the Reformed church," demonstrating this and declaring such to be the case by attending the services there.

Answer: Mere church attendance is not a mark of church membership. When a large congregation comes to hear the Word of God, it is frequently true that a significant number—often the largest portion—are not members; and how often are there not among the audience those who adhere to other religions? Therefore, during these peaceful times church attendance is not a mark of church membership, and thus not a public confession of Christ, His doctrine, and His church. The personal confession of a specific individual is not sufficient to that end. Furthermore, when absenteeism becomes evident, most people will deem such absentees as having separated themselves from the church, and as having retracted their confession. Moreover, it is the will of the Lord Jesus that He, His doctrine, and His church should be confessed by way of the Lord's Supper. This therefore eliminates all evasive arguments.

A Warning not to Engage in Schism

Fourth Proof: To make one's absence so obvious, under the

pretense of making a public statement, is to be guilty of schism. Even if it does not cause the church to be torn asunder, it is at the least a major step in that direction. The sentiments of the members become divided and collide. Every person has his own faction and clings closely to those who belong to his party, thereby opposing others. The bond of love is severed and the one becomes estranged from the other. The absentees are rendered suspect, are accepted by neither the godly nor by the ungodly, and thus become unprofitable as far as the proper use of their talents. Discussions relative to all this lead to division and discord. The common folk among the godly are offended and grieved, which is a great sin (Matt 18:6, 10), and it grieves faithful ministers to the heart. Those who are without are hindered from entering in, and the enemies are given a cause to slander the church. Those who remain absent live but for themselves and do not seek so much the welfare of their neighbor, but rather exalt their own sensuality above the honor of Christ and the well-being of the church, even though they maintain that such is not their objective. From all this it is evident that absenteeism is schismatic or causes schism, which is a criminal offense. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10).

Evasive Argument: He who has withdrawn himself from the church may say, "If one lives and teaches according to the command of God, then such a person cannot be accused of schism. Only he who does not wish to submit himself to the doctrine and life of Christ ought to be charged with this."

Answer: First, all the faults of the church are not of such a nature that one ought to initiate division in response to them, for otherwise one will be as the Anabaptists, and there will be an endless repetition of schisms.

Secondly, if someone has some difficulty concerning the doctrine or life of the church, and he is of the opinion that therefore he ought to withdraw himself from the church and the partaking of the Lord's Supper, this ought to arouse suspicion as to whether this is not due to obstinacy, erroneous views, or being proudly opinionated. He must realize that he perhaps has but a small measure of light, and that therefore he only views the matter from afar and from one perspective, and not with an all-inclusive understanding of this. It is therefore a bold, if not a reckless undertaking to take such a step, knowing that it will engender great disturbances and nothing but confusion in the church of the Lord Jesus,

while doing harm to souls as a result. Such a person ought to acknowledge that he is not the only one endowed with wisdom, but that the Lord has also given His Spirit to others. Yes, one generally has ulterior motives when he neither shares his difficulties with the ministers, nor wishes to be instructed, but immediately and without discussion, not only makes a decision, but translates this into action, stubbornly persevering in this and considering himself wiser in his own eyes than seven who answer with reason. Whoever gives heed to counsel is wise.

One ought to approach the offending party himself and thus seek to bring him to repentance. If he does not hear, the consistory ought to be informed concerning such a person, and observe what they will do in response. That would be a faithful witnessing. But no, this is too much trouble, would generate too much resentment towards his person, and would result in too much opposition. It will thus be ignored and no action is taken. Instead, the only way this is shown to the church is by withdrawing from her fellowship, as if true godliness consisted of such action. Such activity does not proceed from the Spirit of Christ. Such individuals will be held accountable for the offenses, disturbances, spiritual harm, and divisions either within or of the church itself, which would ensue from this. Do not ridicule what has been said, for it will weigh heavily upon you to be witness to that degeneracy of the church to which you also have contributed.

First Proof: God generally imposes secret judgments upon those who absent themselves. They become proud, opinionated, and despise the judgment of godly persons endowed with wisdom. They hold the congregation of God in contempt. They haughtily speak of great things, and come in a condition where they deem themselves beyond instruction, manifesting a pride against that which David prayed in Ps 19:13. God will afflict such with a special cross which they will have to endure for the remainder of their lives. He pours contempt upon them, causes their physical condition to deteriorate, and permits them to fall into sin. He sends them a powerful delusion that they would believe a lie (2 Thess 2:9-11), since they did not embrace the truth in love, and espoused a love for error. Their departure is rarely limited to one error, and it generally goes from bad to worse. One will join either the *Anabaptists* or other proponents of error. Others, considering separation no longer to be advantageous, will return. In order to do this with more glamour, however, they will embrace a different theology affording them more liberty and freedom in their manner of living, and thus they become as excessive in their liberal

bent as they previously were in their strictness. If they return due to being convicted of their duty, it will generally be observed that they have lost the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus. They will have lost much of that inward spiritual frame which previously adorned the church, engaging themselves more with judgmental reflections than with heart reflections, or with concerning themselves with the soul of another person. What a tragic judgment this is!

I have stated all of this in order that those who, because of our arguments and our response to their arguments, have been convinced concerning their previous misconceptions and errors, would humble themselves concerning this before God, pray for forgiveness, and persevere in asking to be delivered from well-deserved spiritual judgments. May they abstain from the things mentioned above which I have enlarged upon as a warning, and make a new beginning with their original simplicity and sincerity.

These arguments ought to convince a Christian sufficiently that he is not permitted to abstain from partaking of the Lord's Supper due to the degeneracy of the church.

Objections Answered

We shall now consider this matter from a different perspective by examining the arguments which those who are of a pessimistic disposition advance for their sentiments and behavior, and ascertain whether these hold any substance.

Objection #1: The church ought to shine forth everywhere with holiness, for she is called "the holy church."⁶

First of all, the shepherds ought to excel in humility, meekness, denial of the things of this world, and in the fear and love of God. They ought to be dignified and thus solicit respect. They ought to be full of the Holy Spirit, wise and industrious, proclaiming the Word of God in the demonstration of Spirit and power. Thus by the revelation of the truth, they would make themselves manifest and pleasing to the consciences of their hearers, so that converted and unconverted alike could examine themselves due to their ministry, thus being discovered as to who they are. This would bring forth conviction and contrition in the unconverted, but also encourage and quicken the hearts of those who possess grace, so that their hearts, as a result of the ministry, would burn within them. The clarity of their presentation of the gospel of Christ ought to be such that everyone would either be allured or compelled to come

⁶ It should be understood that all that follows belongs to this objection. à Brakel's answer to this lengthy objection begins on p. ###70.

to Christ, or they would withdraw themselves, rebelling against this, not being able to endure the power of such a ministry. They ought to be men who visit and minister to each member individually, dealing with them according to their condition, without respect of persons and without regard to social rank.

Secondly, there ought to be true holiness in the members. They ought to manifest themselves as denying all the things of time and sense, being separated and clearly distinct from the world in their walk, filled with love towards God and each other, and with one heart and one soul living together in sweet peace. During the worship service complete silence ought to prevail, so that respect will arise in the hearts of those who enter as they observe the orderliness, the reverence, the attentiveness, as well as the piety manifested by those who enter, sit, sing, pray, listen, and exit God's house. The ungodly would then neither dare to join them nor be able to endure this. Outside of the worship service everyone ought to be a shining light amidst darkness, and everyone according to his ability and consistent with his state ought to be engaged in the upbuilding of the church. Government officials, if they are members of the church, ought likewise to use their authority to further establish the church, and to see that the privileges which the Lord Jesus has given her—privileges He wishes her to have continually—would be preserved. Everyone ought to stir up, rebuke, and comfort his relatives and acquaintances with much love and warmth, and be instrumental in the conversion of the unconverted. Families ought to function as small congregations. Both in the morning and evening people ought to sing psalms together, read God's Word and discuss it, pray, and instruct both children and servants. Everyone ought thus to consider it a privilege to be abundantly engaged towards the edification of the congregation.

Thirdly, the keys of the kingdom of heaven ought to be used earnestly and with freedom against all who lead offensive lives, are worldly and conformed to the world in their clothing, homes, belongings, speech, and daily conversation. The sacraments ought to be withheld from the ignorant, and all who either do not manifest the image of the Lord Jesus, or manifest it to some degree (the church cannot judge concerning their inner condition). Those who will not repent, as well as sinners who live in public and heinous sin and prove themselves to be incorrigible, ought to be excommunicated in order that they would repent, thereby instilling fear in others, and being a cause of joy to the godly. The church would then shine forth as the morning, be as fair as the moon, as clear as the sun, and as terrible as an army with banners.

Thus the church ought to be; however, one will find her dreadfully corrupted from the crown of her head to her very feet.

First of all, the ministers, the good ones being the exception, manifest themselves conformed to the world, and seek the things which are upon earth, such as wealth, honor, and respect among men, while at the same time soliciting their praise and love. Their speech is vain, and one hears from them nothing but worldly conversation. They pride themselves in their homes and the clothing of their families. They associate much with those of social status, delighting in a good glass of wine and a delectable meal. At the same time they hold in contempt those of lower social rank, hate the righteous, and even oppose them. They are ignorant of the spiritual state of souls, and many of them are in need of learning the most fundamental principles of theology. They are lazy, sleep late, and waste their time with trifles. They are not committed to the care of their flocks, but allow to perish whatever may perish. When they preach they engage in intellectual speculation—which frequently ought rather to be referred to as a darkening of counsel—under pretense of expositing the Holy Scriptures. They manifest that they aspire after the reputation of a scholar, and solicit the praise and attendance of the masses. They grieve the hearts of the righteous with their insincerity and harden the hearts of the ungodly. Yes, some are even drunkards, living in such sin that their behavior cannot even match that of the common citizen. They are consequently despised by great and small both within and outside of the church. In one word, profaneness is gone forth from the prophets of Jerusalem. In consistories, Classes, and Synods, there is nothing resembling holiness.

Secondly, the members of the church neither distinguish themselves by their behavior nor live any better than others outside of the church. The sins which are committed by those who are estranged from the truth are found in abundance within the church, such as fancy hairdos, exposed breasts, and extravagant clothing. The world is evident in the church to the extreme. Sabbath desecration, new doctrines, ignorance, hatred, envy, and bitterness are rampant within the church. In the event that a godly person is to be found here and there—or if there are some who gather to engage in godly conversation or to pray together—they will be the object of hatred, ridicule, and oppression. They are referred to as *Labadists*, *Quakers*, *pious ones*, etc. This godliness, however, adorns them and convicts those who live in open sin and mock with all this. More energy is exerted in oppressing the church than in supporting her. Many government officials, the good ones

being the exception, do not use their authority on behalf of the church, but rather work against her. Family worship and the instruction of one's children and servants are unknown practices, so that what is recorded in Isa 59:14-15 is very applicable to our times: "And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey."

Thirdly, the exercise of church discipline is almost entirely neglected. There is no longer a model of what the church ought to be. Men are therefore satisfied if many people come to church, and if many members are accepted. Such churches are then referred to as flourishing churches. In many, if not most localities, those who can recite the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, or have memorized a few questions are accepted as members. A sufficient knowledge of fundamental truths is no longer required, and they also do not require actual separation from the world and a life which to some degree conforms to the image of Christ. If their lives are not entirely ungodly, all is well. Drunkards, gamblers, dancers, vain men, proud and immoral men, misers, and men who are entirely ignorant and worldly, are permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. If anyone is placed under censure, it will be someone of low social status and in response to a sin which will bring him into ill-repute among men. They shut their eyes to offenses, however, and do not want to know about them. If anyone comes to expose them, he will have to expect that he will possibly encounter wrath and also opposition. They will seek to corner such a person. If there is a minister who seeks to initiate some reformation, he has good reason to fear that he will be in danger of being expelled. In one word, the church is incorrigible and cannot be brought to repentance. Simply stated, it is a hopeless situation.

A godly person, having a view of what the condition of the church ought to be, will be enamored by this, and longs to see the church in such a condition. His heart bleeds, however, when he observes the church in so degenerate a condition as she now is. He cannot refrain from being sorrowful, filled with contempt, and angry, saying, "Is this the holy church of the Lord Jesus Christ? What purpose does the Bible then still have?" This will cause him to contemplate whether it would not be better to abstain from partaking of the Lord's Supper, and thus have no fellowship with such a people.

*Answer:*⁷ Who would not delight himself in a church which

⁷ The objection here answered begins on p. ###67.

would be in such a holy condition as defined above? My soul longs for this, and I yearn for the day that the church will be in such a condition after the Lord will have poured out His Spirit upon her. But who will live to see this?

With the aforesaid, I confess that the church is indeed degenerate, a matter which grieves me in the deepest recess of my soul. I have often borne public witness to this, and by way of this medium I still lift up my voice like a trumpet, crying aloud without sparing, showing the people of the Lord their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins. Oh, that all who read or hear this read would take this to heart! Oh, that men would repent and be amazed at the longsuffering of God by still leaving His church in our land, enjoying a peaceful existence; that one would justify the Lord if He were to punish us and cause us, one day, to come to nought! With sorrow and shame I acknowledge my own failure, and consider myself guilty. May the Lord graciously forgive me, and make me more faithful and holier both personally and in my ministry. Those who are concerned about the condition of the church ought to know that they also are not guiltless. I nevertheless acknowledge that the Lord, among all ranks of society—be it among government officials, teachers, families, as well as individual members—has those that are His, and who in all faithfulness seek to serve the Lord. Also, the keys of the kingdom of heaven are still used, and in some localities this occurs to a greater extent than one would be inclined to think.

The Duty to Partake of the Lord's Supper When Members who Give Offense also Partake

We shall now investigate more particularly whether this degeneracy is a sufficient reason to abstain from partaking of the Lord's Supper.

First, apprehensive souls, in examining themselves closely, will perhaps discover that the degeneracy of the church, rather than a text of Scripture, has made them fearful of partaking of the Lord's Supper, and that they have therefore withdrawn themselves from partaking, having stirred each other up to do so by focusing upon the degeneracy of the church. If you were to ask such an apprehensive person why he does not partake of the Lord's Supper, he will respond—if he speaks according to his heart—that this is due to the degeneracy of the church. I furthermore wish to ask, "Ought not Scripture to be the only rule for faith and practice?" to which one will reply in the affirmative. Such an apprehensive person ought then to be convinced that he has not proceeded properly in having and maintaining this concern, as this concern does not

originate in God's Word, but rather in his own mind. He may respond by pointing to Scripture references, saying that they teach us that one ought not to partake of the holy sacraments with such a degenerate church. I want such an apprehensive person to consider, however, whether these Scripture references initially generated concern, or whether his judgment and action were first of all determined by the degeneracy of the church, and he subsequently resorted to Scripture references to support his judgment and action. Consequently, such an apprehensive person ought to be convinced within himself that his initial impulse relates to nothing more than his own ideas which are outside of God's Word. He therefore has reason to suspect himself of error.

Secondly, it may even be asked if partaking of the Lord's Supper in an apostate church is permissible, and therefore the degeneracy of the church cannot be used as a proof that one ought not to partake of the Lord's Supper. That would be a case of circular reasoning.⁸ The question is whether one may partake of the Lord's Supper together with an apostate church. Upon this we answer, "No," the proof being the apostasy of the church. Thus, such an apprehensive person will see that he proceeded without wisdom and in a childish manner, and that henceforth he neither can nor may use the degeneracy of the church as a basis for his action and as a confirmation for his sentiments. He ought rather to consider what the Holy Scriptures have to say regarding whether or not he ought to partake of the Lord's Supper in an apostate church. If the answer is "yes," he sins by abstaining from partaking, and if "no," his action will be right.

Thirdly, it has at all times been God's intent to leave the church subject to such degeneracy while in the world. Consider the church from Adam to Christ, and you will observe that the Lord was not pleased with the majority of those belonging to it. At the time of Christ's sojourn the Jewish church was terribly corrupted, with multitudes of baptized disciples forsaking Him, thereby manifesting that they had not been truly converted (John 6:66). Paul declared that the congregation of *Corinth* was carnal (1 Cor 3:3), that fornication was in vogue among them (1 Cor 5:1), that some partook of the Lord's Supper while being drunken (1 Cor 11:21), and that some were void of the knowledge of God (1 Cor 15:34). In the congregation of *Galatia* there were those who should have been excommunicated, but who nevertheless remained within the

⁸ The Dutch reads: "Dat is hetzelfde door hetzelfde te bewijzen." Literally, "This is to prove something by itself."

congregation (Gal 5:12). In Phil 2:21 Paul states the following concerning many in the church, “For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” Read the letter of Jude, and Rev 2 and 3, and you will observe how degenerate those churches were. Indeed, one will find exhortations and directives relative to the church’s obligation to excommunicate those who lead offensive lives. However, in none of the texts referring to degeneracy within the church are the upright forbidden to partake of the Lord’s Supper in those churches. We here wish to refer you to our *Letters Against the Labadists*, our *Warning*, and our *Doctrine and Government* (addressed to the Labadists), there being many matters which would shed light upon this for such apprehensive individuals. If they refuse to make the effort, however, they must know that they willingly adhere to error.

He who wishes to hide behind the word *church*, understanding it to refer to those who are truly godly in the world and not to the congregation in its external manifestation, thereby declaring himself to remain a member of the church, is a person of Labadistic persuasion. For his instruction, he ought to read what we have written concerning the Labadists in *Doctrine and Government*. Such a person deceives himself and others.

Objection #2: He who partakes of the Lord’s Supper thereby confesses to have communion with all who also partake. “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). The exhortation pertaining to this, and a more extensive explanation concerning this matter, can be found in the Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper. It is certain that a Christian may not have fellowship with the ungodly. Therefore, since the church is filled with ungodly individuals, the Christian is consequently obligated to abstain from partaking of the Lord’s Supper until the church has been purified.

Answer: First, those who are apprehensive will admit that this proposition is not absolute in all respects, and is not true for all partakers of the Lord’s Supper. For if the church were purified of all who give offense, they would partake without objection, even though many unconverted would be partaking as well, since their concern relates not to the unconverted but to those who give offense. They will also admit that one neither ought to be assured that all partakers are converted, nor that one can absolutely be assured of this. Furthermore if by partaking one would declare to have inward, spiritual communion with all participants, one would declare to have such communion also with the unconverted who

either might be or are among them. Far be it from them and us to hold to such a position.

This proves that such texts ought not to be understood as referring to inward, spiritual communion with all who partake of the Lord's Supper. They will also have to admit that they do not wish to understand these texts in this manner, since there are undoubtedly unconverted members in the congregation. We can thus conclude (which they must do on the basis of their own argument), that this text, according to their view, would prove more than they themselves wish to admit, giving them no license to partake of the Lord's Supper except with those of whose regeneration they were absolutely certain. However, such a view they reject. It is thus evident that this text is no basis for abstaining from partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Secondly, in this particular chapter the apostle speaks of the church as being separated from all other religions, and declares that this separated people constitute one body, being partakers of these sacraments; for this reason they ought not to intermingle with other religions (vss. 18, 20-21). He demonstrates that among this people, within this body, there are those who truly possess grace, who truly have communion with Christ, and who have true spiritual communion with each other. Among those who partake there are also those who are unconverted. Even though they have declared that they had received Christ by faith, sought their salvation in Him, and were desirous to live according to His laws, in truth they did not do so. This he illustrates by referring to Israel's exodus from Egypt, their baptism in the cloud and in the sea, their eating of the manna, and their drinking from the rock. With many of them the Lord was not well-pleased, since they lived ungodly and idolatrous lives. These sins and the resultant punishments he holds before the Corinthians, so that thereby they might be deterred from involving themselves in similar sins, such as idolatry, eating and drinking with idolaters at their feasts, and partaking of their idolatrous sacrifices.

From this it is evident that all members of the church constitute one people as far as confession and separation from other religions and nations are concerned—however, not as far as having communion with Christ, and in Him, with each other. The sins of some members in whom God has no pleasure will not be imputed to the account of the godly with whom God is pleased. Thus, this fellowship which one confesses to have with the body of the congregation when partaking of the Lord's Supper is external and neither inward nor spiritual. At the same time this fellowship is

also of an inward nature as far as all true believers are concerned, whether one is acquainted with them or not. Therefore, those who are apprehensive cannot use this text in support of their concerns. Consider here also what we have initially stated concerning the nature of the church.

Objection #3: The apostle expressly forbids us to partake of the Lord's Supper together with those who give offense. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor 5:11). The entire context indicates that the apostle here makes reference to the Lord's Supper, for he mentions that the incestuous person ought to be excommunicated from the congregation, urging her to do so by making reference to the Passover and the removal of the leaven. Even if the apostle were to refer to "love" meals, the same argument is valid, for at such meals one also partook of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Even if he referred to common meals, it is equally true, for that which one ought not to do at a lesser meal ought much less to be done at a meal of superior importance.

This is consistent with 2 Thess 3:14, "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." Consider also verse 6, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." Add to this 2 Cor 6:14,17, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness. ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate." Since there are such clear commands to be separate, it is therefore our duty not to partake of the Lord's Supper together with those who give offense.

Answer: Let us first consider 1 Cor 5:11. Here a clear distinction is made between various persons in reference to the same matter, which one may practice with some and not with others. These various persons are on the one side sinners outside of the church, and on the other side those who give offense within the church. The matter in question pertains to intermingling with them, particularly as far as eating is concerned. This pertains to intermingling which includes walk and talk, business trade and social interaction, the practice of modesty and friendliness, and if required, the mutual partaking of a meal. Even though the practice of eating a meal is not mentioned in reference to sinners outside of the church, the permission granted to intermingle with them

and the existing contrast indicates that it must be understood as being included. The apostle permits such intermingling and mutual partaking of meals with sinners of this world; that is, if the aforementioned circumstances require this from us, while at all times being on guard against their unfruitful works of darkness and always being among them as a shining light in this world—as Christ has eaten with publicans and sinners. He does forbid, however, such intermingling and partaking of meals (which is permitted with sinners outside of the church) with those who are called brothers, but who give offense within the church. This makes it evident that the apostle in verse 11 does not refer to partaking of the Lord’s Supper, since there is never any ecclesiastical interaction with sinners outside of the church, and thus never any mutual partaking of the Lord’s Supper. This is conveyed by the word “without.” Interaction with them is solely of a social nature. The apostle, however, forbids social fellowship with brothers who give offense.

The Duty of the Church and her Members Regarding Individuals who Lead Offensive Lives

Question: Why is fellowship with members who give offense not permitted, whereas it is permitted with sinners outside the church?

Answer: Interaction and partaking of meals with the worldly, that is, those without the church, will not render us suspect, as if one associated and were in agreement with them. However, interaction and partaking of meals with members who have been identified as giving offense, would undoubtedly create the impression that we are pleased with their walk, since there is agreement in all other areas: in confession and being united to a church and her membership. Thus the members who give offense would be confirmed all the more in their sinful ways rather than becoming ashamed, which would be the case if they were shunned. This we deem to be the meaning of this text.

Evasive Argument: Concerned individuals may conclude from this that since we may not intermingle with those who give offense by way of social interaction and social meals, then such is much less permissible in the spiritual realm and in the partaking of the Lord’s Supper.

Answer: I do not object to such a conclusion, but do not draw your conclusion from this text, for it does not pertain to this. But what then? Must a Christian abstain from partaking of the Lord’s Supper if those who give offense partake likewise? Such is clearly not the case. The invalidity of such an argument will become evident upon noting that abstaining from the Lord’s Supper with

those who give offense can be practiced in a twofold manner: by keeping such individuals from the table by way of church discipline or by withdrawing oneself and abstaining from participation. The first option is the duty of the church, and everyone is obligated to do his utmost in this respect by approaching such a person in order to convict, rebuke, and warn in such a fashion, so as not merely to satisfy himself in having done his duty, but to bring the person who gives offense to repentance and to cause him to forsake his offensive behavior. If he gives heed to you, the church has been purified in that respect, and you have saved a soul from death. If he will not give heed, it is everyone's duty to bring such an individual to the attention of the elders with proof of his misdeed, in order that the church, which must act *ex actis et probatis*, that is, in response to actual and proven facts, may keep such a person from the table. If the church keeps such a person from the table, his offense has been removed. You are obligated not to interact with him, and not even to have a meal with him, so that he, due to your withdrawal from and the severance of all fellowship with him, would become ashamed of himself and come to repentance. If the church does not keep him from the table, either because she considers the misdeed not to be of such magnitude or because she lacks sufficient evidence, then apprehensive individuals must be in subjection and not act according to their own judgment—as if this would nullify all fellowship with the church and the church could then not exist. If there is clear evidence of the offense and the church does not keep such a person from the table, she is remiss in her duty and grievously sins against God. You, however, will have done your duty, having expressed your objection concerning such an offensive person. You have declared that you do not desire to keep company with such a person and that he comes to the table contrary to your wishes. In this way you have neither part nor fellowship with such an offensive person.

Evasive Argument: One may say that there are so many who give offense, that it is an impossible task to speak to all of them and to bring them to the attention of the consistory. Many consistories are of such a disposition that such action would bear no fruit, but would rather bring attention to oneself as a “know-it-all” and one who minds the business of others. Yes, they would twist and turn the situation in such a manner, and deal with the witnesses in such fashion, that one would come in a precarious situation himself, and possibly be accused of bringing false accusation. In a word, this cannot be accomplished.

Answer (1) You probably do not know very many who give offense, and those whom you do not know, cannot harm you. This, however, is not the issue, but rather that none wish to make the effort. It is an easy task to let everyone run towards his destruction, and thus avoid conflict with anyone and to walk away from this duty. Consider, however, the servant who buried his talent in the earth.

(2) All consistories are not of such a disposition. In all the localities where I have served as minister, we always censured those individuals who gave offense, who were either brought to our attention or were pointed out by a member of the consistory itself. One may, however, not take action on the basis of one's own views, and be of the opinion that they must immediately take action in response to your testimony. Such testimony must be well-founded and given in such a manner that love rather than an air of superiority is evident. However, one will probably opt for the easiest way out. One will readily complain about the neglect of others while failing to do his duty himself, in the meantime professing to be desirous of such reformation. There may be some who, by making such complaints and staying away from the table, have an ulterior motive to be viewed as holy. I urge such individuals to examine themselves in the presence of the Lord. However, if someone acts thus in sincerity and humility of heart, his error which is accompanied by desire for ease and by apprehensiveness, proceeds from a wrong understanding of the church as far as her external manifestation is concerned. The church must be governed by regulations which are according to God's Word.

We have thus shown how the partaking of the Lord's Supper with those who give offense can be prevented by keeping them from the table, which the church is commanded and obligated to do. Participation with those who give offense can also be prevented by withdrawing oneself and abstaining from coming to the holy table. There is no such command, however, but it is forbidden as we have proven by way of our previous arguments. Those who stay away from the table are thus guilty of sin, and they are doing their utmost to dissolve the unity of the church and to cause her to fall apart.

Even if this text (in the absence of a conclusion reached by reasoning from the inferior to the superior) were first of all to be understood as referring to not partaking of the Lord's Supper with those who give offense, the meaning would *not* be: You will not eat with them by walking away yourself and abstain from coming to the table to which you are called, which is so profitable for your soul, and which brings so much glory to the Lord Jesus. However, the meaning would then be: Eat not with such by removing the

wicked from your midst (vs. 13), by removing the old leaven from the house (vs. 7), but not by walking away from the house and the passover itself. Thus, these apprehensive individuals ought to be convinced that this text, which is their chief support, affords them no basis for staying away from the table. Having dealt with this text, we do not need many words to deal with the other texts.

Secondly, let us consider 2 Thess 3:6, 14. These texts yield no argument whatsoever for such apprehensive individuals. They make no mention of withdrawing oneself from the church or from the Lord's Supper, as if this would be for one's own benefit in order not to be polluted. They rather deal with the duty of the church concerning those who give offense; that is, to identify them, keep them from the table, excommunicate them out of her community, separate from them, and to shun such as are under censure, in order that they may become ashamed and be brought to repentance. Take notice of the distinction which is made between either intermingling with them or excommunicating them (which is the duty of the church), or staying away from the table, which is not permitted.

Objection: If the church does not do her duty, and those who give offense come to the table, one then nevertheless has communion with them, and does not withdraw oneself from them by partaking of the Lord's Supper with them.

Answer: One has nothing more in common with them than the confession, which we have shown above, and you have expressed your objections against them as you have been directed to do. That such a situation cannot be corrected ought to be lamented.

Thirdly, let us consider 2 Cor 6:14-17. It will at once be clear that this text is an exhortation to the church and to each member, whether converted or unconverted. It applies to one's obligation to be separated from the unbelieving heathen; it is not applicable to those who give offense within the church. The church must unite itself as one body, people, and church, and manifest herself clearly as distinguished from the heathen population out of whom they have come forth but among whom they still reside. Others would be able to see that her members are an entirely different people from the heathen, having separated themselves from them and having united under one Head, Jesus Christ. What argument is there here for such apprehensive individuals?

Objection #4: The congregation will provoke God to wrath if members partake of the Lord's Supper with those who give offense. This is evident in 1 Cor 11:30, where we read, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." The

Reformed church acknowledges in Question 82 of the Heidelberg Catechism [HC 82]: “*By this, the covenant of God would be profaned, and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation.*”

Every Christian is, however, obligated not to provoke God to wrath, yes, even to flee this wrath. It is therefore one’s duty to abstain from partaking of the Lord’s Supper as long as so many who give offense attend as well.

Answer: First, it is not stated in this chapter that God’s wrath is kindled against the godly due to the correct manner in which they partake of the Lord’s Supper. To maintain this is to state an untruth. Rather, God’s wrath is kindled against the church if she becomes guilty of disorderly and offensive practices which are very sinful in nature, as was the case in Corinth, and she becomes guilty of neglect in not keeping those who give offense from attending. If all are guilty of this, and no one performs his duty, all would justly be punishable in this matter. And if the apprehensive individuals are also guilty of such neglect, why then do they hate the chastisement instead of saying, “I shall bear the Lord’s indignation, for I have sinned against Him?”

Secondly, it is simply not credible (I make an appeal to the conscience of every one of these apprehensive individuals) that God would pour out His wrath upon an upright soul who in all sincerity partakes of the Lord’s Supper in a godly manner, mourns over the corruption of the church, and has done his duty in this respect.

Thirdly, if God’s wrath is kindled against the entire congregation due to partaking of the Lord’s Supper together with those who give offense, this is also applicable to such apprehensive individuals, even though they abstain from attending, for they declare themselves to be members of the church. They therefore, according to their own definition, cannot avoid the wrath of God as long as they declare themselves to be members of this corrupt church.

Evasive Argument: The Lord will spare us, since we have not sinned in partaking of the Lord’s Supper.

Answer (1) This sin is not the issue here.

(2) Where is it written that those who profess to be members of the church will go free when the entire congregation is punished—go free by reason of not having partaken of the Lord’s Supper?

(3) If they were to go free, why then not the sincere and godly partakers of the Lord’s Supper, who have done more than they as far as offensive individuals are concerned? They thus ought to be convinced that this pretense neither has any validity for their own heart nor does it appear to be valid for others.

A Rebuke Toward Persons who Leave the Church to Establish a Purer Church

Objection #5: A person must bear witness against the degeneracy of the church and there is no better way to do this, considering the sad condition of the church, than to separate oneself. In doing so one makes it evident that he considers the church to have degenerated and that discipline is not exercised. In doing so ministers and elders will be rebuked and convicted that they are remiss in their duty and are the cause that the church is and remains in such a degenerate condition. Such action would cause the ungodly to be ashamed because of their sins, and the godly would be inwardly convinced that they too must arise and come to Zion's rescue by also withdrawing themselves. The chaff would then be separated from the wheat. The chaff would be blown away and the wheat would be gathered together, be it either by removing the chaff or by meeting in different localities. They would call good ministers, thus establishing a purer church which would be as a city upon a hill, manifesting itself as a light upon a candlestick in the nation. If such a church would not be tolerated, and instead were to be persecuted, it could then move to a different locality or nation where freedom could again be enjoyed. The entire earth is the Lord's and He can maintain His people elsewhere as well as here. Yes, the Lord would possibly grant more external blessings to such a purified church. Such a church would then function as a banner held up for all of Europe to see, and the godly would come to her from all directions. They would nevertheless remain a special congregation of the Reformed church, which would be deemed more degenerate, but yet acknowledged as the true church. Is it therefore not highly beneficial to abstain oneself from partaking of the Lord's Supper when so many individuals who give offense attend as well? Even if such action did not have the desired result, one would nevertheless have done his part, which in turn would be pleasing to the Lord.

Answer: This is nothing more than daydreaming. This was also the cry of the Labadists, a movement which is going from bad to worse! One must not do evil in order that good may come from it. This is not the way to bear witness against the degeneracy of the church, as such action is contrary to the ordinance of God. Rather, one bears witness to his own misunderstanding, imagination, pride, and inclination towards schism. In the above we have indicated how one ought to bear witness. Add to this the necessity of a holy walk in humility of heart, in faith, and in love. It is in this fashion

that Noah bore witness to the first world, and godly women likewise bear witness to their unbelieving husbands.

The thought that the church can thereby be restored is nothing but imagination, while in fact it scatters the church. “He that gathereth not with Me scattereth” (Luke 11:23). When the Lord determines the restoration of His church, He will pour out His Spirit more abundantly upon her; or He will give a general unction of His Spirit to all the godly, so that all who give offense are either driven out or will depart of themselves. This was true for the exodus from Babel and when the iconoclasm⁹ occurred. Until such is the case, let us do our duty within the church.

The emotions and opinions, even among God’s children, are presently so diverse that due to this diversity of sentiments no unity can be expected among them, even if the church were rid of all who give offense, or if there were a departure from the church.

This proposition makes it evident that the work of such apprehensive members would result in schism if they were to acquire a following. Their protest that they nevertheless are and wish to remain members of the church would turn into viewing the church as Babel. The pretense of being concerned about offensive behavior could readily engender the notion that one can have a certain or probable knowledge of another’s regeneration. They will then not be satisfied with the criteria for membership and the exercise of discipline proposed earlier. Such would then revert to either Labadism or Judaism, or it would result in a third error. Therefore refrain from such contemplations and subject your judgment and conversation to God’s Word, and you will proceed safely.

Objection #6: God manifests His favor upon such who abstain from partaking of the Lord’s Supper, for He gives such persons a sweet and quiet conscience, free access to the throne of grace, and more power against their inner corruptions, so that they may go their way with joy. This is an irrefutable fact, experience teaches it, and those who do not partake know it to be true. To deny and contradict this is to act contrary to truth and experience, and proceeds from ignorance concerning the true spiritual frame of the person who does not partake.

Answer: First, the comfort and holiness which one pretends to have is not all genuine, for the devil can transform himself into an angel of light. I have experienced with several individuals that such lofty claims were nothing more than a seeking for glory to justify

⁹ “Iconoclasm” refers to the violent removal of images from Roman Catholic churches during the time of the Reformation.

their actions, and thereby to allure others to join them in the battle. Shortly after that, however, their situation would change.

Secondly, if a person who does not partake truly experiences all that he claims, this is not to be attributed to abstaining from the Lord's Supper. The Lord also blessed the midwives in Egypt, not due to their lie, but rather because of the good which they performed. When there is grace in the heart and one is of the opinion that he does God a service, such grace is quickened because of the witness of his conscience, even if such witness itself be in error. The Lord then manifests Himself to such a living soul—having stirred herself up and being exercised in both faith and sanctification—and in His goodness overlooks the sinful occasion which has quickened the soul. The soul can also be revived because such separation and the manifestation of doing something extraordinary results in conviction and a stirring in her conscience, so that she strives to be extraordinary in her walk. By doing this all the more since all eyes are upon her, her missteps would give all the more offense and thus taint her witness. Thus, a good spiritual frame cannot be the basis for believing that abstinence from the Lord's Supper is pleasing to God.

Objection #7: Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. However, we cannot partake in faith, there being much danger in doing so. It is therefore better to abstain from coming to that holy table as long as the church is so degenerate, even though one has a great desire for the Lord's Supper, it being a bitter grief that one neither dares nor is permitted to partake of it.

Answer: First, it is true that a person ought not act contrary to his conscience, but it is also true that he may not follow an erring conscience, for he will then also err in his walk. The conscience follows the light he has, and therefore he must strive to understand the truth correctly, instructing his conscience by searching the Word of God without prejudice and with prayer for light, while consulting with men who are wise and godly, particularly with ministers whose lips keep knowledge; “they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal 2:7).

Secondly, as a person may not partake with a fearful conscience, he may also not abstain with a fearful conscience. When the thought of abstinence initially occurred, he still was partaking of the Lord's Supper. One therefore must examine himself whether he had no concerns and was absolutely assured that his first abstinence was according to the will of God—and thus necessitating compliance with this will; or whether he did so because he was concerned as to whether he did the right thing, and was of the

opinion that this would be his best option. If you still fear to make a change, you must stay where you are until, by faith, you can make a change without fear. Therefore the apprehensive person will observe that he should have continued in partaking of the Lord's Supper, since he neither could nor has abstained without being troubled about it, and did not sufficiently investigate the matter. The subsequent reduction of his fear was the result of having hardened himself more in his prejudice as a result of his actions, thus diminishing his fears. This could possibly be accompanied by a judgment of God, who has left those over to themselves who were inclined towards error and have begun to act recklessly. In view of all this an apprehensive person can observe what confusion he has brought upon himself, and that his fear does not exempt him from the commission of sin, if it was his duty to partake of the Lord's Supper, which indeed it was.

We have thus considered this matter from all angles and clearly presented the truth. I end with this wish and exhortation, "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles" (Ps 43:3); "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee" (Song 6:13).

Beloved, be obedient to the truth and allow neither the pride of your heart nor carnal shame to prevent you from giving honor to God and from repenting. May the Lord become too strong for you, persuade you, keep you from other errors, and cause you to walk in His truth. May He cause you to be a light and an ornament in His church to the honor and glory of His Name! Amen. < page n=87 >

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The Communion of Believers with Christ and with Each Other

In the previous chapter we discussed the nature of the church, as well as the obligation to join and remain with her. We shall now speak of the communion true members of the church have with their Head Jesus Christ and each other, and also how they must exercise this.

The Relationship Between Christ and His Church

The Lord Jesus not only gives many and excellent benefits to His church, but He and His Church mutually belong to each other, are united with each other—and exercise communion with each other, all of which is wondrous beyond comparison. These three elements comprehend all true felicity.

All true believers are the property of Christ, and Christ is the property of all true believers. This is indicated by the possessive pronouns “mine” and “his,” which so frequently are employed in the Song of Solomon, as well as in many other texts. “My beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song 2:16); “Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled” (Song 5:2).

This is first of all based and founded upon a *gift*. The Father has given them to the Son. “Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me” (John 17:6); “Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Ps 2:8).

The Father has likewise given the Son to believers. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isa 9:6); “And gave Him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22).

Secondly, this is based and founded upon *purchase*, for Jesus obtained them at great expense. He purchased them with His blood; He has paid the price and they are thus His property in full conformity to the law. “For Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood” (Rev 5:9).

Thirdly, this is based and founded upon *victory*. Believers were once in the power of Satan, being in his snare and taken captive by him at his will. By His death, the Lord Jesus has conquered and bound the devil, delivering the elect from his power and translating them into His kingdom. “That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:14-15); “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils” (Luke 11:21-22).

Fourthly, this is based and founded on *marriage*. In a marriage covenant both parties become the property of each other by way of mutual surrender. This is also true of this relationship. “Yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest Mine” (Ezek 16:8). In Hos 2:19-20 reference is made to this marriage covenant. We read there, “And I shall betroth thee unto Me for ever.” This covenant can therefore never be broken, nor can the partakers of this covenant ever be separated from Him. “Yea, I shall betroth thee unto Me in righteousness.” It has the Father’s approbation and is His delight. As a consequence of Christ’s suffering and death they have been translated into a state wherein they can approach unto God, whose justice has truly been satisfied, and become His children in Christ. “And in judgment”; that is, to keep them as the apple of His eye and to take vengeance upon all who offend them. “And in lovingkindness, and in mercies.” This entire transaction is marked by love, friendliness, goodness, and beneficence. “I shall even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness”; that is, I shall do so in truth, faithfully, and with certainty, and thus never leave you nor forsake you. “And thou shalt know the Lord.” I shall enlighten the eyes of your understanding, I shall reveal Myself to you, and cause you to see and to taste all My beauty.

Fifthly, this is based and founded upon *surrender*. From the side of the believer there is likewise a heartfelt, total, and absolute surrender, doing so without any reservation. They yield themselves unto the Lord (2 Chron 30:8); “One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord” (Isa 44:5);

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance” (Ps 33:12).

The Nature of the Union Between Christ and His Church

This belonging to each other also implies union. The nature of this union is inexpressible, and can better be experienced by the believer than expressed in words. This union is neither one of *essence* as the divine Persons are one, nor *personal* as the human nature has been assumed by Christ as divine Person. This union is also neither one of mixture as water and wine are mixed, nor does a transformation take place as if believers would become Christ Himself, and thus would become God or Christ. This union is neither a sacramental union such as the union between the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper with the body and blood of Christ, nor is it merely an external relationship. It also does not consist in the believer’s conformity to Christ in the way of sanctification.

Rather, this union is established:

(1) by the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in believers: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you” (1 Cor 3:16);

(2) by spiritual marriage (cf. Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:19-20);

(3) by faith which, by its very nature, unites: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17);

(4) by love which, due to its very nature, cannot tolerate separation, but seeks the most intimate of unions. “My Father shall love him, and We shall come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23); “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ” (Rom 8:35). This union is therefore real, essential, true, complete, without any reservation, eternally inseparable, spiritual, and without any corporal dimension.

Scripture refers to this union by means of several expressions and explains it by way of various comparisons.

Scripture refers to this union as:

(1) “being one”: “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17); “For if we have been planted together ...”¹⁰ (Rom 6:5);

(2) “putting on Christ”: “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 13:14).

(3) “being rooted in Christ”: “Rooted and built up in Him” (Col 2:7);

(4) being mutually in each other. a) Christ is and lives in believers.

¹⁰ The Statenvertaling reads: “Indien wij met Hem éne plante geworden zijn,” that is, “If we have become one plant with Him.”

“I in them” (John 17:23); “Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you” (2 Cor 13:5); “Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20). b) Believers in turn have been elected in Christ. “According as He hath chosen us in Him” (Eph 1:4). They are also baptized in Him. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4). They live in Him. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Col 2:6); “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). The Lord Jesus gives expression to this mutual indwelling when He states, “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5).

Scripture expresses the intimacy of this union by a variety of comparisons.

First, it compares this union to a marriage. “They two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph 5:31-32).

Secondly, this union is compared to the union of the body with the Head. “... and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23); “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15); “And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19).

Thirdly, it is compared to the union between a tree and its branches. “And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Rom 11:17); “I am the vine, ye are the branches” (John 15:5).

Fourthly, it is also compared to a house, which is built up by uniting many stones together. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, ... ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:4-5); “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:20-21). The comparisons point to a most intimate union in the natural realm. However, the spiritual union between believers and Christ is of a more intimate nature than these.

Union with Christ Will Necessarily Result in Communion with Christ

As a consequence of belonging to each other and the resulting union, there will of necessity be *communion*; that is, the exercise

and utilization of this relationship. This communion is both with the Person of Jesus Christ and with His benefits.

First, believers have and exercise communion with His Person. A temporal believer concerns himself only with the benefits and has no interest in Christ Himself. Believers, however, have communion with the Person of Jesus Christ, but many neither meditate upon nor closely heed their exercises concerning Christ Himself. They err in this, which is detrimental to the strength of their faith and impedes its growth. Therefore we wish to exhort them to be more exercised concerning the truth of belonging to each other, and the union and communion with Jesus Himself. They will then better perceive the unsearchable grace and goodness of God that such wretched and sinful men may be so intimately united with the Son of God. Such reflection will most wondrously set the heart aflame with love. It will strengthen their resolve to put their trust in Jesus without fear. It will give them strength and liberty to obtain everything from Him to fulfil the desires of their soul, causing them to grow in Him, which in turn will generate more light and joy. Therefore, faith, hope, and love are mentioned in reference to the Person of Christ. Scripture speaks of *receiving Him, believing in Him, trusting in Him, living in Him, loving Him, and hoping in Him*. This communion with the Person of Christ Himself is expressed in the following passages: “That ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3); “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9); “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16).

Secondly, believers due to being united with Christ are also partakers of all His benefits. The Lord Jesus says concerning His relationship to the Father, “And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine” (John 17:10). How we must marvel that a believer may thus say to Christ, “All that is mine is Thine, and all that is Thine is mine.” They are partakers of all that Christ is and has, and may use it as their own.

- (1) They have the same human nature (Heb 2:11,14), and may have communion with Him in that capacity.
- (2) They have fellowship with His Sonship, for in Him they are children of God, having one Father (John 20:17).
- (3) His satisfaction of the justice of God is their satisfaction. With this they may come to God desiring that God would do justice to them according to this their righteousness. On the basis

of the resurrection of Jesus Christ they may ask with a good conscience, “Has not Christ paid for all my sins? Art Thou not therefore satisfied and reconciled with me?” The apostle confirms this in Rom 5:10, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

(4) His perfect obedience and accomplishment of the law is their holiness, and this renders them perfect before God (Col 2:10), and the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21). Because of this they have a right to say, “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10).

(5) His intercession and high-priestly appearance before the throne of grace is on their behalf. “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). They may appropriate the High-Priestly prayer of Christ which is always heard. “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me” (John 17:24).

(6) Christ’s glory is their glory, and His inheritance is their inheritance. When the head is crowned, the entire body of necessity is crowned. “And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them” (John 17:22); “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17).

(7) The Spirit of Christ is their Spirit. “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you. ... Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:11, 9).

(8) The power of Jesus is their power, and they may take hold thereof as their own and be active therewith. “Or let him take hold of My strength” (Isa 27:5); “Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee” (Ps 84:5); “The Lord is the strength of my life” (Ps 27:1).

(9) In one word, we may conclude that all the benefits of the covenant of grace are their benefits, and all the fullness of Christ is theirs. “And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16).

(10) Finally, they also have fellowship with His suffering and become partakers of it, which is their great glory. “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you” (1 Pet 4:14).

Exhortation to Seek Communion with Christ

Since believers are partakers of Christ and all His benefits, how heartily and continually they ought to be exercised concerning this union!

First, this is their portion and they have a right to it. Jesus Himself is their Jesus and all His benefits are theirs.

Secondly, since it grieves you, believers, to be so empty in yourself, and you desire neither not to be distracted by nor filled with anything but Jesus and His fullness, why do you remain so long in this empty frame? Arise, satisfy and fill yourself with Him; rejoice in Him and His benefits.

Thirdly, you are not ashamed of Him, are you? Is it not your greatest delight to be familiar with Jesus and to have communion with Him as with a family member?

Fourthly, Jesus Himself delights in having communion with you, extending such a friendly invitation so that you would also exercise communion with Him. “Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away ... let Me see Thy countenance, let Me hear Thy voice; for sweet is Thy voice, and Thy countenance is comely” (Song 2:13-14); “Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon” (Song 4:8); “Come, My beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages ... there shall I give thee My loves” (Song 7:11-12).

Fifthly, in the exercise of this communion there is sweetness and overflowing delight. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine” (Song 1:2); “I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love” (Song 2:3-4); “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures” (Ps 36:8).

Sixthly, as the countenance of Moses shone forth after He had enjoyed communion with God on the mount, the exercise of communion will likewise cause believers to shine forth with holy luster. Thus, communion with Christ will cause the soul to shine forth with holiness. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

Seventhly, in the exercise of this communion there is a strong and loving comfort in all the circumstances believers encounter.

(1) It enables them to endure all the contempt of the world. Jesus is their glory and delight, and they know that once, before the eyes of the entire world, they will be placed at the right hand of the Lord Jesus in glory.

(2) The grievous poverty they must endure will not oppress them, for they may behold their riches in Jesus, who, though He

was rich, yet for their sakes He became poor, that they through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor 8:9).

(3) They will then not fear persecution, for they know that the Lord Jesus is as personally affected as if He Himself were being persecuted. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me” (Acts 9:4); “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Ps 116:15).

(4) Here they find balm for their sick soul, light to clear up their darkness, life for their deadness, food and drink for their hunger and thirst, peace for their troubled heart, blood to atone for their sins, the Spirit for their sanctification, counsel when they are at their wit’s end, strength for their weakness, and a fullness of all for their manifold deficiencies.

(5) Such communion yields comfort as a remedy for the fear of death. The exercise of this communion removes not only the fear of condemnation, but also the natural fear for natural death which at times causes considerable anxiety. For they then believe and taste the truth of Jesus’ words, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

(6) The exercise of this communion causes them to rejoice that one day the day of general judgment will come. For this day they long and yearn. They love His appearance, for then the entire world will see their Bridegroom in His glory; then believers will see Him in close proximity, and He will usher them into the new Jerusalem.

All these glorious and delightful matters are suitable to cause a believing soul to be enamored with the exercise of communion with Christ, and there will be a desire to understand in what manner she may exercise this communion and by which means one may engage in this.

The Manner in Which Believers Exercise Communion with Christ

This communion is exercised in the following manner:

(1) In *beholding* the Lord Jesus in his beauty, desirability, and fullness. There will be thoughtful reflection about the Counsel of Peace, in which the Son of God out of love for His elect willingly offered Himself as their Surety. From there one descends to meditate upon His assumption of the human nature, the full scope of His bitter suffering, and then His cursed death. From there one proceeds to His resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God. In all of these one beholds His love, His willingness, the efficacy of the atonement, and all His fullness unto the salvation of the sinner. Here the soul pauses with longing eyes, desiring a further, clearer, and closer view of His perfections. She desires

to find delight in such contemplation, to be ignited with love, to joyfully acknowledge and approve of Him as such, and to praise and to magnify Him. In this manner a believer beholds Jesus. Such beholding of Him stirs Jesus up to express His love towards the believer. “Thou hast ravished My heart, My sister, My spouse; thou hast ravished My heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck” (Song 4:9).

(2) When the heart of the believer *goes out in love* to Jesus, viewing Him as his own and as being his Bridegroom. There will be a desire to focus the eyes on the one loved, and in beholding, love will be stirred up all the more, for the loved one will behold love in the face of the beholder. This mutual beholding of each other in love is as an act of communication, whereby loving desires towards each other are maintained.

(3) By means of *familiar discourse*. The soul who thus beholds Jesus, the heart going out in love towards Him, will share with her Beloved the frame of her heart, her love, and her grief for not loving Him more. She will bring all her needs to Him, reveal her desires to Him, make supplication to Him, plead affectionately with Him, and beg of Him sweetly for the fulfillment of her desire. She listens to what Jesus has to say to her, turns herself to His Word, deeming it to be the voice of her Beloved. This is particularly true when with clarity, power, and sweetness He impresses a text of Scripture upon her heart, causing her to speak to Him in return, giving expression to all the questions generated by her love, which in turn causes Jesus to reply to her. In doing so the soul will lose and forget herself, and it will grieve her if this dialogue is broken off, or if her body is too weak to endure the intensity of her desires as well as the kisses and influences of His love.

(4) *In dependence upon Him*. In love she leans upon Him, entrusting to Him her soul, her body, and whatever she may encounter. She expresses and reveals all of this to her Bridegroom; she takes refuge under His shadow and rests in His safekeeping. Without fear she entrusts all this to her Jesus, taking refuge with Him, knowing that He will neither drive nor cast her away from Him, but that this is pleasing to Him and stirs up His desires toward her.

(5) By *asking counsel*. If something must be performed or refrained from, she will neither proceed blindly nor will she trust her own judgment. Much less will she follow her own will. Rather, she will ask counsel of her Lord, asking Him what is pleasing to Him, for His will is her will. And having received counsel from Him she will walk in the way of uprightness.

(6) By *making use of His strength and all His benefits as her own*. The

believing soul knows that she may avail herself of Jesus' benefits, that this is pleasing to Him, and that He has given them to her for that very purpose. If a sin has been committed, she will flee to the blood of Jesus. If she has polluted herself, she will go to Him as a fountain to be washed. If she is weak, she will take hold of His strength, and in union with Jesus will overcome all resistance, doing whatever is according to Jesus' will. By His strength she is encouraged. She boasts of His benefits as being her own, and she presents herself as possessing light, life, strength, riches, glory, and all things in Him. This causes her to have contempt for the world. Her walk will be in heaven and she manifests herself as such to the world.

Exhortation to Remain Steadfast in Exercising Communion with Christ

Anyone who wishes to be steadfast in the exercise of this communion is to consider the following:

(1) You must be very much on guard for unanticipated sins which overtake you by surprise, and even more for presumptuous sins. This is very detrimental to holy familiarity, for the holy Jesus will withdraw Himself, and the soul will lose her liberty and her suitable frame. And if one has fallen, he must hastily arise and seek atonement and satisfaction in Christ's ransom.

(2) Behave yourself appropriately towards Jesus. If this communion has diminished for other reasons, take heed that you do not reject grace. Be not fretful, for Jesus is not to be moved by this. Also, be not insensible concerning your want of communion, as if you could do without Him, as if restoration were no longer possible, and as if this former communion could never return.

(3) Those who may enjoy such communion, must see to it that the fear of man will neither prevent you from professing Him nor from manifesting His image and true holiness; that is, be not ashamed of Christ, for this dishonors Him.

Rather, acquaint yourself with Him. Let the exercise of this communion be your daily task when you are alone, when you are in company, and when you are engaged in your profession. May Jesus always have your ear, and may there always be a view upon Him.

By faith, hold fast to the fact that you are reconciled to and are a partaker of Him and His benefits, even if you do not perceive and feel this. This belonging to Him is not based on feeling. If the soul may truly believe this and be exercised therewith, this will lead the soul toward communion with Him.

Be patient and submissive if you cannot attain what others do attain. The Lord is free and is in no way obligated toward you. If He gives you less in this dispensation, this is neither a token of less

love, nor of being His property to a lesser degree. It is rather wisdom, for God wishes to be glorified by you in a different manner than in others, and your future glory will therefore not be any less.

Plead urgently before the Lord upon His promise, and show Him your desires in this matter, holding before Him that He Himself has given these promises to you.

Let the Word guide you; believe it, follow it, and wait upon the fulfillment of the promise. Be reminded that bliss is reserved for heaven, and that this life is a time of battle in which the victory is an absolute certainty. In doing so you will not stray so far, and you will time and again will be restored—until the Lord will immediately unite us to Himself in glory.

The Communion of Saints

As believers have communion with their Head Jesus Christ, they likewise have *communion with each other*. I repeat, with each other, and thus not with other gatherings which assemble for religious purposes. From all such gatherings they separate themselves, whatever their names may be. This applies to:

(1) The heathen in all their various manifestations, as well as to *Mohammedans*. This also applies to the *Socinians*, and among them the *Socinian Anabaptists and Arminians* who deny the holy Trinity, the hypostatic union of the natures of Christ (that is, Christ as the eternal Son of the eternal Father having assumed a holy human nature within the unity of His Person), the true satisfaction of Christ as Surety on behalf of the elect, justification on the basis of the merits of Christ only without the good works of man, and the sealing power of the sacraments to all believers.

(2) *The Papists*, who have the antichrist as their head, committing heinous and abominable idolatry with a piece of bread by worshiping it as their God. They religiously call upon angels and deceased saints for help according to body and soul. They render religious honor to images, make themselves guilty of the body and blood of Christ again by daily sacrificing Christ unto the forgiveness of sins, seeking to be justified by their own works and the works of others to merit salvation thereby. They deny the sealing power of the sacraments, attributing to them the power of the removal of sin. They are also bitter persecutors of the Lord Jesus and His church.

(3) *Modern Lutherans*. I am not referring to those who strictly adhere to the Augsburg Confession, but to such as they generally are today, who have the Augsburg Confession in their mouths, but depart from it and come very close to popery. These, if there arose but a small persecution against them, would perhaps soon return as

a dog to his vomit, and unite themselves again with popery. To seek fellowship with such would thoroughly corrupt the church. May the Lord keep His church from this. If they were to remain faithful to the doctrine of Luther, however, we would readily embrace them with our whole heart, and overlook their misconceptions.

(4) This lastly applies to *the heretics* within the church. The smoke from the bottomless pit permeates the church, causing numerous harmful and despicable sentiments to come in vogue, as well as the zealous promotion of such sentiments. If the church would have her old love and earnest concern for the truth and the purity of the church, such persons would have to be excommunicated.

Even though such persons may remain in the church, true believers will separate themselves from them as well as from the others mentioned who are outside of the church. They neither wish to have ecclesiastical fellowship with the one nor with the other. It grieves them that the church has not excommunicated such heretics. As long as they are not excommunicated, believers—in addition to being unpretentious, compassionate, helpful, etc.—may and must greet in a social manner such heretics and those who give offense. In our nation the practice of greeting is not an indication of familiarity and fellowship, for if that were the case, one would not be permitted to greet them. Rather, it is merely a social gesture which one makes even to those who are entirely unknown. However, in all social interaction and the manifestation of charity one must always demonstrate that there is a distance between them, and that one meets them only as human beings and not as believers or godly persons.

In separating themselves from them, believers thus exercise communion with the church and her members. Part of the church is triumphant in heaven and part of it is militant upon earth. A believer exercises communion with both.

The Saints' Communion and Fellowship with Angels

How wondrously has man, so contemptible and sinful in himself, been exalted that he may even have communion and fellowship with angels! Due to their dissimilarity—the one being an angel and the other man, the one holy and the other sinful, the one loving God and the other hating Him—there was incompatibility and enmity between the two. The Lord Jesus, however, has removed this and has reconciled them to each other. “And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:20). This is also expressed in Zech 3:7, “I

shall give thee places to walk among these that stand by.” The saints are thus fellow citizens in heaven. “For our conversation is in heaven” (Phil 3:20). The Greek word *πολιτευμα* (*politeuma*) does not merely mean “to walk,” but rather “to dwell in one’s own city as a citizen,” and thus is expressive of citizenship. They are therefore included in the general assembly. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22-23). For this reason they are called fellow citizens. “I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 19:10). Together with the godly they have one head, Jesus Christ, and one inheritance, eternal felicity in communion with God. From their side the angels express their love towards believers in preserving and serving them, being sent forth for this purpose by God (Heb 1:14). They find delight in their worship services and are present there. They pay close attention to God’s dealings with them, and learn from this the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10).

Believers from their side acknowledge their glory, love them because they love God, are one with them and thus form as it were one assembly, and stand in awe of their presence (1 Cor 11:10). They refrain themselves, however, from rendering them religious honor and from worshiping them.

The Relationship Between Believers and Glorified Saints

Believers also have and exercise communion with the spirits of just men made perfect, who also belong to the general assembly to which believers who are still on earth have come (Heb 12:23). The glorified saints know that there is still a militant church upon earth. What specific knowledge they have, be it due to divine revelation, or due to being informed by the holy angels, we cannot determine as God’s Word is silent on the matter. This, however, we know: they cry out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth” (Rev 6:10).

Believers on earth acknowledge the glorified saints as their brothers and sisters. They love them, highly esteem them, follow their conversation upon earth, join them, jointly bowing before the throne with them, giving honor and glory to the Lord, and longing to be with them in the state of perfection. They do know, however, that the saints in heaven have not been vested with the

worthiness of being worshipped. Neither has God delegated to them the task to help others, nor has He appointed them to be intercessors. They therefore refrain from rendering any religious honor unto them or beseeching of them that they would pray for us.

The Communion of Saints on Earth

How refreshing it is for God's children, being hated by the world, to have communion with each other, to make their needs known to each other, and in love and familiarity may enjoy each other's fellowship! They exercise communion with God's church in general (which is dispersed over the entire face of the earth), as being the sole people of God, as being the sole adherents to the truth and the way of salvation, and as confessing Christ alone to be their Head. Since they have the same Spirit in common, as well as the same interests, they rejoice when the church prospers, and likewise grieve when elsewhere the church does not fare well. Their prayers and thanksgiving are for the church in general. They exercise communion with the church within the kingdom or republic in which they are subjects, as well as with the specific congregation of the city or village in which they reside. Yes, their communion is most specifically with the godly; however, in exercising such communion, they remain in the church. They may have a special relationship with some, which, however, does not cause them to separate themselves from the church or to cause schism within the church, since they cherish the church above their chief joy upon earth.

Thus a believer unites himself to all believers who constitute the church, whether or not he knows them. Even though he knows but few, he believes that there are thousands of believers with whom he is not acquainted. He also knows that there are many unconverted within the church, but union with them does not extend beyond a common confession. He rejoices in the fact that Christ is confessed by many, and that the church therefore has much opportunity to beget souls for Christ. The latter is the focus of the prayer which the godly offer on behalf of the unconverted in the church.

Believers have this in common that they, whether great or small, are all equally partakers of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are equal partakers of the Mediator, Jesus Christ, and are equally partakers of the fullness of Jesus and all His benefits. The principal parts of all this we have shown you previously.

This communion manifests itself in many and various deeds. First, they will *diligently join the assemblies of God's people* in order to hear the Word and partake of the sacraments. They, with David, rejoice in this (Ps 122:1). They unite themselves with the church,

the congregation, and all the godly who are present there—and as fellow professors join all who profess the Lord Jesus. In doing so they bear witness that this congregation is the church of Jesus Christ; they are members of and have communion with her, have the same interests, and wish to live and die with her. In doing so they publicly testify that they confess Jesus as the only Savior, and as the only Head of the church. In this manner they reveal themselves to the world and to the congregation. In one Spirit they join her in singing the psalms, in calling upon God’s Name, in hearing God’s Word out of the mouths of His servants, and they anticipate with longing the blessing which God has promised to bestow upon such gatherings. All this is comprehended in the exhortation, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb 10:25).

Secondly, *with all their might they will endeavor to maintain peace*. This is not accomplished by tolerating various errors, for truth and peace must go hand in hand. “Therefore love the truth and peace” (Zech 8:19). It also does not mean that they tolerate a variety of sins and offenses, for the Lord commands, “Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev 19:17). The congregation of Ephesus was praised for this. “Thou canst not bear them which are evil” (Rev 2:2). Rather, peace is maintained when:

(1) one adheres to the same truth. If one holds to a peculiar view, he ought to permit himself to be instructed by a wise person; doing so, however, by keeping this to himself so that no one will notice this. Differences of opinion result in the stirring of the emotions.

(2) one endures maltreatment by his neighbor without making it known that he is being maltreated, and without manifesting that he is enduring this. “With longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2); “Forbearing one another” (Col 3:13).

(3) one always esteems and behaves himself as being the least, rejoicing in the fact that we may behold God’s children, be in their presence, and serve them. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil 2:3).

(4) the evil of fellow members is concealed, is not spoken of behind their backs, and is not listened to in the gossip of others. Rather, attention will be focused upon someone’s virtues, and how he is esteemed by us and others. “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people” (Lev 19:16); “Charity ... beareth all things” (1 Cor 13:7).

Thirdly, *they will endeavor to have, manifest, and show love*. “Charity ... is the bond of perfectness” (Col 3:14). Love binds together. “Being knit together in love” (Col 2:2). If we may have our spiritual origin in

God, who is love, we will also have a loving heart, and if we love God we shall also love His children. “Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). If a believer meets someone whom he perceives to be a person loved by God and loving God in return, it cannot be but that his heart will go out in love towards such a person. If this love is sufficiently strong, it will not be impeded if it perceives a weakness in such a person. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (1 Cor 13:4-5). One must not only have love in the heart, but also manifest this by the expression of joy when meeting such persons—in friendliness when speaking to them, in unity when interacting with them, in the rendering of service when the opportunity presents itself (albeit that others could assist likewise), and in familiarity when counseling each other.

Fourthly, communion is exercised *by being good examples to each other, and by following each other's example in doing good*. Exemplary behavior is marvelously effective in attracting others. Christ is the perfect example, “leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps” (1 Pet 2:21). Believers, however, in whom Christ has been formed, must manifest the image of Christ, also with the objective of being a good example to others. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16); “In honour preferring one another” (Rom 12:10); “Shew me thy faith without thy works” (James 2:18); “So that ye were ensamples to all that believe” (1 Thess 1:7); “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:7). As one must endeavor to be a good example to others, one must also endeavor to follow the good examples of others whom the Lord has given to us within His church. “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1); “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12); “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Phil 3:17). There is the happy advantage that one can be an example in the congregation whereby others can be stirred up unto godliness, and that one may also himself be stirred up to follow the examples of others. When both of these aspects are practiced, there is communion of saints.

Fifthly, communion of saints is practiced by mutually promoting one another's spiritual growth.

(1) This occurs by helping each other to arise again after having

fallen, and to correct someone who is in error. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1).

(2) This also occurs by encouraging and exhorting one another. “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13).

(3) This occurs by comforting each other in times of discouragement. “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:18). The apostle joins several of these duties which necessarily must flow out of the communion of saints unto the upbuilding of the church. “And to esteem them [the ministers] very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (1 Thess 5:13-15).

Sixthly, communion of saints is exercised *by faithfully assisting each other in times of perplexity*. If someone is in need of counsel, counsel him according to your ability. Your counsel will either be right, or he will receive light in consequence of your counsel. If he is slandered, defend his good name; if he is ill, visit him; if he is poor, assist him with your means, or assist him in other ways, doing so while manifesting all love, compassion, and diligence.

(1) Job is here an example to us. “I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth” (Job 29:15-17).

(2) These virtues will publicly be extolled by the Lord Jesus on the day of judgment. He will show that His elect have exercised these virtues during their life. He who wishes to hear of them *then*, must practice them *now*. “For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me” (Matt 25:35-36).

Communion of Saints and the Sharing of Possessions

Question: Must believers have all temporal goods in common?

Answer: This thought was conceived and advanced by such people who were too lazy to work. In this way they tried either to get into the mainstream of or acquire the necessities of life. This was practiced in ages past by the Anabaptists under the leadership of *Knipperdollink* and *Jan van Leiden*, and currently the *Boehmists*

desire this, especially those who are the least among them. The *Labadists* also pretended to practice this, but in reality those who did not contribute had to work hard, but received little food and sleep. However, upon separating from each other, everyone, as much as possible, took his own property again. Everyone was not able to retrieve all that he had contributed, so that several were reduced to beggary. We do maintain that believers, according to their means, must support believers who are subject to poverty. Everyone, however, must retain possession and control of his own assets, for:

First, even during the time of the apostles, there have been both rich and poor. “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit” (James 2:15-16). There were poor as well as rich believers. The rich possessed and controlled their own assets, and were obligated to share these in a generous manner with the poor. The women with means possessed and governed their belongings and served the Lord Jesus with their goods (Luke 8:3). This was likewise true of Dorcas (Acts 9:36), and Lydia the seller of purple (Acts 16:14-15). Philemon was a wealthy man who retained possession of his assets as is evident in Paul’s letter to him. The believers in the congregation of Ephesus had gold and silver. Paul says concerning this in Acts 20:33, “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.”

Secondly, if all assets were to be held in common, the giving of alms would cease and could not occur. It is, however, evident from the collections which were held, and from the exhortations towards liberality, that the giving of alms was not meant to cease. Concerning collections Scripture says, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him” (1 Cor 16:1-2). Consider also the exhortations to liberality. “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Rom 12:13); “And let us not be weary in well doing” (Gal 6:9); “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb 13:16).

Objection #1: The original apostolic church had all things in common. “And all that believed were together, and had all things common” (Acts 2:44); “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32); “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses

sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:34-35). Ananias and Sapphira were even punished with death because they had withheld something (Acts 5:1-10).

Answer: We have shown that in the first church everyone owned and controlled his own assets. This was an extraordinary situation due to the large multitude of strangers which were in Jerusalem at that time, who, upon having believed, remained with the church and did not return to their place of origin. An extraordinary persecution was also imminent, whereby everyone was in danger of being deprived of his possessions. These extraordinary circumstances are not normative for all times and localities. It is evident from the examples of Dorcas and Lydia that some also retained possession of their assets. Philip the evangelist also had a house and belongings where he welcomed Paul at that time and those who accompanied him. Ananias could also have kept his gifts for himself. He was not punished for this, but rather for his lie.

Objection #2: Believers may not possess gold and silver, but whatever they possess, they must sell and give the money to the poor. "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses" (Matt 10:9); "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Matt 19:21).

Answer (1) The Lord Jesus gave a special command to His disciples whom he had sent forth to preach. This command was in force only for the duration of their journey, in order to demonstrate to them that He would care for them. He also did this to prepare them for their labors after His ascension, in order that they would do this, trusting in the Lord. This text neither pertains to the entire congregation and all her members nor to all ministers in every age, for they are not forbidden to have possessions. Rather, they are forbidden to preach for the purpose of material gain and for filthy lucre.

(2) The command to the rich young man was given to him in order to convince him of the fact that he was miserly, and that material possessions were his idol. Special injunctions given in a particular situation are not normative for everyone under all circumstances.

The Blessedness of the Church Where Communion of Saints Functions

We have discussed with you the communion of saints. Everyone will have to agree that the church that functions in such a manner is blessed indeed, while praising everyone who is thus engaged. A true believer, with shame, will be convinced of his neglect in this

area. May everyone therefore be stirred up to exercise communion of saints in such a fashion.

(1) The entire congregation will thereby shine forth as a light upon a candlestick. She will be as a city upon a hill, render honor and glory to Christ, and be respected by all who are without.

(2) The congregation will be built up by this; the godly will be stirred up by the examples of others to walk likewise; and many will be converted as a result of this. One would observe a great influx of those who are without who would acknowledge that God dwells in her midst and she is truly the church.

(3) It will engender great mutual joy and union. Love and peace will so refresh believers that they would readily do without the love of those who are of the world. Yes, they will be able to courageously endure and ignore all contempt, slander, and persecution of the world.

(4) The Lord will richly pour out His blessing upon such a congregation. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! ... for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps 133).

(5) Such will hear the declaration of this delightful voice, saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I shall make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt 25:21).

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Government of the Church, and Particularly the Commissioning of Ministers

No kingdom, republic, home, or society can exist without order. This is also true for the church. God is a God of order, and it is His will that all things be done honestly and orderly. The Lord Jesus is the only and all-sufficient Head of the church—her only Lord, only Master, only Bridegroom, only Mediator, and only Foundation. Since the Lord Jesus is very God, He does not need the help of men to gather and govern His church. As it is the Lord's common way, however, to govern and direct all things mediately, thereby manifesting His wisdom and goodness, the Lord Jesus likewise does all His work in His church by the agency of men. For this purpose He has appointed *shepherds, teachers, elders, governing bodies, ministers, etc.*, to serve in His church.

The Pope: Neither the Head of the Church, nor the Successor of Peter

Popery insists that *Christ governs His entire church by means of a vice-regent, that is, the pope*, and that this vice-regent governs all matters. Popery maintains that the Lord Jesus had appointed Peter to be the general head of the church upon earth; that Peter established his chair in Rome; and that he has been general bishop there for twenty-five years. They also maintain that the pope is his successor; that is, he has taken the place of Peter in the papal chair, and likewise as the general head of the church. They also consider him to have the authority to appoint vice-regents, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, abbots, prelates, priests, etc. These ranks have been arranged in a hierarchical order, all being inferior to the

pope's rank. All of this is a subtle fabrication which is extra-biblical and contrary to the Word of God.

First, there is not one text in Scripture which states that the supreme authority in the church has been or would be vested in one person. The various offices are mentioned, but never as if the one were inferior to the other, nor that all offices would be subordinate to one person. We thus reject this entire construction.

Secondly, Scripture expressly forbids all lording of one office over the other. "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. ... But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke 22:25-26). "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:3). Even the high priest of the Old Testament had no dominion whatsoever over the other priests (even though one may not draw a parallel from this to the New Testament, since they were types of Christ). His rank was the highest, but this did not pertain to jurisdiction. Thus, there must be no head in the church other than Christ.

Thirdly, whatever has been said concerning Peter in the above is both outside of and contrary to Scripture. Where is it written that Peter was appointed to be the head of the church and all the other apostles, and that he gave them any commands and ordinances? Where do we read that the apostles acknowledged him as such and have subordinated themselves under him? This is obviously nowhere to be found. Neither in the Bible nor in true accounts of the history of early times do we find any reference that Peter has ever been in Rome, has been bishop there, or that he functioned as general bishop over all the churches founded by the other apostles. We thus reject all this as belonging to the realm of fables.

Fourthly, it is evident from God's Word that all the apostles were of equal rank with Peter and vice versa.

(1) The Lord Jesus sent them forth with the very same words, giving them all the very same commission. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them" (Matt 28:19); "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. ... Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

(2) All apostles were equally and in like manner qualified for their office on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

(3) They all conducted themselves in identical fashion in their ministry, as for instance, in the election of another apostle (Acts 1:23). Paul was not sent to Peter, but to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, to inquire about a certain question (Acts 15:2). The

apostles sent Peter to Samaria (Acts 8:14), and at the ecclesiastical assembly the opinion of James rather than of Peter was followed (Acts 15:7-29). Paul declared that he “was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Cor 11:5), and James is mentioned ahead of Peter in Gal 2:9. The apostles divided their tasks among each other, and Peter was entrusted with the ministry of the circumcision and Paul with the ministry of uncircumcision, that is, the Gentiles (Gal 2:11). Paul rebuked Peter concerning his error (Gal 2:11), and Peter did not esteem himself higher than the others, calling himself a fellow elder (1 Pet 5:1).

Fifthly, we deny that the pope is a successor to Peter. Let this be proven, for where is this written? Even if Peter had been the head of the church (which he was not), this would only have pertained to himself. Where is it written that he had authority to transfer this position to another person? Where is it written that he transferred this office to the bishop of Rome rather than to the bishop of Antioch, who was one of the primary bishops prior to the year 606 A.D. Peter did visit Antioch (Gal 2:11), but we read nowhere that he had been in Rome. Furthermore, even if Peter had been in Rome and had been bishop there, the one who followed him was nevertheless not the head of the church, which is the point in question. It is known from history that every locality initially had its own bishop. Subsequent to this, however, ambition crept in whereby one locality brought other localities within its sphere of influence. There were nevertheless many bishops who neither had submitted nor were willing to submit to each other. Subsequently, the church was divided among four bishops, one not being superior to the other, even though envy prompted the one to accuse the other of being the antichrist. Finally, after the Western empire had been destroyed, and the power of the bishop of Rome increased, the Eastern emperors flattered the patriarch or bishop of Rome in order to include the Western empire again under their jurisdiction. This culminated in the Eastern emperor Phocas appointing the bishop of Rome as general bishop in the year 606, ordering the patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria to be subordinate to him. Where is the reference here to succession? These matters neither pertain to Peter nor to any other bishop of Rome prior to the year 606! Furthermore, even if the first bishops of Rome succeeded Peter, such is not the case with the pope. A good ancestor can have a heretic as one of his descendants, and wherever truth ceases to be present, succession likewise terminates. The pope does not adhere to the doctrine of Peter, but opposes it, as we have demonstrated in nearly every chapter of this book. The

pope's lifestyle is also not identical to Peter's. Where do we read of Peter having a triple crown beset with diamonds? He said, "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6). Where do we read of Peter having a purple robe, chariots and horses, a gestatorial chair for vain show, and purple-robed cardinals who carried him? When did he ever allow his feet to be kissed? Which kings did Peter either appoint or depose? To which kings did Peter grant the proprietorship of certain countries? There is therefore no resemblance with Peter at all, unless it would be pertaining to his confession, "I know not the man." Finally, since the pope is the antichrist, as we have demonstrated in chapter 24, it is evident that the pope is not Peter's successor.

Even though we have sufficiently exposed the entire system of popery for what it is in regard to its authority over the clergy and its hierarchal structure, all being subject to one pope, we nevertheless shall respond to three objections by which popery seeks to prove the headship of Peter. However, these will be of no avail to them.

Objection #1: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). They say that Christ here makes an extraordinary promise to Peter upon his glorious confession, this promise being that Christ would build His church upon him. Peter therefore of necessity must be the chief of all the apostles and the head of the church.

Answer (1) The promise here made to Peter by Christ is that He indeed was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that He would therefore not build his church upon a sandy foundation, but rather upon Himself as the immovable *Petra*, that is, rock. He would make this foundation so solid and immovable, that all the subtlety and power of Satan would not be able to prevail against her, and that therefore Peter also had no reason to fear, but would also certainly be kept and established. Upon this he could reflect with comfort after he had denied Him thrice; and not only he, but also all the other apostles who were present, as well as all who cherish the preservation of themselves and of the church. He should therefore not be offended when he would observe that Christ died on the cross, and when he would encounter many adversities in his office as apostle. This is the literal meaning of these words. It is thus evident that there is no reference whatsoever to the supreme headship of Peter.

(2) *Petros* (Peter) and *Petra* are clearly distinguished here, just as these two words are distinct in their original meaning. *Petros* refers to a stone, a pebble, or a brick. *Petra* refers to rock layer, or a rocky

mountain formation upon which one would build a house. Such houses are so immovable and strong that they can withstand storms, torrential rains, and floods, which is not true of those which are merely built upon sand (cf. Matt 7:24-27). The Lord Jesus here refers to Peter as *Petra*, making an allusion to his name as the Lord Jesus generally did in His parables which are recorded in the gospels. From *Petros* He proceeds to Himself, calling Himself *Petra*, having previously been promised by that name. “I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16). “The stone which the builders refused” (Ps 118:22).

In the New Testament these texts are applied to Christ. It is therefore also stated concerning Christ in 1 Cor 10:4, “For they drank of that spiritual Rock (*Petra*) that followed them: and that Rock (*Petra*) was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4). Christ is likewise called *Petra* in Rom 9:33, where we read, “... rock (*Petra*) of offence” (cf. 1 Pet 2:7).

(a) Christ is called *Petra* in God’s Word, however, and this name *Petra* is never attributed to Peter.

(b) The endings of the words *petros* and *petra* are different. The one noun is masculine, and the other feminine.

(c) The conjunction which is placed between the two words indicates that the subsequent word *petra* has a different meaning from the previous word *petros*. It is therefore not stated that the church will be built upon Peter, an apostle, but upon Christ, the spiritual *Petra*.

(3) What is stated concerning this *petra* cannot be said of Peter; namely, that the church would be built upon him, and that therefore, being built upon this *petra*, the gates of hell would not prevail against her. Is the church built upon a man? Is she immovable because of a man? Is everyone called to put his trust in a man, and to make flesh his arm and strength? A curse is pronounced upon such in Jer 17:5. Those who, having hearts of stone, wish to put their trust in a pope—in a man whose heart is as hard as a rock—will with him not escape the curse. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord” (Jer 17:7). Christ is the foundation, the only foundation upon which the church is built. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). *This was the foundation of the apostles and the prophets*. They were not the foundation themselves, but they laid this foundation by preaching Christ, “Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:20-21). The apostles, and thus also

James, Cephas, and John, were eminent supporters of this congregation which was built upon Christ. For this reason they are called “pillars” (Gal 2:9). Therefore Peter is not the *petra*, that is, the foundation upon which the church is built, but it is the Lord Jesus Christ who endures forever, is omnipotent, and preserves Peter and the church from apostasy, causing her to remain unmovable against all the attacks of the devil. The name “Cephas,” as Peter is called in Gal 2:9, is not a derivative of the Greek Word Κεφαλη& (kephale=*head*), but rather of the Syrian word)πκ (*kepha=stone*), which was the language Christ and the apostles used, as was generally true of all the Jews at that time.

Objection #2: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:19).

Answer (1) The word “key” does not refer to sovereign power, for it is undeniably true that Christ alone possesses such power. “I ... have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev 1:18). Rather, it refers to ministerial authority, whereby a servant of God is thus authorized to open the door to those whom Christ has commanded to give entrance, and to close the door for those whom Christ has commanded to keep out or cast out. This means to proclaim the forgiveness of sin to repentant sinners in Christ’s Name, and to declare to the unrepentant, in Christ’s Name and on Christ’s behalf, that they still are and remain in their sins. It is this authority with which Peter is here vested by Christ. Who can even produce a semblance of evidence that Peter had supreme authority over the apostles and was the head of the church? He who is said to be servant, is by the same declaration said not to be a lord, master, and head.

(2) The other apostles were vested with the same authority: “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 18:18); “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:23). It cannot be refuted that in both of these texts the Lord Jesus addresses all the apostles, vesting them all with this authority. Their position is therefore identical to that of Peter, and it is thus evident that the authority with which Peter is vested is no different from the authority with which all the apostles were vested, and thus the claim of Peter’s supremacy has no validity.

Objection #3: In John 21:15-17 Christ commands Peter three times to feed His sheep. What else is to be concluded but that Peter is the shepherd par excellence, and thus the shepherd of all shepherds?

Answer (1) Such a conclusion must be entirely denied, for there is not the least connection between that which precedes and the conclusion drawn from this.

(2) The divine commission here given to Peter is the commission given to all other apostles—yes, to all ministers—in Acts 20:28 to “... feed the church.” This is the necessary consequence of being a shepherd.

(3) Christ is the “chief Shepherd” (1 Pet 5:4), and the “great Shepherd” (Heb 13:20). This honor Christ reserves for Himself and consequently He did not appoint Peter as chief shepherd.

Additional Objection: It must be of special significance that Christ commanded Peter three times to feed the sheep.

Answer: Since the word “feed” is not indicative of supremacy but of ministry and does not prove the supremacy of Peter, this is likewise not the thrust of this threefold repetition. It merely points to Peter’s backsliding or regression due to his threefold denial. It was meant as an encouragement for his apostleship of which he had made himself unworthy, so that he would neither be inhibited in the exercise of his office nor abstain from doing so entirely, deeming himself unworthy of this task. In response to his threefold denial there was a threefold restoration.

All of this makes it very evident that Peter neither was a general bishop of the entire church nor had a position of supremacy over the other apostles and over the church. Thus, the pope of Rome is neither a successor of Peter nor the head of the church.

Bishops Have no Authority over Other Ministers

There is another point of contention among Protestants; namely, *whether the office of bishop is a different and superior ministration than is the office of the ministry*. Consequently, bishops have power and authority over other ministers, and they, with their entire congregations, are thus in subordination to the bishops. Popery answers in the affirmative. During the time of the Reformation, there were bishops in some countries who also had embraced the confession of the truth. However, they did not wish to yield their significant income and prestige. Consequently, they retained their dioceses, and argued that this was not contradictory to the Reformation. Thus, in this area they were in agreement with the sentiments of popery, as is still the case today. We, however, along with the Reformed church, answer the above question negatively. The office of bishop is not a different and superior office to that of minister. This is evident for the following reasons.

First, nowhere does Scripture make a difference between bishops

and ministers, nor does it teach that bishops are superior to ministers, or that the latter are subordinate to them. This is particularly so in those texts where reference is made to the ministries of the church (cf. Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28). This has therefore been fabricated apart from God's Word.

Evasive Argument: The apostles, as well as Timothy and Titus, ordained ministers.

Answer (1) It is not written, however, that they had and exercised power and authority over the ministers which they had ordained.

(2) When in a certain locality there is neither an established church nor a minister, but churches are in the process of being organized, then it is necessary that ministers be supplied from elsewhere, or that believing members of those churches be appointed as ministers. In such fashion the apostles ordained elders from city to city, and Paul thus commissioned Titus that he would likewise ordain others. If some believers were already present in a given locality, election of elders would occur by a show of hands of the congregation; thus we have not the least indication of distinction or supremacy.

Secondly, elders and bishops have one and the same office. Elders are bishops, and bishops are elders. In our language the use of the word "bishop" is equivalent to the use of "elder" (cf. Acts 20:28). There it is written that Paul "called the elders of the church," whereas in verse 28 these elders are called *bishops*, "over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers* (bishops)" (Acts 20:28). It should also be noted that in this one city there were several bishops, whereas Roman Catholics maintain that one congregation, yes, various and many congregations together must have but one bishop. This is evident in the following text, "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil 1:1). In this one city and congregation there were several bishops who, along with the deacons, were greeted by him. If there had been other teachers and elders not comprehended in the term "bishops," he would have mentioned them likewise, for he even makes mention of the deacons, who have a subordinate office. From this it can clearly be deduced that there were but two offices in the congregation: bishops and deacons. It thus follows that the word "bishop" refers to both ministers and elders. This is also confirmed in 1 Tim 3 where the apostle teaches what qualities bishops and deacons must have, as well as how they ought to behave themselves, without prescribing any special rules for ministers and elders. This clearly proves that they were considered to be bishops. This is also true in Titus 1:5, 7, for those whom he calls *elders* in

verse 5, he calls *bishops* in verse 7. We thus conclude that ruling as well as teaching elders and bishops have one and the same office. Thus, the office of a bishop is not superior to that of a minister, and bishops do not have power and authority over ministers.

Thirdly, all ministers have the same authority in the government of the church and in the use of the keys as has been given to the congregation and the elders (cf. Matt 18:18; John 20:21-22). No distinction is ever made.

Fourthly, as we have previously indicated, all supremacy and the lording of the one over the other in the church is forbidden by God. We thus conclude that the office of bishop is no different from the office of ministers and elders. The office of bishop in some churches of Reformed persuasion¹¹ is nothing other than a remaining claw of the beast, and a remaining vice by which the antichrist has ascended the throne. This is all the more evident considering that he who has been ordained as priest by a bishop in the papacy and has been converted to Reformed religion, is permitted to preach without receiving a new commission. However, they refuse the pulpit to a Reformed minister who has received his commission from a Classis (i.e., equivalent of presbytery) rather than a bishop.

Objection #1: The high priest in the Old Testament was ranked above the other priests and Levites. The twenty-four priestly orders also each had a chief priest, who were the head priests. Consequently, also in the New Testament a bishop has a different and superior office than does a minister and an elder, and they must thus be in subordination to the bishops.

Answer (1) From this conclusion it must necessarily follow that there must be one bishop both over them and over the entire church on earth. Since they contradict this, their conclusion of necessity unravels, for their conclusion implies more than they are willing to admit.

(2) These ministrations (or services) were performed by different orders; the one, however, had no dominion over the other. This is likewise the case today as far as ministers, elders, and deacons are concerned.

(3) One may not make the ceremonial worship binding for the New Testament, since all ceremonial ministry and offices have been abolished.

Objection #2: The seven congregations in Asia each had but one

¹¹ Since the office of bishop never existed in the Reformed churches in Holland, à Brakel is most likely referring to Reformed churches outside of the Netherlands, the probable reference being to the Anglican church in England.

angel, and thus there is one bishop which has authority over other ministers.

Answer (1) How does one prove that there was more than one minister in each congregation?

(2) Allow that there were more ministers, yet it is not proven that the one to whom the letter was sent had a higher position than the others, and that the other ministers were subject to him. In Paul's time there were several who simultaneously served as bishops in Ephesus (Acts 20:17-18). Consequently, the one angel of the congregation of Ephesus was neither the only bishop, nor had he authority over the other bishops. From this we can draw a conclusion about the other churches.

(3) One cannot use the word "angel" to designate one minister as being superior to another, since they all are messengers who have been given and appointed by God (cf. Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28). It is also true that every minister is an angel, that is, messenger (cf. Mal 2:7).

(4) The letters pertained to the congregation itself; the initial address, however, was to one of the ministers or to the entire council of elders, this being the manner whereby the letter would be made known to the congregation.

Objection #3: Timothy and Titus were bishops who had authority over other ministers whom they had ordained and over whom they had to exercise judgment. Consequently the office of bishop is a different and superior office.

Answer (1) It is not written anywhere that they had authority over other ministers, which is the issue at hand. This we deny, as no proof for this is to be found anywhere in the world.

(2) They ordained other ministers from city to city since these churches still had to be organized. In such cases it was consistent with their office that ministers who were best situated for this should supply such localities with ministers.

(3) The fact that Timothy receives the injunction not to receive an accusation against an elder but before two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19), does not imply supremacy. Furthermore, those of equal rank may not receive an accusation against another but before two or three witnesses. An entire consistory, Classis, or Synod must act likewise. Were Timothy to render judgment concerning an accused elder, then this does not imply that he would do so by himself. Even Paul, when using the keys of God's kingdom to excommunicate an incestuous person, did so by assembling the congregation for this purpose (1 Cor 5:4). This therefore does not yield any proof for ecclesiastical government by bishops. We do not object

to one or several ministers being appointed to watch over the life, doctrine, and ecclesiastical labors of other ministers. However, let there be no lording of the one over the other.

Thus we have observed that the government of the church is neither vested in one who is the head over all others, nor ought the church to be governed by bishops exercising authority over other ministers via whom they would govern various congregations. Rather, all ministers are of the same rank. The one is not inferior in his office to the other. As equals they must work together in all things.

We shall now proceed to indicate which offices God has instituted in His church. In doing so we shall consider the calling to these offices and the labors related to them.

Some offices are extraordinary, which God uses in special seasons and circumstances in the church. These are the offices of *apostles, evangelists, and prophets*. The Lord used these offices in the first days of the New Testament era. Even though the Spirit of prophecy still reveals future events to some individuals (something which can readily be denied by those who have had no opportunity to be acquainted with this), such revelations are then merely intended for those to whom they are given. They are accompanied with such a sense of the presence of God that such persons know them to be neither imaginary nor subtle deceptions of Satan, but that it is God Himself who reveals future events to them. Since such matters do not pertain to any doctrinal points, however, they are consequently also not binding upon others. Therefore, one does not sin in leaving such revelations for what they are. However, such revelations seldom become known to many.

We shall here discuss the ordinary offices, which are the *ministers, elders, and deacons*. Sometimes this number is reduced to two: the office of elder, which includes ruling and teaching elders, and deacons; or ruling elders and deacons only (cf. Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-8). Everyone will readily admit that there must be instruction for both young and old, that worship services must be conducted to hear God's Word and to give expression to the unity of the congregation, that such services must be conducted orderly, and that those who conduct themselves in an ungodly manner during the worship services, that is, who are drunk and behave themselves in an unbecoming manner, may not be admitted or retained as members of the congregation. Since church government and the public ministry of the Word are a necessity, the question must be asked whether individuals must be sent forth for this purpose, and whether anyone may engage herein who has a desire for it and considers himself qualified for such a task. If a commission is

necessary, it must be asked whether such a commission originates in man (thus being merely a human commission), or whether such a commission has its origin in God, which is executed by the church, and thus is a divine commission. We shall first discuss the divine commission of ministers—the pastors and teachers.

The Necessity of a Divine Commission for the Ministry of the Word

Question: Is a divine commission necessary for the office of minister?

Answer: Socinians and others answer negatively; however, we answer affirmatively.

The need for a divine commission is first of all evident from several clear texts.

(1) “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:19-20). One cannot maintain that this divine commission is intended for the apostles only and thus not for others, for this is a commission pertaining to doctrine and the administration of the sacraments. As long as this labor continues to be performed within the church, there must also be a commission unto this task. We know, however, that these labors must always continue in the church. They were not meant to cease at the conclusion of the apostolic age—which is therefore also true for this commission. Added to this is the promise of the Lord Jesus to remain with His church until the end of the world. This promise could not have pertained to the apostles only, for they would not live that long. It thus pertains to the ministry and its related commission.

(2) This is also evident from Eph 4:11, “And he gave some, apostles ... and some, pastors and teachers.” As you can observe, Christ has given pastors and teachers as well as apostles “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Wherever this ministry functions, ministers will also be sent forth. We also read that “God hath set some in the church, first apostles ... thirdly teachers” (1 Cor 12:28). God has therefore appointed ministers as well as apostles. This is likewise expressed in Acts 20:28, where we read, “over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.”

(3) Consider also Rom 10:15, “And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” It is as much as being stated that no one can or may preach without being sent. One cannot evade the issue here by saying that Paul only referred to his time period, for such a limitation is nowhere to be found. The time frame is immaterial

both then and now, for the matters and their conjunction remain the same in essence. By the manner in which he graduates from one matter to the next, he also shows that no one, either then or now, may preach without a divine commission. Both now and then it is one's duty to call upon God, which is likewise true for all the other duties which he mentions successively. How can one call upon God without faith, believe without hearing, hear without preaching, and preach without a commission? All the interrelated components precedent to being commissioned are true for all ages. This is therefore true for the last component as well, without which, according to the apostle, the others are rendered null and void.

Secondly, this is also evident from God's dealings in both the Old and New Testaments. God called and commissioned the tribe of Levi instead of the firstborn whom, prior to this, the Lord had separated to His service. He chose Aaron and his descendants to minister in the priest's office. The apostle states concerning this, "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Heb 5:4). One of the tasks of the priest was to teach, a task which had to be performed as God's ambassador. "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal 2:7). Sharp threats are issued to those who run without a divine commission. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jer 23:21). Likewise no one in the New Testament preached without having been divinely commissioned to do so. The apostles present these credentials at the beginning of their letters, and they in turn commissioned others. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23); "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim 4:14); "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Tim 5:22); "... that thou shouldest ... ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). From this we conclude that all who have ever preached were commissioned to do so. Consequently, a divine commission is also now a prerequisite.

Thirdly, ministers are God's ambassadors. "For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal 2:7); "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20). An ambassador cannot do anything but what he is commissioned to do, and he thus speaks on behalf of his Lord.

Objection #1: It is everyone's duty to teach, and he who has been given some abilities is obligated to use them. Everyone must endeavor to *prophecy* (1 Cor 14:39).

Answer: It is everyone's duty to do so privately. It does not follow, however, that everyone ought to do so publicly. Even if someone has the ability to govern, may he therefore ascend the throne and rule? The analogy applies here as well.

Objection #2: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Every believer participated in this, and thus a divine commission is not a prerequisite for the office of the ministry.

Answer (1) There were also elders, evangelists, and deacons among those dispersed believers, for one as well as the other was dispersed. Among them was also Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8) who had an extraordinary revelation and commission (Acts 8:29) and was also authorized to baptize (vs. 38).

(2) Everyone of these dispersed members declared the Word individually, the one to this person, and the other to another person. They thus did what everyone is called to do privately. There is no mention at all, however, of either the public ministry or the administration of the sacraments.

Objection #3: In 1 Cor 14 it is related how all members of the congregation were permitted to speak. "When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying" (vs. 26). No special commission is therefore needed to preach.

Answer (1) It can at once be observed that the reference here is to assemblies where the extraordinary unction of the Holy Spirit was present. The apostle here gives direction how everyone ought to conduct himself in the use of these extraordinary gifts. It must be obvious, however, that one may not draw a conclusion from the extraordinary to the ordinary.

(2) The reference is here to prophets who are instructed to speak in an orderly sequence.

(3) In private meetings where there is discussion, everyone may contribute. Thus there is nothing in this text negating the need for a divine commission for ministers.

Objection #4: "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things, and ye need not that any man teach you" (1 John 2:20, 27). Hereby it is evident that there is no need for ministers, and consequently there is also no need for ministers to receive a divine commission.

Answer (1) Did these persons make that much progress without instruction? Of course not, and thus they initially were in need of instruction. This of necessity renders the conclusion invalid.

(2) The apostle does not mean to say that they had now attained absolute perfection as far as knowledge was concerned, being beyond all need for instruction. He rather states that they had been illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and by this light they could discern between truth and error, thereby promoting their own progress. Their enjoyment of the Word and its ministry could thus be a fruitful endeavor.

We have thus observed that a divine commission is necessary for the ministry. We shall now proceed to consider the particulars of this commission.

The Elements of the Internal Call to the Ministry

This commission is both *internal* and *external*. An extraordinary, divine declaration is not an element of this *internal commission*. God does not do this, or does so only on very rare occasions, and thus one need not wait for this. There are other matters by which one may be assured of his internal calling.

To these belong, first of all, *a knowledge of the office*. One must know what it means to be a servant of Christ, to be the mouth of the Lord, to proclaim that great gospel, to teach ignorant men the way of salvation, to be instrumental in delivering men from the devil, and to lead them to Christ. One must know that it consists in comforting those who mourn, stirring up the indolent, bringing back those who have strayed, exposing hypocrites and temporal believers to themselves, defending the truth against error, rebuking the ungodly, helping to keep out or expelling from the church those who lead offensive lives, and adorning the church, so that by the holiness of those who profess the truth she would bring glory to Christ. One must know that it consists in being an example and in being able to give an account of the souls entrusted to him. How can he who is neither thoroughly acquainted with these matters, nor perceives the weightiness of it all, nor takes this to heart, have intentions to be faithful? All of this must be known, considered, and experienced in order to be conscious of one's calling.

Secondly, there must be some knowledge of one's *aptitude for this work*. A fundamental knowledge of divine truths and thus being satisfied with a speculative knowledge of these is not sufficient. Rather, one must experience the power of these truths in his own heart, having been converted thereby. He will thus be able to speak from his own experience. He must also have the aptitude to clearly express his thoughts, and must have a voice which is capable of being heard by others. Even though the most qualified person must say, "Who is sufficient for these things" (2 Cor 2:16), one

must nevertheless be conscious of some aptitude. Shortly we shall consider this aptitude more comprehensively.

Thirdly, there must be *an extraordinary love* a) *for Christ* and a desire to make Him known; b) *for the church* to present her as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor 11:2), and to cause her to shine forth with light and holiness to the honor of God; c) *for the souls* of the unconverted to snatch them from the fire, as well as of the converted to strengthen, comfort, and continually provide them with spiritual food.

Fourthly, one must be *willing to deny all that is of the world*, such as honor, material goods—yes, even life itself. If someone is of low social status and wishes to become someone of renown or to acquire material goods by way of the ministry, his objective is entirely wrong. He would be much happier as a shoemaker, for in my opinion there is no man more abominable than an unregenerate minister who uses the holy things of God to his own advantage.

Fifthly, there must be a *great desire for this work* (1 Tim 3:1). There must be continual stirrings to give oneself to the Lord by way of this work, and there must be a concern about whether or not one is called. There must be anxiety when ulterior motives are perceived in the heart which in turn causes one to entertain the thought to refrain from this work; or when the heaviness of the task, and a sense of inability causes one to look up against this work, engendering a desire to be relieved from this work, as with Moses and Jeremiah. The stirrings will nevertheless persist and overcome the objections. This in turn will give him more liberty before the Lord and he will find himself more willing than beforehand because by the objections he will have a clearer view of the motives of his heart. Then his heart does not condemn him, but rather convinces him of his sincerity in this matter.

By these and similar arguments one can ascertain his internal calling. We shall now proceed to consider the external calling.

The Elements of the External Call to the Ministry

The *external calling* also is not extraordinary in nature. This was true only for the prophets and the apostles. This occurred either entirely immediately, or concurrent with certain means. “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3). When we speak of the normal, external calling, then this call does not proceed from God by means of the government, but from God by means of the

church. When a church needs to be established in a certain country, and all means are lacking to obtain ministers who are divinely commissioned, then the church, which is vested with the primary authority to call, is authorized to call some qualified men from her midst for this great work and to initiate them into service, even though ordination by way of the laying on of hands cannot transpire. The church always retains this authority to call, even when she is established. No one may challenge this or remove this authority from her. To make use of *Jus Patronatus* in an established church is an abominable practice. No one may force himself into the church by such means if he expects God's blessing upon himself and upon his ministry.

Even though the ordination is performed by divinely commissioned ministers, the external calling nevertheless pertains to the congregation which calls ministers either by every brother casting his vote (which is still customary in some churches in the Netherlands), or by means of the elders, for:

(1) the elders represent the congregation;

(2) the church does not exist for the elders, but the elders for the church—they are not lords of the church, but rather her servants (cf. 2 Cor 4:5, 3);

(3) the congregation is obligated to give heed to their doctrine and life, must examine the spirits whether they are of God (1 John 4:1), and must be on guard against false prophets and are not to hear or follow them (John 10:27);

(4) the congregation elected two, of whom one would be chosen by the casting of the lot (Acts 1:23). The entire congregation chose seven deacons (Acts 6:3, 5-6), and the congregation sent forth some men to Antioch (Acts 15:22-23). Whenever Paul would make use of the keys of God's kingdom, he wished to do so together with the congregation (1 Cor 5:4). This is not contradicted by the fact that Paul commissioned Titus to appoint elders from city to city (Titus 1:5), for 1) churches still had to be established there, and 2) Paul commanded him to do so in the ordinary manner, according to his own practice, that is, by a show of hands of the congregation. It thus remains certain that neither a bishop nor ministers (being vested with authority) are authorized to call ministers, but rather the congregation herself.

Within an established church (which has the primary prerogative to call), one can readily distinguish between: the *commission* to the ministry, the *call* from and unto a particular church, and *ordination* in her midst.

The commission occurs in the presence of many elders gathered

either at the classical or synodical level. There must first be a careful *examination* of life, doctrine, and ability of those who present themselves to serve Christ in His church. “The same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2); “Lay hands suddenly on no man” (1 Tim 5:22); “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless” (1 Tim 3:10).

Upon this *examination* follows the *commission*, authorizing them in the name of Christ to preach, to administer the sacraments, to exercise discipline, and to perform whatever pertains to the pastoral office.

Such authorization is not given at the time when the preparatory examinations are administered. Such candidates are not authorized for anything, not even to preach the Word as an ambassador of Christ. For preaching as God’s ambassador and the administration of the sacraments cannot be separated. The Lord Jesus assigns preaching and baptism to the same persons in Matt 28:19. Such candidates are only permitted, under the supervision of ministers who are situated in the various localities, to exercise their gifts and to let themselves be heard in the vacant congregations. Such an authority is only given to them when they are called by a congregation and are ordained there by a minister appointed for this purpose by the classis.

In some localities the above-mentioned authority is given after the preparatory examination has been administered to such candidates, and they are then sent forth into the holy ministry without being aligned with a particular congregation. This commission bestows the authority to proclaim the gospel as an ambassador of Christ and to administer the sacraments, even before one is called by a particular congregation. Such a commission gives one freedom to go from one congregation to another upon the extension of a call. Such a calling I do not deem to be as a new commission, but rather as a request, “Come over, and help us.” Such a call, after having sought the Lord, one may either accept or decline in accordance with what one deems to be most advantageous for the church. Such a commission gives liberty not only to conduct oneself as an ambassador of Christ in one’s own particular congregation, but wherever one may travel; such a commission pertains to the office in general.

I am joyful, and on many occasions it affords me liberty, that I may have such a general commission without limitation to a particular location, which is true for all Frisian candidates. The words of my commission are as follows:

... Itaque per praesentis literas, testatum facimus, nos as dignissimum ministerii munus (quod Deut.s bene vertat) praefatum dominum Wilhelmum à Brakel admisisse, sicut etiam admittimus, in album et ordinem ministrorem Christi recepisce, sicut etiam recipimus eique potestatem dedisse, sicut etiam damus Euangelium ex Dei praescripto pure praedicare, venranda N.T. Sacramenta reverenter adminitrare, claves aperiendi atque claudendi regnum caelorum, ecclesiasticam, scilicet disciplinan prudenter exercere, oniaque, quae ad ecclesiae regimen spectant tum publice, tum privatum perager, prout fidum Christi ministrum decet; etc., which translates as follows:

We therefore bear witness by means of these documents that we have admitted the aforesaid Wilhelmus à Brakel into the most worthy office of the ministry (may God cause it to prosper), having likewise admitted and accepted him as belonging to the servants of Christ, also accepting and authorizing him to preach the gospel purely according to God's precepts, to administer the honorable sacraments of the New Testament, to use the keys of the kingdom of heaven to open and to close; that is, to carefully administer ecclesiastical discipline, and also to engage specifically in all that pertains to the government of the church, both in public and in private, as it behooves a faithful servant of Christ, etc.

Such candidates must be elected by the congregation or her elders according to God's institution and the good order of the church, and upon such *election and calling* they may make themselves available, this being the objective of their commission or of their preparatory examination. Having accepted the call, the candidates to whom the preparatory examination have been administered are examined once more. Subsequent to this they are ordained by the laying on of hands (which is in accordance with the examples given in Holy Scripture, and the established tradition of the church) in a specific congregation by a minister appointed by the Classis. This laying on of the hands does not occur, however, when due to a call, someone moves to another congregation. In Friesland there also is no new installation, due to the general commission in use there.

The Need for Persons in the Ministry to Examine Themselves

Let every minister consider and reflect before the Lord, examining himself and answering upon the following questions: Have I been sent of God, or did I run myself? Do I know what pertains to this office? Was I convinced that I had some aptitude for this as far as external knowledge is concerned, and am I likewise spiritually acquainted with the experience of regeneration, faith, hope, love, holiness, God's dealings with the soul, spiritual warfare, and the

various conditions of the soul, in order to bring forth old and new things out of the treasure of my heart, to address everyone according to his condition, and particularly to give everyone publicly and privately his portion by way of personal experience, and to speak from heart to heart? Did I have a special love to preach Christ, to be instrumental to the conversion of souls, and to promote the welfare of the church? Was I continually stirred up in my soul to accept this work? Has it been my concern whether or not the Lord has sent me, and have I prayed much in order to know this? Have I at times been desirous not to be engaged in this work, considering the magnitude of this task and my inability? Were those desires to draw back repeatedly conquered by love for this work, or was I frequently put at ease and confirmed in my intention? Have I been troubled by ulterior motives which time and again disappeared by perceiving my sincere motive in the presence of the Lord? Did I perceive a frame of heart by which I was willing to deny myself by parting with material goods, honor, and my life for the Lord Jesus and His church? Or did I only pursue honor and prestige, the acquisition of material goods by which to improve my temporal circumstances, and which, outside of this office, would have been poor and insignificant? Or had I advanced in my studies to such a degree that I of necessity had to proceed? Did I ever really examine myself concerning these matters, or did I merely run without such self-examination?

Concerning the external calling, ask yourself: How did I arrive in this congregation? Did I flatter the elders of the congregation, thereby soliciting their favor? Did I establish friendships in order to control these friends? Did I give gifts? Did I interact with the worldly members of the church in order that they would impose me upon the congregation? Has money been promised and given in order thus to come to this congregation, and if this was done by friends without my knowledge, did I make restitution after this came to my knowledge?

The consideration of these questions can be beneficial for students before they enter the ministry, and can be useful to cause every called minister to be discovered to himself as to whether he has only come to kill and to destroy (John 10:10), or to feed upon himself without fear (Jude 12). If someone has become convinced that he has no commission for this lofty office, but rather has forced himself in with unlawful objectives and by unlawful means, let him humble himself before the Lord and let him seek reconciliation in the blood of Christ, and endeavor as yet to be called internally. If he does not do this, however, I advise him to stop,

even if he must beg for his bread, for a most dreadful judgment hangs over the heads of such individuals. He will have to pay a high price for the good name and the advantage which he has acquired. If anyone stoops so low that, in order to quiet his conscience, he rejects a calling altogether, and merely views a minister as a hired school teacher, let him be a hireling. However, if anyone is convinced of his commission, let him use this commission to undergird himself in his inability, to engender liberty in the administration of his office, to believingly pray to be qualified, and to patiently exercise trust in all trials which he will encounter in his ministry.

He who is convinced of his divine commission must then also view himself as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. As such, and with that authority, he must perform all his work, such as preaching, catechizing, the administration of the sacraments, visitation, and the use of the keys of God's kingdom. This will make him bold and faithful, and he and his work will receive more approbation. Such must be the conduct of all ministers relative to their commission.

The Responsibility of Church Members Toward the Internal and External Calling of Ministers

Church members cannot perceive the internal commission of ministers, and therefore it also ought not to be their concern. It is also not their business to examine the external calling of ministers too carefully. When someone has been called by the elders of the congregation, they must acknowledge him to be an ambassador of Christ. If the minister is in reality a Judas, this is a matter pertaining to himself only. Ungodly ministers are ambassadors, even as Judas was, and the congregation must also hear them. "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works" (Matt 23:2-3). If elders, in calling a minister, have been remiss in their conduct, and if they have allowed themselves either by promises or threats to call such a minister, they will be accountable for this. If a minister has been called, if this calling has the approbation of the Classis, and if he has publicly been installed in the congregation, the congregation must acknowledge him as such and must hear him as long as his life is not ungodly and as long as he preaches the truth. The congregation is the happier, however, if she may have a godly minister who was called in the right way and in a godly manner. The impression must nevertheless remain in the congregation—whether the minister is converted or unconverted, or if his calling was proper or less than proper—that Christ has sent him by way of ecclesiastical procedure. He must

therefore be heard as such, and if his words are in agreement with the Word of God, they must then be received as words spoken in Christ's Name. They who may thus conduct themselves in all simplicity will be edified by the ministry, and the commission and the qualifications of the minister as an ambassador of Christ who speaks on Christ's behalf, will make much more impression upon the soul than if one merely views ministers as proponents of truth; or if one focuses on the person instead, thereby easily allowing himself to be offended.

A proper consideration of the commission, the qualifications, and the authority of ministers (who not only proclaim beneficial truths but who are ambassadors of Christ), as well as the fact that Christ has deemed the congregation and each individual member worthy of having an ambassador sent to them to speak to them in His Name that which He has commanded them, will have a powerful effect upon the hearts of the members. The ministers must therefore impress this upon the congregation, and the members must instruct each other concerning this, so that everyone may acknowledge and hear the minister as such.

Members must thus be on guard to do nothing whereby the commission of ministers loses its importance. This occurs when the ministry is imitated by someone who, either in his home or in a different location gathers people together, and according to the format of a sermon announces a text, expositis the text, and makes application; or if someone sets forth some touchstones by which (it frightens me to think of it) he declares one to be either spiritually alive or dead. One then runs without being sent, thereby removing the impression concerning the commission of ministers out of the hearts of the people, and thus making the ministry less fruitful. Even if someone is highly talented, being more talented than the best of ministers, and even if it is someone's objective to edify, and a person is edified by this, then this does not justify such a practice, which generally will do tenfold more damage than good. Such a practice is generally accompanied by pride and self-promotion, frequently resulting in divided sentiments. Frequently the cause of the ungodly is bolstered, or the hearts of the godly are tossed to and fro, disturbed, and saddened by the imprudent propositions of such preachers. I anticipate that such a practice will cause much confusion in the church. Oh, that the Lord would fill such individuals with terror if they are as yet unconverted. If they are converted, that He would then convince them of their error and cause them to cease such activity!

I am not opposed to special gatherings of church members. I

despise such ministers who keep godly members from the Lord's Supper either because they have such special gatherings or because they are opposed to them. I make it my business to encourage members to meet together, since the communion of saints requires this. I am, however, opposed to disorderly assemblies as well as to the practice mentioned. One must not strive for dominance in such assemblies, but each person must have equal input. Such assemblies must be conducted by way of mutual discussions, the reading of a chapter from God's Word, a mutual exchange of questions and answers (one person may lead to ask the questions), the singing of psalms and spiritual songs together, the reviewing of a sermon, the encouraging and comforting of each other, and praying together. Upon such gatherings the Lord's blessing would rest, and the Lord Jesus would be present according to His promise. Such gatherings should neither be conducted too frequently nor should they last too long, lest one be blamed for being lazy, squandering his time, and neglecting his household. One must actually demonstrate the contrary to be true. It would be more prudent if one were to have such gatherings during the day rather than at night, especially if men and women gather together.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The Offices of Minister, Elder, and Deacon

Having considered what is essential as far as internal and external calling are concerned, we shall now proceed to consider the particulars of the offices God has established in His church, as well as the labors pertaining to each office.

The Office of the Ministry

Due to their position and labor (and thus due neither to superiority nor territorial influence) we must first of all consider the *pastors* and *teachers*, that is, the *ministers*. The apostle refers to them by these two names in Eph 4:11. This is not to suggest that these titles represent two different offices in the church and thus require a different person for each office. Neither does it suggest that the pastoral office is superior to the teaching office. Much less is it suggested here that the office of a teacher, referred to as *Doctor Theologiae*, is a superior office to that of a pastor, and thus has higher prerequisites. Rather, these two titles refer to one and the same office, since a pastor is required both to teach and to feed his flock. In our time, however, *Doctor of Theology* is an honorary title. A person may have this title and be acknowledged as such.

The *pastoral* (or *ministerial*) *office* is an office instituted by God, executed in the Old Testament under the title of “priest” and in the New Testament under the title of “pastor.” Although commission and calling are executed by human agency, they are nevertheless executed in the name of God. Each pastor must therefore conduct himself as an ambassador of God. “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20).

Concerning the pastoral office, we must consider the qualifications of the persons and the distinctive elements of their labors.

The Qualifications for the Ministry

As a personal quality it is a general requirement that such a person be suited for this task and that he be faithful in its execution.

First of all, it is a specific requirement that such a person be *a learned person*. I do not understand this term to refer to the knowledge of several languages, for knowledge of languages does not constitute scholarship, but is merely a means thereto. Knowledge of the Latin language adorns a minister, but such knowledge is not absolutely necessary for this office. It is nevertheless very helpful, since philosophy, theology, and the most prominent expositions of the Holy Scriptures are recorded in this language. Knowledge of the *Hebrew* and *Greek* languages is much more essential, as the Holy Scriptures were originally written in these languages. They ought therefore to be known by every minister. Learning, however, consists in a thorough knowledge of many matters, wisdom in the utilization of this knowledge, and aptitude to present this knowledge in a manner that is beneficial to others. It is therefore beneficial that a minister be trained in philosophy or natural wisdom. This will render him the more qualified to deal with theological matters. A thorough knowledge of theology is, however, an absolute requirement for a minister. He ought not to be satisfied with having memorized a summary statement of truth—having lodged some propositions in his brain merely to pass the examination in a respectable fashion—and with possessing only as much knowledge as is necessary to put together a sermon by using a variety of books. Wretched minister and wretched congregation where such is the case!

To be a good theologian one must have a deep, penetrating knowledge of a variety of theological issues with which he has become conversant due to frequent dealings with them. This requires much study of Scripture. A minister therefore ought not only to read the Word much but also search out the intent of the Spirit and the context, comparing text with text and ascertaining what is the fulfillment of prophecies and types. All of this is nevertheless of no avail if he himself has not been illuminated and converted by the Holy Spirit, so that the truths which he reads in God's Word are also found in his own heart. He should know by personal experience what conversion, prayer, believing in Christ, the wrestlings of faith, the subtle delusions as well as the assaults of Satan, darkness, the sealing work of the Spirit, self-denial, and mortification of sin, etc. are. He will then be a Timothy who from

a child had known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make him wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15). He will then be a “scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,” and “like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matt 13:52). He will then be able to say, “That ... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; that ... declare we unto you” (1 John 1:1, 3).

Secondly, such a person must be *apt to teach* (1 Tim 3:2). All good theologians are not able to be pastors and teachers. Everyone does not receive the gift to communicate the treasure of truth, to make oneself understood, and by revelation of the truth to express himself in a clear and desirable manner to the consciences of men. He may be able to edify himself, but with his treasures of knowledge he will be of little benefit to others, which, however, is the specific objective of the office of pastor and teacher.

Thirdly, he must be *a man of gravity*, “... with all gravity” (1 Tim 3:4), “in doctrine shewing ... gravity” (Titus 2:15, in order that “no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15). Job conducted himself as such, “The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth” (Job 29:8-9).

Three vices must be avoided here:

(1) One must not be *pretentious*. One then seeks to create the appearance of gravity even though such is not the case, or desires as it were to be singled out and have people say, “There he is.” One accordingly becomes pretentious in all things, wears his hat accordingly, holds his head in the air, and walks with a ridiculous gait. How abominable is such ridiculous pretension which has self-aggrandizement as its mother!

(2) One must neither be *surly* nor *stern*. This is the fruit of pride, imagining himself to be far above others, deeming himself to be something and expecting everyone to deal with him as if they were subordinates. Or this may also be the result of a poor upbringing, whereby one does not know how he ought to conduct himself among people.

(3) He must also avoid despicable *immaturity* in word and behavior, which proceeds either from a vain heart or from one’s upbringing. Since a minister must avoid these things, he must likewise strive most diligently to be friendly and grave at the same time, so that his sheep will neither be shy in his presence nor have contempt for him.

Fourthly, a minister must excel in *love for Christ, His cause, and His sheep*. This must be evident to the congregation and will be very

conducive to edification. Paul gives expression to this love: "... our heart is enlarged" (2 Cor 6:11); "Though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" (2 Cor 12:15); "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us" (1 Thess 2:8). This love towards the congregation must not be motivated by a mere desire for reciprocal love nor be the result of some natural attractiveness. Rather it should solely consist in the desire for her spiritual welfare. This love must proceed from love for Christ. "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor 5:13-14). Such a frame will cause one to interact with the members as a friendly father. "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (1 Thess 2:7).

This love will cause a minister to pray much for the congregation and pray that he himself might receive grace to communicate this to the congregation. He will study for his sermons prayerfully, and he will prayerfully traverse the street towards the pulpit. His prayer is not that he may avoid disgrace or shame, nor that he may speak in a manner pleasing to the congregation, rendering him honor and respect and enabling him to draw crowds. If such is his secret motive (even if he does not say so expressly) and he pretends to have another motive while praying for the honor of God and the edification of the congregation, he frequently does this to satisfy his conscience, but his own honor is his primary motive. Love, however, will cause him at all times to pray for the congregation, thereby seeking her benefit. "Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (1 Thess 3:10).

Fifthly, there must be *self-denial*, that is, a willingness to sacrifice one's honor, goods—yes, even one's own life. "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry" (Acts 20:24); "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). This is how a servant of Christ ought to be. He must not give opportunity for contempt, slander, and oppression due to misbehavior. If he walks in all sincerity, however, having only the welfare of the congregation in view, he must willingly endure whatever may befall him; he must neither allow himself to be hindered in anything nor become discouraged. He should let Paul be his example. "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving

ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience ... by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true," etc. (2 Cor 6:3-10).

There is no creature more abominable under the sun than a minister who seeks himself, for he uses God and all that is sacred to satisfy his own evil lusts. How abominable it is to display holy zeal in prayer, preaching, and speech, and yet to have nothing but strange fire or to pretend love for God in order to receive love and honor for self! This abominable frame is accompanied by another dreadful vice: *envy*. Always being fearful that others will diminish his reputation, he begrudges others their excellent gifts and graces. It grieves him when he perceives that the ministry of others finds entrance, brings souls under conviction and leads them to Christ, and causes souls to be moved and melt away in quiet tears under their ministry. He ought to accomplish this, and this ought to come about by his agency. Yes, he will abhor those who have been drawn by the ministry of others. Those who love other ministers become an object of his hatred. Where is love then for Christ and for souls? He not only fails to pursue the objective of the ministry, but he has an objective contrary to this. *Whatever is not suitable to accomplish his objective is not fit for use at all.*

Sixthly, he must be *diligent*. A lazy and indolent man is not fit to be a shepherd. The office of bishop consists of work (1 Tim 3:2), and such a man must be vigilant (1 Tim 3:2). Evil shepherds are described as follows: "They are all ... sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber" (Isa 56:10). The Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, was occupied from early morning till late in the evening, and was engaged in prayer during the night. A good shepherd must follow this example, for there is much work to be done. There must be prayer, the searching of God's Word, and a studying to preserve and improve his acquired knowledge (and thus have a treasure of varied knowledge). There must be the preparation of sermons (accompanied with the endeavor to bring them into his heart before he preaches them), the visitation of healthy as well as sick members, and action must be taken whenever the situation demands it. Since all of this requires time, and since time is of such short supply, he must be vigilant, allowing no time to pass by idly. If someone has come into the ministry for monetary reasons, or to lead a nice, soft, and easy life, he ought to return from where he came, for this office requires work. He who wishes to receive money without work possesses it unrighteously.

Seventhly, he must be an *example* in all things, so that he may be able to say to the congregation as Paul did in Phil 3:17,

“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” He also states, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). The apostle also states what a minister must exemplify. “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). Add to this 1 Tim 3:2-7, and take note of every word: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

If a minister is guilty of giving offense, he will immediately hear, “Physician, heal thyself.” He will have no freedom to rebuke, his words will find no entrance, the name of God will be blasphemed, and many will be offended. If he excels in virtue, however, and his life emanates much light, his word will have much effect upon the hearts of the hearers, his presence will command respect, and many, due to their sins, will be rebuked in their conscience, and be stirred up toward godliness when they see him. A minister must therefore diligently give heed to his internal condition and his external behavior. He is like a polished diamond; the smallest hair or thread on it will easily be detected. He must be aware of the fact that he is observed to a far greater degree than one would be inclined to think; and that men are more aware of his internal condition than he would suspect. This concludes our discussion of the required qualifications of a minister.

The Duties of a Minister

We will now proceed to discuss the work which ministers must perform in the execution of their office. This work consists of 1) prayer, 2) preaching, 3) catechizing, 4) visitation, 5) the administration of the sacraments, and 6) the exercise of discipline.

First of all, a minister must *pray*. I am not referring to the special exercise of prayer in which a minister must continually be engaged, but rather to the engagement in congregational prayer when he functions as the mouth of the congregation toward God. We read of this in the following passages, “And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all” (Acts 20:36); “And we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed” (Acts 21:5).

(1) A minister must certainly also pray in secret before he goes

to the pulpit, praying for the Spirit of prayer and for the ability to preach. To read a form prayer from a book, or to formulate and memorize one's own prayer, and repeat such a prayer time and again, is generally a sign of an intercessor without feeling; and those who pray along with him (or after him) will likewise do so without feeling. I do not object to reflecting ahead of time upon matters which must be brought before the Lord on behalf of the congregation. I also do not object to making notes of some points in order to assist one's memory. This must not always be the same, however, but ought to change according to time and occasion. Furthermore, one must be dependent upon the Spirit and bind oneself neither to words nor matters, but follow the Holy Spirit who maketh intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered as far as matters, expressions, and motions are concerned.

(2) In public prayer a minister must not only endeavor to have respect and reverence for the great Majesty to whom he is speaking; he must also manifest this externally without pretense or imitation of others, but in truth and moderation.

(3) The matters must be presented in a manner suitable to move and stir up the congregation to follow him in a prayerful frame, and repeatedly say "amen" upon his prayers. It is dreadful to babble some words in an unintelligible fashion, jumping from one matter to the next, and to speak on without any rhyme or reason. The congregation would benefit much more and be much more attentive if a form-prayer were used than with such a vain production of words.

(4) When the minister prays for himself, asking for assistance in preaching, he must refrain from praying in such a fashion as if he were praying in the solitude of his room by using the words "I" and "my," for then the congregation cannot pray along with him. He must, however, speak in the third person, and then in such a manner as being conscious of being the mouthpiece of the Lord to His people, praying that God would qualify him for this task and that by him the congregation would be edified.

(5) He must also refrain from referring too much to his bodily weaknesses if he either does not feel well or imagines this to be so. This gives too much an impression of soliciting pity from people or providing an excuse if he does not preach very well, either because he did not study enough, or to solicit adoration for doing well in spite of being so weak.

His second task consists of *preaching*, which is a great task indeed. "And He sent them to preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2); "Preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). For this work it is needful:

(1) In lifting up his heart, he must seek to remind himself in a lively manner that God has sent him, that he ascends the pulpit as an ambassador of God, speaks in the name of God, and is as the mouth of the Lord unto the congregation. This ought to cause him to fear and tremble concerning the matters he will bring forth, as well as the manner in which he will do so, as the Lord will take careful notice as to whether he preaches as he was directed to preach.

(2) He must seek to remind himself in a lively manner of the necessity and advantage of the office of the ministry, since it is a power of God unto salvation and the means whereby God translates souls out of the kingdom of the devil and from the power of darkness into His marvelous light, and thus into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. He must therefore take careful note of both what he says and how he speaks, considering whether it is suitable for the attainment of that goal.

(3) He must have the heart of a preacher; that is, he must stand in awe of the God in whose Name he preaches, and with love seek the welfare of the souls to whom he preaches. He must know himself to be entirely *undone* in himself and have a lively impression of his own inability, so that he will not trust too much in having studied properly. He ought to *pray much beforehand*, not so much to get through the sermon, but for a sanctified heart, for a continual sense of the presence of God, for suitable expressions, and for a blessing upon his preaching to the conversion, comfort, and edification of souls. His concern ought not to be whether the congregation will be pleased with him and will praise the sermon, but his motive must rather be a love for the welfare of the congregation.

(4) He must first seek to impress upon his own heart the matters to be preached, seeking to be brought into the frame in which he wishes to bring others, and thus speak from heart to heart.

(5) He ought to use all his scholarship to formulate the matters to be presented, in order that he might express them in the clearest and most powerful manner. While using his scholarship, however, he must conceal his scholarship in the pulpit. To labor to be reputed as being scholarly, and to bring much Latin into the pulpit for this purpose, is only a seeking of self. Every word of Latin is nothing but a pound of flesh (that is, carnality) and is frequently held in contempt by scholarly divines, whose objective it is to make themselves pleasing to the consciences of men by the revelation of the truth. I am not now referring to the practice of extracting the full meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek words.

(6) He must select subject matter for consideration (preceded by prayer) which he deems to be most suitable for his congregation,

as well as for the circumstances and events of the moment. If he deals with a chapter, book, or epistle sequentially, there ought nevertheless to be occasion for the preaching of free texts.

(7) In all his preaching his objective ought to be to touch hearts, and thus while aiming for the heart, to apply this, to comfort, and to stir up.

(8) Having performed his task, he ought to descend from the pulpit as Moses descended from the mountain, so that his awe for God and the weightiness of that great task may as yet be manifested upon his countenance, and that, after having descended from the pulpit, he would not immediately begin a discussion about other matters or ask about what is new.

(9) Upon arrival at home, he immediately ought to go to his room and consider in what frame he has preached. There he ought to humble himself before God concerning that which was lacking, to thank the Lord for His assistance, and to pray for a blessing upon the Word for himself and for the congregation.

His third task consists of *catechizing*; that is, to impress the truth upon the minds and to promote godliness by way of questions and answers. “That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed (i.e., catechized)” (Luke 1:4); “Let him that is taught (i.e., catechized) in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth (i.e., catechizes) in all good things” (Gal 6:6). I cannot comprehend how a minister who does not engage in the task of catechizing can live and die with a good conscience. The people are generally ignorant, and fluent sermons are not suitable to implant the first principles of truth and godliness in their minds. Catechizing is the most suitable means unto this end, it being identical to preaching, albeit the method is different.

Catechism instruction can be conveniently arranged in four categories. (At this time we shall neither discuss private catechism instruction provided by parents for their children nor the private instruction of each other).

First, there must be catechism for *children*, whereby the first principles of the doctrine of Christ are impressed upon them in a manner agreeable to their level of comprehension. Since they are baptized, and thus incorporated into the church, it is the obligation of ministers to focus upon them also, and to shepherd them as well as other members.

Secondly, there must be catechism for *adults* who are inclined to partake of the Lord’s Supper. How will they make confession of faith and give an account of the hope which is in them if they are not thoroughly acquainted with the truth, and how will they know

if they are not instructed? The instruction which they have received as children is not sufficient. They must receive further instruction in the knowledge of the truth, and they must be stimulated in the practice of godliness. The church must give heed whom she permits at the Lord's table, for the welfare or the degeneracy of the church hinges upon this. How gullible are such ministers who admit members to the Lord's table upon the recitation of the articles of faith and the Lord's Prayer, and how wretched are the members who are admitted on this basis!

Thirdly, there must be catechism for *young men* and other males, thereby making them competent to defend the truth against opposing parties, and to use them as "helps" (1 Cor 12:28). As such they can be used to give instruction and direction to others, to visit the sick, to read both in the church and upon ships of the merchant marine and the navy. A minister will endeavor to prepare the most able among them for the ministry.

Fourthly, there must be catechism which focuses on *the practice of godliness*, in order to explain what God's ways are with souls in their conversion and as they progress in spiritual life. It gives opportunity to deal with cases of conscience pertaining to the various states of the soul, such as joy and sorrow, zeal and indolence, as well as strife and victory. Direction must thus be given so that everyone may steadfastly walk in the way of godliness. This may occur by way of open discussions where each person asks and answers questions under the direction of a minister, or it may occur by way of formal catechizing, either in public places or in the private gatherings of only a few.

The fourth task is the task of *visitation*; that is, the visitation of members from house to house. "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks" (Prov 27:23). In order to know the members, the minister must ask every member about the condition of his soul. He must ask each member how he conducts himself; that is, whether he is accustomed to pray and read God's Word in solitude in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Does he conduct family worship? Does he instruct his children, or cause them to be instructed? How does he conduct himself while engaged in his profession? Is he diligent in attending the public worship services? Does he keep the Sabbath? What does he do for the edification of others? A minister will thus have reason to deal with everyone according to each person's circumstances. It is not only necessary to do so prior to the administration of the Lord's Supper, but also on a daily basis irrespective of such an occasion. He must therefore not only deal in this manner with those who are ill or who, due to

weakness, are bound to their homes, but also with those who are in good health. Prior to the administration of the Lord's Supper he ought not to frequent house after house as a funeral director who hastens to finish his task, thereby avoiding the rebuke that one does not visit; neither must he say the same thing to every member, such as, "Is there something that would hinder you from attending? If not, we wish you much blessing," etc., repeating this over and over again. Nor must he first engage in social conversation and then at last say something concerning the Lord's Supper. Such conversation will render the heart incapable of deriving much benefit from what will be said. He must immediately come to the point. Visits in homes where one receives a good glass of wine or some other form of refreshment cannot be designated as membership visitation. Due to this, there would be insufficient time to visit other homes, and other members must then be satisfied with only a word or two. How wretched are such ministers and how wretched are those house visitations conducted in such a manner!

The fifth task is *the administration of the holy sacraments*. Those who are sent forth to preach are also sent forth to administer the sacraments; the Lord Jesus conjoins these. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them" (Matt 28:19). As ministers are the mouthpiece of God in preaching, they are likewise the hand of the Lord Jesus to give His bride the wedding ring. In this task the minister must conduct himself with the greatest reverence for God. Each time he must renew the impression that he performs this task as an ambassador of Christ, that he imparts the signs and seals of the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he seals to every participant the promise of the gospel, namely, that "whosoever believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." If the minister administers the sacraments without this spiritual frame, performing this labor in a thoughtless and lackadaisical manner, he is then guilty of a dreadful desecration of the holy things.

The sixth task is *the usage of the keys of the kingdom of heaven*. "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:23). In a special sense the minister may and must use the key of the Word of God to proclaim to believers the forgiveness of sins, applying this to specific individuals whom he perceives to be true believers, thereby strengthening those that are weak in faith. He cannot know this with infallible certainty, but he can know whether there is a resemblance to spiritual life, thus believing in his heart that such a person is a believer. In such cases his judgment will generally be correct;

however, he can be deceived and therefore the specific application is made upon the condition that they indeed are believers.

The minister may and must also make specific use of the key of the Word in reference to ungodly members, making application to specific individuals. He must declare that they are unconverted, have no part in Christ, and will go lost—all this upon the condition that they do not repent. As a minister must use this key by making specific application, he must likewise do so publicly from the pulpit. He must first of all give a clear analysis of who true believers are, so that every one may perceive what his own condition is; he must then proclaim to such the forgiveness of sins. On the other hand, he must clearly and forcefully uncover the condition of the unconverted, proclaiming unto them that they are still objects of the wrath of God and must anticipate condemnation if they remain unconverted. The minister must use this key faithfully with much tenderness of heart, without respect of persons, and with boldness, upon the authority given him by Christ, to promote the building up of His kingdom. He must therefore give heed to the manner in which he uses this key. If he leaves this key unused, he is unfaithful to Christ and His church. If he thereby grieves the godly and hardens the ungodly, he ought to fear for the judgment of God. “Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life” (Ezek 13:22).

The second key, Christian discipline, is not to be used independently by him, but he must use it as a member of the consistory. We shall discuss this a bit later in this chapter.

The Office of Elder

Having discussed the office of the ministry, we shall now proceed to the second office of the church, which is the *eldership*. Of old there has been much opposition to this office, as it rightfully opposes anti-Christian dominance and supremacy in the church. The bishops in England also reject this office, since it runs counter to their exercise of dominion. The Arminians, who with their flattery endeavored to bring the government on their side, thus surrendering ecclesiastical authority into the government’s hands, have rejected this office, even though they now have elders; they refer to this office as a new discovery. Also among us there are those who would like to move in this direction in order to promote either their errors with more freedom or to lord over others. It is therefore a necessity, prior to presenting the duties of this office,

that we demonstrate *the office of elder to be a divine institution*. This is evident for the following reasons:

The Eldership: A Divine Institution

First, we read in 1 Tim 5:17, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the Word and doctrine.” The overseers of the church are here denominated with the general title “elders,” this being either due to age, since elderly men were chosen for this office, or due to their wisdom, being referred to as characteristic of age. Timothy was of a young age; he was nevertheless chosen as an elder. A clear distinction is made here between elders who govern and those who also teach. The apostle elevates the latter above the former, which is clearly indicated by the word “especially.”

Evasive Argument #1: This only refers to a distinction between ministers: those who labor with all their energy and those who are less energetic in the performance of their labors.

Answer: Those who are delinquent in their task are not worthy of double honor, but rather of being rebuked. The first part of the text therefore does not refer to ministers.

Evasive Argument #2: The first part of the text refers to deacons.

Answer: Deacons are never referred to as elders, and their task does not consist of government.

Evasive Argument #3: The reference here is to elders who receive remuneration. Governing elders, however, do not receive remuneration; therefore, the first part of the text does not refer to elders.

Answer: It is nowhere forbidden that elders receive remuneration. If they spend all their time in the work of the congregation, the congregation is obligated to compensate them for this.

Secondly, we read in 1 Cor 12:28, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that ... governments.” The governing office is distinguished from the teaching office, for the words “first,” “secondarily,” and “thirdly” prove clearly that each reference is to a specific office. The fact that the word “governments” refers to elders, whose task it is to govern, is evident from 1 Tim 5:17 which speaks of “elders that rule well.”

Evasive Argument #1: “Governments” refers to civil governments.

Answer: God did not place the office of civil government within the church. Governments rule and issue laws as the bearers of authority. The Lord, however, has forbidden all lording over others in the church. The apostle wrote this to the Corinthians whose governments consisted of unbelieving heathens.

Evasive Argument #2: “Governments” cannot refer to elders here, since they are mentioned after “miracles,” “gifts of healings,” and “helps.” They should have been mentioned prior to these, since they have more worthiness than the matters just mentioned.

Answer: No degree of worthiness may be concluded from the fact that one thing is mentioned first and the other last. In honoring one’s parents, the mother is placed before the father (Lev 19:3). *Priscilla* is mentioned before her husband *Aquila* (Acts 18:18).

Thirdly, in the Acts of the Apostles elders are generally distinguished from ministers, as individuals who govern but who do not teach (cf. Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22). In Jewry there were also elders who were distinguished from Levites, priests, and scribes (Matt 16:21). Thus, the Lord Jesus also wills that His church of the New Testament be governed by men who are distinguished from its ministers. This can be observed in the following passage: “They determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. They were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men” (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22).

(1) However, the apostles were also elders (cf. 1 Pet 5:1-2; 2 John 1; 3 John 1). In addition to them there were also other elders.

(2) The apostles reserved the labor of preaching in Jerusalem for themselves. “It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:2, 4). We never read that at that time there were others in Jerusalem; that is, other than the apostles who preached, or that there were other ministers besides the apostles. Therefore, other elders are here distinguished from the apostles. The office of elder is consequently distinguished from the office of the ministry.

Objection #1: Elders are partly unlearned men. Many belong to the lowest rank of the population, and even dominate over the ministers. There is therefore no need for them, for the ministers can handle the labors themselves, etc.

Answer: Of what origin were the apostles? Their lack of qualification and their shortcomings no less rendered their office void than it did for ministers. The eldership is beneficial even if it is only to hold ministers accountable as far as doctrine and life are concerned, and to prevent ministers from being domineering. In order that all be governed well in the church, ministers cannot handle this government by themselves. It has pleased God to appoint such an

office in the church, and that is the end of all arguments. Who would dare to say to God, “Why doest Thou thus?”

Objection #2: In 1 Tim 3 the apostle makes mention only of bishops and deacons.

Answer (1) Whatever is not stated in one text can be found in other texts.

(2) The title “bishops” can refer to both types of elders.

Objection #3: It is the task of elders to feed the flock (Acts 20:28). This takes place by means of the Word, which is the task of ministers. Thus the word “elders” must be understood to refer to ministers.

Answer: To have the oversight and to feed the flock pertains to both rulership and preaching. It is also the obligation of elders to privately speak from the Word of God and to exhort and rebuke by means of the Word. In view of all this it remains a certain fact that the office of elder has been instituted by God.

Elders are not permitted to serve of their own accord, but they must be elected by the congregation, as has been shown above regarding ministers. Therefore, we shall not discuss this any further. To this office belong the qualifications of the persons holding the office and the performance of their labors. The qualifications of elders we shall also not discuss further, as they are identical to those of ministers; their qualifications we have discussed extensively. The second qualification is the exception, namely, the one which pertains to public preaching. This is not to suggest that elders neither ought to be without learning nor have qualifications needed for preaching; be it far from us to suggest this. The more knowledgeable and qualified they are, the better it is. These qualities, however, are not as absolutely essential for ruling elders as for teaching elders. We shall now make a few remarks about the labors of the elders.

The Duties of an Elder

Their purpose for being in church is not to sit upon a soft pillow in front of the church, nor to imagine that they stand above other members and thus can order them around. They may also not behave as if they were lords and masters over the ministers, it being their duty to give heed to the doctrine and life of the ministers. It is also the task of ministers to give heed to the doctrine and life of the elders. They also may neither oppose the good counsel of the ministers within the consistory, nor deem it to be a masterpiece if they succeed in checkmating the minister. Neither is it intended that the elders be but “yes-men” who blindly follow the minister in his wishes. Rather, it is their task in all humility, and with

wisdom and love, to assist the ministers in promoting the welfare of the church. As is true for ministers, the labor of elders is also twofold, for they perform these labors either individually or in cooperation with other consistories, Classes, and Synods.

Every elder has a duty toward the congregation. He must view himself as having been sent by the Lord to perform these labors. With this impression and in this capacity he must accept and perform all his labors.

The primary task of elders is to “*take heed ... to all the flock,*” and “*to feed the church of God*” (Acts 20:28; cf. 1 Pet 5:1-3). This means that they must endeavor to keep the congregation together, to return those to the flock who have strayed, and to be watchful against wolves who come from without to create unrest among the members with false doctrine. They must immediately give attention to this by chasing them away by means of the Word of God, providing good pasture for the flock. Their task is not only to call ministers and to search for the most qualified and godly among them, but they must also encourage them to preach, catechize, and lead gatherings intended for edification. It is also their task to prevent or resolve all quarreling and discord, so that the members may live together as lambs in love and harmony. They must keep an eye upon the entire congregation and, out of love for her welfare, be concerned for the possibility of calamities.

Secondly, *they must particularly give heed to the walk of each member.* There must be careful supervision as to how one conducts himself at home; that is, whether there is love and harmony, and whether each member in his particular position of the household conducts himself properly towards others. They must inquire whether family worship is conducted, whether God’s Word is read, whether the children are instructed, whether they are raised appropriately, whether they are attending school, and whether they are being trained for an honest profession. They must inquire whether the father of the home has an honest profession, as well as how he conducts himself in this profession. Elders must inquire what reputation each member has among the local population, in order that they may know how they ought to deal with each member. In one word, they must keep an eye upon everything, and if they are informed that something is not well somewhere, they must immediately make work of correcting the situation. For this purpose it is necessary for elders to divide the congregation into sections, similar to what ministers do in the cities. They will then be able to take much more careful note of things. Elders must not think that they have performed their duty if they accompany the minister on

family visitation, even if they do not say a word. No, the purpose of this is to make this family visitation all the more credible, and to make a deeper impression upon the members concerning the necessity of preparation for the Lord's Supper. It will also enable them to assist the minister in word and deed if there are situations which require this, and to learn from the minister how to deal with souls. He is also to observe where the minister, upon having conducted family visitation, needs to visit to follow up whatever needs to be attended to. The elder must, however, also do this work himself.

In order that everyone be persuaded to perform the duties God has laid upon them, the elder must take note of:

(1) the words *take heed, feed, and oversee* (Acts 20:28). This task is not properly performed unless particular attention is paid to whether *everyone behaves himself appropriately as far as confession and walk is concerned*, as is stated in the form;

(2) the fact that giving heed to each other is even the duty of every individual member. "And let us consider one another" (Heb 10:24). This is therefore much more true of him who bears the title of elder;

(3) this question: "Would it be detrimental if an elder thus conducted himself? Would he do wrong?" Everyone would have to reply "no" to this. Furthermore, would it not do much good, would it not have a restraining effect upon the members, knowing that they are observed and that their behavior would come to the attention of the minister and elder? Would not the edifying effect upon the congregation be considerable? Everyone will obviously have to answer in the affirmative. Consider therefore that "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Thirdly, he must instruct the ignorant, for,

(1) this is everyone's duty. "Teaching and admonishing one another" (Col 3:16). This is therefore much more true for an elder.

(2) This is unquestionably the task of ministers. Whatever a minister does, outside of preaching, however, is also the duty of elders, for together they bear the title of *elder*.

(3) The Synods have declared that it is not only their duty to instruct every ignorant person from house to house, but also to give catechetical instruction, doing so not only in this or that individual home, but also publicly in the church.

(4) The questions are: Would an elder sin in doing so? Would it not be good and beneficial if he did so? The answers to these questions will also convince him in his conscience that such is his duty.

Fourthly, he must exhort, rebuke, and comfort, for,

(1) what else would it mean “to take heed concerning the flock,” “to feed” and “to take the oversight,” but to ascertain whether everyone behaves himself appropriately? Would it merely consist of being observant? No, but it rather consists in the elders conducting themselves according to the occasion.

(2) It is the duty of every member. “But exhort one another daily” (Heb 3:13); “Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thess 5:14). This is therefore much more the duty of elders.

(3) It is the duty of ministers and thus also of the elders, for we are here referring to specific duties.

(4) We could again ask the same questions: Is it sin? Is it not good?

Fifthly, he must *visit the sick*, also widows and orphans, and all others who have some particular trial, for,

(1) this is everyone’s duty. “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27); “I was sick, and ye visited me” (Matt 25:36). How ashamed such elders ought to be who withdraw themselves from this task!

(2) It is the duty of ministers and thus it is also their duty.

(3) Their own conscience testifies that such is a good rather than an evil practice.

(4) The sick are commanded to call for the elders. “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him” (James 5:14). The word “elder” is used without restriction, so that it pertains to all who bear the title “elder,” that is, both teaching and ruling elders.

If these duties are performed with heart and soul, according to all these particulars, with the consciousness of being sent by God, and all this is acknowledged by both elder and congregation, then this will result in a prosperous congregation. These then are the duties which elders themselves are obligated to perform. We shall relate the duties which ministers and elders must perform together after we first briefly point out what the duties of the deacons are.

The Office of Deacon

The third office which God has instituted in His church is the *deaconry*. The deaconry pertains to an office in the church, distinct from the offices of elders and ministers, which has as its purpose *to support the poor in the congregation in their physical needs*. Since God gathers His church primarily from among the poor, there will always be poor persons in the church. “For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou

shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deut 15:11). This gives opportunity to those *with means* to demonstrate their generosity, and for the *poor* to acknowledge the Lord’s providence regarding them and to be thankful. It could readily occur that several poor members, unknown to those members with means, would thus be neglected, perish due to want, or be forced to beg—which would be a matter of shame to the church. It can therefore easily be seen that it is needful that there be some whose work it is to have oversight over the poor. It has therefore also pleased the Lord to institute such an office in the church. Concerning this office we must note the calling, the required qualifications, and the task itself.

The Deaconry: A Divine Institution

First, it is evident that the Lord has instituted such an office, for we read in Acts 6:3, “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

Secondly, the deaconry was not only intended for that era, when due to urgent circumstances all goods were brought together and the church lived from one common purse. Rather, since the poor will never be absent in the church, the deaconry must continue at all times. In the congregation at Rome there were also deacons, to whom the apostle said, “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity” (Rom 12:8). He also wrote to the deacons in Philippi: “... with the bishops and deacons” (Phil 1:1). In 1 Tim 3 he instructs Timothy concerning what manner of men deacons must be, thereby confirming that the deaconry is a divine institution.

Since the deaconry is a divine institution in the church and for the church, deacons must be chosen by the church. This must either be done by all the brethren or by the representatives of the church—her elders—and not by the civil government. It was done in this manner in Acts 6. The apostle insists that deacons must first be proved, and after this are to serve (1 Tim 3:10). Such probation and subsequent service implies an election. This is emphatically stated in the form for the installation of deacons. “*And in the first place I ask you, both elders and deacons, whether you do not feel in your hearts, that ye are lawfully called of God’s church, and consequently of God Himself, to these your respective offices?*” Since deacons are intended for the church, it is not fitting that they distribute alms to those outside the church, and thus mix the gifts of the church with the common provision for the poor, for:

(1) this is contrary to the purpose and objective of the office.

(2) Such a practice subtly promotes the mixing of the church with those who are without, as it treats all the poor as being equal; the church, however, must obviously be separate in all things.

(3) This will impede the generosity of many, for their gifts would then not be distributed in harmony with their objective.

(4) It would be to the disadvantage of the poor in the church, who otherwise could be supported in a much more abundant measure.

(5) It confirms papists and others in their errors and ungodly life, since they receive support regardless.

(6) It robs the church of its holy radiance. Such radiance would be all the more evident if the deacons, due to an abundance of funds, would manifest voluntary generosity to some individuals outside of the church.

The Qualifications of a Deacon

The apostle describes the required qualifications for deacons. “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Tim 3:8-9, 12). Add to this all the virtues they must have as Christians in order to be examples to others. They must especially manifest those virtues which flow out of the virtue of generosity.

(1) They must manifest *compassion*: “Having compassion” (1 Pet 3:8). The burden of the poor must so weigh upon them, as if they themselves were afflicted with it. They may neither be rude nor proud, nor may they snarl at them as if they had dogs or enemies before them.

(2) They must be *merciful*, which is a kindness causing one to be inclined to help another. “Blessed are the merciful” (Matt 5:7); “Be ye therefore merciful” (Luke 6:36); “Be pitiful” (1 Pet 3:8). The opposite behavior would be to shut one’s heart, to harden oneself toward the poor, not giving them anything, or if, out of a sense of shame or for any other reason one must give, he then gives it in such a manner as if he were casting a piece of bread to a dog.

(3) As a father cares for his children, they must be *careful and concerned* as to how the poor can manage their affairs, have enough to live, and thus be able to thank the Lord. “I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor” (Job 29:15-16).

(4) They must be *cheerful and friendly*. “... he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom 12:8); “Be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Pet 3:8). They must be of a friendly disposition. A kind word and a friendly countenance are most refreshing for the poor, who due to

their poverty are dejected. A grim countenance and a harsh word, however, cut through their soul.

The work of deacons pertains to the collection and distribution of monies, as well as to caring for the souls of the poor.

First, they must *collect*. They must do so in cooperation with the ministers and the elders, who together must superintend both the poor as well as those who have means. For the office of the ministry includes the offices of elder and deacon, and the office of elder includes the office of deacon. I repeat, deacons must consult with them to determine where sufficient means will be obtained, but also to be diligent in providing in situations of which they are aware.

Secondly, they must *distribute*. In distributing funds they must use wisdom and caution, seeing to it that they do not give thoughtlessly. They must give most to those who have the greatest need, and less to those who are lazy and waste that which has been given to them, in order to teach them to work and to be frugal. Orphans, the aged, the sick, or mothers who have given birth each require a different approach. Those who are to blame for their poverty and who are capable of working must again be treated differently. This is also true for those who, due to a handicap, cannot work, even though they are healthy. It is again different with those who would rather perish from hunger with their families (which is a sin), than to allow it to be known that they are receiving something from the deaconry. A different approach is also needed for those who would be reduced to poverty unless some monetary help be given to them enabling them to remain solvent. Much wisdom is needed to clearly discern time, manner, and circumstances in making these decisions.

Thirdly, the deacons must also *care for the souls* of their poor, for they are as fathers to them; and whatever one member is obligated to do to another, they must excel in doing to those over whom the Lord has placed them.

(1) They must instruct the ignorant, and bring them to the church services and to catechism instruction.

(2) They must exhort, rebuke, and comfort according to individual circumstances.

(3) They must visit the sick, either preparing their souls for the hour of death, or exhorting them to increase in godliness if they may again become healthy.

In doing so they will “purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 3:13). They will be an ornament to the church, being enabled to be of more benefit to the church than before. Their gifts and graces will

be increased as well. Among all the offices there is not one office which is more burdensome and detrimental to the body than the diaconship. It therefore frequently amazes me and gives me cause for rejoicing that the Lord gives the deacons such willingness and zeal, a fact which is generally true in the Netherlands. Upon receiving rich gifts they are as happy as if they had received them themselves. It does not trouble them to be engaged in their task until late in the evening. In no meeting is there generally more order, more unity, and more faithfulness than among the deacons. The Lord also rewards them, giving them honor and respect, and frequently grants that their own circumstances improve rather than deteriorate.

Exhortation to Faithfulness in the Execution of the Offices

Especially in reference to these spiritual offices, knowing and doing must go together. We shall therefore add to the description of these offices an exhortation to be faithful in their execution, for which we present the following motives:

First of all, ministers, elders, and deacons, does not the Lord Jesus, the King of His church, call everyone of you to your respective office and task? It is considered a great honor in the world to be the ambassador of a king. Here, however, we have the Lord of lords and the King of kings, who is very God Himself, the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His Person, who as Mediator is exalted at the right hand of the Father, seated with the Father on His throne, and crowned with honor and glory. It is He who has called you to His service, having sent you forth with a message recorded in His Word. He who reveres this King, who has spiritual eyes to perceive that this spiritual honor is incomparably greater than worldly honor, and that the honor which God and the Lord Jesus bestow upon the holy angels and the children of God is not to be compared to any honor bestowed by men, will deem it to be the highest honor to be His ambassador and messenger. He does not do so to boast of this, but rather is as willing and ready to execute his ambassadorship joyfully as the angels are when they receive a message from God. The greater the person is who sends you the more careful one ought to be to obey his command to the letter. Behold, therefore, that the great King bestows such honor upon you. He has given you such a glorious, precious, and advantageous commission, and His eyes are continually upon you. Therefore, give heed to engage in your task in a heartfelt and faithful manner. Be then faithful and diligent, while often reflecting upon 1 Cor 9:16-17: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me;

yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.”

Secondly, the Lord has provided you with such gifts and talents as are needful for the work to which He has commissioned you, giving unto one less and to the other more. These talents have been given to you in order that you would improve them. He moreover has given you esteem and respect among the people, thereby giving you reason, and granting you good opportunity, to use your talent advantageously. What manner of person would you be if you either would allow these wondrous benefits, talents, opportunities, and esteem to be unused, or if you were to display them proudly, seeking to attain worldly honor with spiritual benefits? They are too precious for this. Acknowledge therefore their preciousness and may you burn with zeal to use them for that purpose for which they have been given, namely, to serve your Lord and to be beneficial to His church.

Thirdly, the salvation or damnation of precious and noble souls hinges upon your labor. When viewing a church full of people, be reminded that every person has an immortal soul and by nature is traveling upon the broad way to destruction—a destruction which will be everlasting. There are no other means whereby they can be helped but by you in whose mouth the Lord has placed the word of reconciliation. If you allow them to go their own way, they will be lost. Whose soul would not be moved to help them? If someone has but fallen in the water, everyone will cry for help and do whatever he can to help. How moved one ought to be when reflecting upon the eternal destruction of men according to body and soul! You, having been sent by the Lord Jesus to help them, ought especially to be moved. Would you not, as much as possible, combine all your skills to help them by instructing, exhorting, and rebuking them, and thus take such souls by the hand to draw them out of the fire, removing them as spoil from the gate of hell and bringing them to the feet of Jesus?

There are also converted persons in the church. Among them are little children, as well as those who have made spiritual progress. Each one of them desires and cries out for food, for milk, and for a piece of bread in order that his spiritual life may prosper. There are those who gently progress upon the right way, but there are also those who, as lost sheep, wander about. There are those who are healthy, those who are sick, and those who are near unto death and about to enter eternity. Everyone opens his soul and longs for a strengthening and encouraging word. Everyone anticipates

your coming, and as it were draws the words out of your mouth. You have bread and wine at your disposal, and the Lord has sent you to strengthen and encourage them, having qualified you for this task. How could you bring yourself, be it due to laziness or carelessness, to let them die for hunger by not giving them the food which the Lord Jesus entrusted to you on their behalf? If there be but any stirrings of love or compassion, consideration for souls—whether they be converted or unconverted—these things will move you to help them with all your might.

Fourthly, reflect upon the congregation over which the Lord has appointed you as overseers. It is the church of God which Christ has bought with His blood, which Christ has loved, and for which Christ has given Himself. There you have the Lord's precious sons and daughters, his darling children, over whom the Lord has appointed you as nurses. Will you then not tenderly treat such darlings of the Lord—protecting them from the violence of those who wish to harm them, keeping them from error, giving them food and drink, and instructing them as such beloved ones of the Lord Jesus? Did Jesus buy them with His blood and would you not concern yourself with them? If the love of Jesus toward His church fills your heart toward the church, it will also make you diligent to care for her with all your might and to seek her welfare.

Fifthly, the prosperity of the church renders God glory upon earth. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name," He immediately pointed to the means whereby this is attained: "Thy kingdom come!" It is the church which ought to be the glory of Christ and show forth the praises of the Lord who has drawn them out of darkness into His marvelous light. God's Name is blasphemed when it goes ill with the church and when there are many offenses. When, however, the church shines forth with holy ornaments, is adorned with delightful virtues, and bears much fruit, the Lord will be glorified. The Lord's attributes will then be honored, the angels will jubilate, the ministers will rejoice, the children of God will delight themselves, and those who are without will perceive the holiness of the Lord and be filled with awe. Then voices praising God will be heard in such a fashion that the heavens will resound. Therefore, overseers of the church, the Lord has appointed you to labor that the church be in such a condition. Consequently, if it is your delight and desire that the Lord be glorified, be very diligent to cause the church to be in such a condition.

Sixthly, every one of you in particular must give account to God for the souls which have been entrusted to you. If you have been unfaithful, woe be unto you! If you have been faithful, it will be

well with you. Do not imagine that your performance will not be examined. The Lord will most certainly call you before His judgment seat and say to you: “Give an account of the manner in which you have ruled. Have you been true to your commission, your talents, and all the wondrous opportunities you have had? How did you deal with souls? Are you to be blamed for some of them going lost? Did you strengthen the hands of the ungodly? Did you allow the death of those who wanted to die? Did you tenderly give attention to My lambs and sucklings? Or did you unjustly grieve them, slay them, and take their veil away from them? (Song 5:7). Where are the souls which by means of your service have been converted, comforted, and built up?”

How dreadful will this investigation and interrogation be for many overseers! How pitiful and dreadful will be the sentence that will be pronounced upon them! If only they had never been born and had never been an overseer! What will it be to perish due to one’s own sins, and then also to be burdened by so many souls! They will see you in the last judgment and rise up against you, saying, “You knew very well that I was ignorant, and that I lived in sin. If you had looked after me—had warned, rebuked, instructed, and led me in the way of salvation—I would have been saved. Look, however, you unfaithful minister, you unfaithful elder, I am now going lost! Let God require my blood from your hand, and deal with you as a wicked and lazy servant!”

However, what a precious moment it will be for faithful ministers, elders, and deacons when the Lord will make manifest their labors, their prayers for the congregation, their special discourses, their exhortations, their warnings, and the manner in which they gave direction to souls. He will then cause them to enter into glory, saying, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt 25:21).

Take the following texts into consideration as a warning and an exhortation: “His blood will I require at thine hand ... thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek 3:18-19); “They watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb 13:17); “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 25:30); “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt 25:23). Do not lightly pass by these texts, but reflect upon them for some time, until you sense the weight of them upon your heart and it will stir you up to be faithful in your office.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Ecclesiastical Authority and the Use of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

Having discussed the labors each minister, elder, and deacon must perform, we shall now proceed to consider the labors ministers and elders must perform cooperatively.

Ministers and elders when laboring cooperatively constitute *consistories, Classes, and Synods*.

The Necessity of and Biblical Basis for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

The propriety of such assemblies is first of all evident when considering the need for them. It is naturally evident to man that there can be no republic or society without having an assembly of those who have been appointed as rulers. This is particularly true when such republics and societies include various provinces, cities, and villages. It is thus also a requisite in the church that her elders assemble, not only in each individual church, but also in the provinces. In turn, there must be assemblies representing several or many provinces. If need be, there must also be assemblies consisting of delegates from all churches throughout the world, for there is but one church. In this manner the unity of doctrine will be preserved, and the church will be delivered from confusion.

Secondly, this is also evident from the manner in which the church of the Old Testament conducted her affairs, namely, by way of a council. The Lord Jesus acknowledges this by stating, “Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council” (Matt 5:22).

Thirdly, this is evident from the manner in which the apostolic church conducted her affairs. “And the apostles and elders came

together for to consider of this matter” (Acts 15:6); “... when ye are gathered together, and my spirit ...” (1 Cor 5:4).

These assemblies are either superior or subordinate to each other; however, their arrangement is not hierarchical, but rather pertains to jurisdiction.

First, their purpose is to preserve the unity of true doctrine, to defend the true meaning of Scripture against errors which surface, and thus be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Their purpose is neither to institute a new doctrine and a new religion, nor to vest Scripture with authority, nor to be the highest and infallible judge in disputes. For:

- (1) God is the only Lawgiver (James 4:12);
- (2) one may neither add to nor subtract from Scripture (cf. Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19);
- (3) the Lord Jesus rejects human commandments and institutions (Matt 15:9);
- (4) it is the calling of ministers to teach all that the Lord has commanded them in His Word (cf. Matt 28:19-20);
- (5) every member must be watchful against becoming a servant of men, not allowing himself to be brought under the dominion of anyone (cf. Gal 5:1; 1 Cor 7:23).

Secondly, their purpose is to maintain good order, so that “all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). Their purpose therefore is to prevent the one from lording over the other, so that the practice of religion may be edifying and without confusion, and that such practice be not neglected.

Thirdly, their purpose is to avert all that would give offense, and to use the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that is, the exercise of Christian or ecclesiastical discipline.

The Purpose of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

Let us consider *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*. *Keys* are symbols of authority, and this authority is legislative *in nature*. The Lord Jesus, as the Lord of the church, has such authority over her. “He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Rev 3:7). This authority is also one of *administration*, and is used as such upon the command and on behalf of the Lord Jesus. “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder” (Isa 22:22). Thus, the church has power either to include in or exclude from the church.

We shall now speak of the kingdom *of heaven*. We are not referring to the kingdom of power, nor to the kingdom of glory, but rather to the kingdom of *grace*, which is the church, and wherein everything is

of a heavenly nature. It consists of a heavenly King, heavenly subjects, heavenly goods, heavenly walls and gates, and heavenly power to grant or to deny entrance. This authority is permanent, is not contingent upon locality, nor does it originate in the elders, as if they were proprietors of the church. They do not have this authority in and of themselves, and they may not exercise authority as they wish. This authority is neither naturally theirs nor has it been bestowed upon them, for this authority is and remains Christ's. They are but servants by whom Christ exercises His authority.

This authority pertains to binding and loosening, and to the forgiving or retaining of sin. "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:19); "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (Matt 18:18; cf. John 20:23). This certainty neither issues forth from the ministers nor is it the result of some agreements whereby God has bound Himself to act according to the wishes of elders. Rather, this authority belongs to Christ and is exercised in His Name and according to His precepts. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him. ... Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him" (Isa 3:10-11).

Two Keys: Preaching and Discipline

There are two keys: the Word of God and Christian discipline. *The first key is the proclamation of the Word of God.* The Lord has given this Word to His church, and has authorized His servants to proclaim it in His Name. "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me" (Luke 10:16). Because of this authority they proclaim to believers the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). With this same authority they close the kingdom of heaven for unbelievers and the unconverted; that is, as long as they remain in such a condition and do not repent. "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom 2:9); "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). There is a great difference between someone knowing this personally, by a private individual saying this to him, or if a servant of Christ—either publicly or privately—with specific application says to someone, "Believer, you are an heir of eternal life and your sins are forgiven"; or to an ungodly person, "I declare to you that God's wrath is upon you, and that you shall be condemned if you do not repent." Since

these words have been declared to them by a servant of Christ upon Christ's injunction, and since the Word is of equal authority, it must find such entrance into the hearts of both parties; that is, to the comfort of the one and to the terror of the other, as if the Lord Jesus said this to them in person.

The second key is Christian discipline. This has been given to the church as an administrative power to *close* the kingdom of heaven to those who give offense and are ungodly, and to *open* it again to those who repent concerning their former life, promise reformation of life, and confirm this with their deeds. Neither Jews, heathens, nor those outside of the church are subject to the use of this key, but only members of the church who give offense, be it that they are only baptized or that they have been admitted to the Lord's Supper. "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor 5:13-13). Those who are within the church are subject to Christian discipline if they go astray in either doctrine or life and persevere in their sin after having often been admonished. "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor 5:13); "Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim 1:20). To excommunicate a person is equal to depriving him of Christ's protection, and to deliver such a person to him who rules beyond the boundaries of the church,¹² that is, Satan.

The Steps in Christian Discipline

The purpose of excommunication is to *exclude* offensive members from the church, no longer to recognize them as her members, and to keep them from the Lord's table. Such an extreme measure is arrived at by way of several steps.

The *first step* consists of exhortation, warning, and rebuke, be it privately at home, or if this is not requested, in the presence of the consistory.

The *second step* is to refuse admittance to the Lord's table, since the objective of censure is the repentance of the person who gives *offense*, as well as to prevent *the church* from being slandered, and so that no one else will be offended by or imitate his sins. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor 5:6). Thus, there are some occasions when someone who has committed

¹² The Dutch reads: "... die buiten heerst ..."

an offense must be refused admittance for the benefit of the church—someone whom one otherwise would admit as far as the person is concerned, since he manifests very genuine sorrow and lives a blameless and godly life both before and after the committed offense. The second step of censure is specifically intended for those who persevere in giving offense.

The *third step* consists of informing the congregation about the person who perseveres in giving offense in life and doctrine, so that members may know that the keys of God's kingdom are being used, that they may pray for the repentance of the one who has gone astray, and also that the one who gives offense may be put to shame and come to repentance. Such announcement must initially be made without the mentioning the name, and thereafter if the situation remains unchanged, the name must be announced, so that it may make that much more of an impression upon the heart of the offender as well as in the congregation.

If all of this is to no avail, one must proceed to the *fourth and last step*, excommunicating him, and thus depriving him from all fellowship with the church. This means that he will no longer be acknowledged as a brother or sister, but rather is considered to be a heathen. Such was true for the administration of censure in the Old Testament. "That soul shall be cut off from his people" (Gen 17:14); that is, his name would be erased from the genealogy and he would be reckoned as neither belonging to the seed of Abraham, nor as being a partaker of the covenant established with his seed. The Lord Jesus speaks likewise when He states, "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt 18:17). It is that of which the apostle Paul speaks: "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor 5:13).

The End and Objective of Christian Discipline

The end and objective of Christian discipline is spiritual and thus neither pertains to all men as such, nor to the meting out of physical punishments. It only pertains to people who are members of the church whose doctrine and life are not in harmony with God's Word. Its purpose is:

(1) to cause the sinner himself *to be ashamed*, so that he may know how far he has departed from godliness as defined by God's law and how much his life differs from his confession; also that he may become ashamed before God and His church and thus come to repentance. "Have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess 3:14);

(2) that the sinner may be sensitive to censure as being a punishment imposed by the Lord Jesus and thus repent from his evil ways. "... that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:5); "... that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim 1:20);

(3) to cause other members to fear the punishment which the Lord Jesus imposes; all children fear when a father chastises a child, and this causes them to walk circumspectly. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim 5:20);

(4) to remove offenses from the church for the benefit of those who are within the church, but also that they who are without would not use such offenses as an opportunity to slander religion. "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Rom 2:24);

(5) to prevent the judgments of God from coming upon the entire congregation. "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. For among my people are found wicked men" (Jer 5:25-26); "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor 11:30-31).

Appropriate Conduct with Regard to Censure

As far as censure is concerned, we must consider the conduct of 1) the elders who administer censure, 2) the person who is being disciplined, and 3) others towards those who are under censure. *They who administer censure* must do so in all *fairness*, without respect of persons. They must also do this with much *carefulness, meekness, and gravity*, so that it can be seen on their countenances that they are conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus and are performing this task in His Name. They are to do this in all *humility*, thereby manifesting that they do not engage in this in a domineering sense, but as servants who manifest sorrow and *compassion* with the wretched circumstances of such persons. Thus, in doing so, they are pursuing the welfare of these persons as well as of the congregation.

The person who is under censure is under obligation to be very sensitive to it and to submit himself with sorrow to the discipline of the church. He must do so considering it to be the disciplinary action of Christ Himself, realizing the promise which he made when admitted to the Lord's table, and acknowledging that the church acts thus for his welfare and the well-being of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. If, however, a church has become so degenerate and if the elders are so ungodly that they permit offenses to go unpunished—and thus oppose the godly who excel in orthodoxy

and a virtuous life—and use the keys of God’s kingdom against them, such application of censure is of none effect to those who are censured unjustly, and is deemed null and void by other godly members as well. Such use of censure is not according to the ordinance of Christ, but contrary to it. “The curse causeless shall not come” (Prov 26:2). This curse will rather come down upon the heads of those who grieve the hearts of the righteous by their treachery and who strengthen the hands of the ungodly (Ezek 13:21-22).

Members must conduct themselves prudently towards those who are under censure and, commensurate with the step of censure, must rebuke them and withdraw themselves from them. “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thess 3:14-15). When, however, the highest step of censure is imposed upon someone, such withdrawal must be more complete and more evident. If the opportunity is there, or if in some edifying manner we can create an opportunity, then, while manifesting the distance and separation between us and him, we must lament his wretched condition and exhort him to repentance. If, however, this has no effect and he instead becomes more wicked, allow him to go as a heathen and a publican. “Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt 18:17); “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10); “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matt 7:6).

The kingdom of heaven is thus closed by way of Christian discipline. Such closure, however, is not permanent, but lasts only until such persons repent, and by confession and deeds show their heartfelt sorrow in immediately turning from their errors or offensive life and instead lead an exemplary and godly life. In such an event the kingdom of heaven is again opened for them by reacceptance into the fellowship of the church as a brother and a sister, and readmittance to the Lord’s table. In doing so there must be a manifestation of joy and love, since there is even joy in heaven over every soul which repents (Luke 15:7, 10). Such restitution is to be observed in 2 Cor 2:6-7, “Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.”

The Foundation for Christian Discipline

The use of censure in the church has always had many opponents. Since this is still the case, it is needful that we further clarify

the foregoing by answering the following question: *Has the church been vested with such spiritual authority as stated above?*

Erastians and Arminians either deny all administration of spiritual authority in the church as far as the use of censure is concerned—insisting that only the gospel be preached and nothing else—or if they admit to some measure of authority, they maintain that the civil government is vested with this and administers it through the elders of the church who function as her servants and subordinates. We, on the contrary, answer in the affirmative and maintain that the Lord Jesus has vested the church with such authority. This authority is entirely distinct from the authority of civil government and must be executed only on behalf of Christ and not on behalf of the government.

This is first of all confirmed by texts in which this is expressly stated: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:19); “If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matt 18:17); “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor 5:3-5, 13); “I would they were even cut off which trouble you” (Gal 5:12); “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom 16:17); “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess 3:14); “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10); “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 10).

Considering all these texts together, or each of them individually, the use of censure in the apostolic churches is very evident, as is also the command of Christ and the apostles to keep those who are offensive in doctrine and life outside of the church. It is also clear that if such persons are within the church, they are to be cast out, excommunicated, not to be interacted with, to be removed out of the midst of the church, and to be shunned. The *church* was commanded to do this without there being the least reference to civil government.

Evasive Argument: At that time the civil governments were pagan and therefore could not perform this task. Therefore, the church of necessity had to do so herself. If the civil government is of Christian persuasion, however, such authority is vested with her.

Answer: It is irrelevant whether or not the civil government is of Christian persuasion. Civil governments as such have the same authority, and all Christians are obligated to submit themselves to all governments in identical fashion, whatever their religious persuasion may be. Being a Christian or not a Christian relates to the persons who are in governmental office, not to the office itself. Nowhere is a Christian government vested with more authority than a pagan government. The church maintains her own identical form and nature, irrespective of the nature of civil government.

Secondly, such ecclesiastical authority is evident from the terminology used to describe the labors of the elders of the church. They are called “stewards of God” (Titus 1:7); “overseers” (Acts 20:28); “ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1); “governments” (1 Cor 12:28); “them which have the rule over you” (Heb 13:7, 17); “them ... are over you” (1 Thess 5:12); “elders that rule” (1 Tim 5:17). Regarding their labors the following is written: “to take heed to all the flock ... and to guard against wolves” (Acts 20:28-29); “to do all things decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40); “... for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12); to present the church “as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2).

All this terminology pertains to being vested with authority to do certain things; the church is therefore vested with authority. Such authority does not originate with the civil government. Thus the elders, in the use of this authority, are not servants of the government. Rather, this authority originates with the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of His church, and the elders of the church exercise this authority as servants of Christ. Furthermore, without closure and opening and without exclusion or inclusion, this authority can neither be exercised nor can its objective be achieved. Consequently the church has been vested with such authority.

Thirdly, such authority was exercised in the Old Testament. God Himself cast Cain out of the church (Gen 4:14, 16). In many texts God commands the excommunication of those who give offense, *cutting their souls off from the people*. It is one church, and since authority existed then, this is therefore also true today—for this authority does not pertain to the ceremonial law, but rather is related to the very essence of the church and thus is of a permanent nature. *To cut off souls from among the people* is not a putting to death, but rather an erasing from the genealogy of the children of

Israel, that is, the church. This means that such persons would not be reckoned among the seed of Abraham, but would be considered *as heathens and publicans*, as Christ explained it in Matt 18:17 when He spoke of censure.

Fourthly, the very nature of all corporate entities and organizations demands that there be order and authority to exclude all those who do not abide by the conditions upon which they were admitted, but who instead seek to generate confusion in the entire organization. The church is a spiritual community, and those who are admitted into this community are admitted upon making a vow. Consequently she also has the authority to exclude those who violate their vows or undermine the well-being of that community.

Fifthly, consider also:

(1) the first Synod (Acts 15). It issued directives (vs. 24); it rebuked and condemned error (vs. 25); and established ordinances (Acts 16:4). It is thus very evident that the church has the authority to permit elders to govern and direct her, and to this belongs necessarily the power of inclusion and exclusion.

(2) This has always been the steadfast practice of the church of all ages. It has also been the steadfast confession and practice of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands since the time of the Reformation. This is confirmed in *The Form of Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word*. "Finally, it is the duty of the Ministers of the Word, to keep the Church of God in good discipline, and to govern it in such a manner *as the Lord hath ordained*; for Christ having spoken of *Christian discipline*, says to His apostles, *whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ... with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, committed to them (whereby they exclude and include) according to the charge given them by God.*"

This is likewise confirmed in *The Form of Ordination of Elders*: "Therefore, in the first place, the office of elder is ... diligently to look, whether every one properly deports himself in his confession and conversation; to admonish those who behave themselves disorderly, *and to prevent as much as possible, the sacrament from being profaned*: also to act (*according to Christian discipline*) *against the impenitent.*"

The Form of Excommunication conveys this very clearly. Note especially these words: "Wherefore we at this present are necessitated to proceed to this excommunication according to the command and charge given us by God in His Holy Word."

Our *Heidelberg Catechism* states in answer 82, "Therefore it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and His apostles *to exclude such persons.*" In answer 85 we read: "Thus: when *according to the command of Christ, those ... are by*

them (the elders of the church) *forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ.*"

In the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 32, we read: "For this purpose excommunication or church discipline is requisite ... according to the Word of God."

Add to this the Christian, praiseworthy, and exemplary *Resolution of the Most Noble Commissioners of the Province of Friesland*, formulated in the year 1645, to which they hold rigorously, and of which everyone is repeatedly reminded. We read there: "*In order that the church may maintain her rightful authority as far as censure and discipline are concerned, which hereby is fully granted to her.*"

The foregoing makes it very clear that this is not the peculiar opinion of some private individual, but that this has been the continual confession and practice of the entire Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Therefore, those who either contradict this or oppose it in practice are in this respect not in agreement with the Reformed Church, but with all their power are engaged in mutilating the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Forms of Unity.

Objection #1: "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" (Matt 13:28-30). Behold, here it is expressly forbidden to pull out the tares, and the command is given to let them grow.

Answer: The field is not the church but the world (vs. 38). The tares are the wicked, and the harvest symbolizes the end of the world (vs. 39). The meaning of this parable is this: It is not according to God's will that there are only the godly in this world, but also the ungodly. Therefore, in order to the gathering of the elect, the ungodly must not be eradicated since godly children also do come forth from the ungodly, and this could not occur if all the ungodly were eradicated. Consequently, we maintain that this text does not pertain at all to the church and her authority to censure, for censure does not pertain to the hypocrite but to those who give offense.

Objection #2: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt 18:15). Thus public rebuke and excommunication do not belong in the church.

Answer: (1) Read also verses 16-18; you will then observe that such excommunication is commanded. It is the Lord's will, however, that we would come to this extreme measure by way of steps.

(2) The Lord makes reference in verse 15 to one's conduct relative to private, rather than public offenses.

Objection #3: “But let a man examine himself” (1 Cor 11:28). This is therefore not the consistory’s business.

Answer: The one does not exclude the other, for also the overseers are enjoined to do so. “Do not ye judge them that are within” (1 Cor 5:12). It is particularly the task of elders to do so when someone is neither able nor willing to examine himself.

Objection #4: You will thus stigmatize people and thereby cause them to be abhorred.

Answer (1) Let those who wish to live ungodly lives remain without.

(2) This is self-inflicted, for the church does not make their conduct public, but rather punishes only that which has become public.

(3) This is not the objective of censure; but its objective is their conversion and the well-being of the church.

Objection #5: Civil government is permitted to mete out punishment, but not the church.

Answer: Civil government does not have the authority to use the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Those keys have not been given to it, but rather to the church. The civil government punishes those who disturb the peaceful coexistence of its subjects, doing so by way of corporal punishment. The church, however, punishes those who act contrary to truth and godliness, doing so with spiritual discipline. They both have different objectives and there is thus a different manner of punishment. He who is disciplined by the church may nevertheless be a good subject of the government.

Objection #6: By such a practice a government is established within a government, and the fact that these two are in opposition to each other must necessarily result in the demise of a kingdom or a republic.

Answer: This would occur if both governments were of the same nature. They are entirely different in nature, however, as has been shown in our first proof (p. 162). If they both maintain their proper position, they will never be in opposition to each other, but will fortify each other. The disobedient are punished by way of ecclesiastical authority being vested in the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This authority is also used against those who are disobedient towards the civil government.

The Relationship of the Civil Government to the Church

This generates another question: Does the civil government have any authority at all with regard to the church? If yes, what does or does this not consist of?

We wish to preface our answer to this question by stating that first, all members of the clergy—ministers, elders, and deacons—are subject to the civil government as *individuals*, and thus are in

one and the same category as other people. I repeat, as individuals. This is not true, however, as far as their ecclesiastical standing is concerned, for as such, they are subject to consistories, Classes, and Synods, and thus are subject to the only King of the church, Jesus Christ.

Secondly, if members of the clergy conduct themselves contrary to civil laws pertaining to all citizens, they, just as other citizens, may and must be punished according to the magnitude of their crime.

Thirdly, since members of the clergy are not servants of the civil government, but as individuals are in the same category as all other citizens, they have the same right to legal defense. Therefore, in the event of an indictment, legal procedures must be initiated against them the same as against other citizens.

Fourthly, members of the clergy and the entire congregation, each in their own position, are obligated to honor and obey the civil government conscientiously—with heart and in deeds. They are to do so not by way of compulsion, but in an affectionate manner, out of love for God, whose supremacy and majesty are reflected in the office of civil government. No one is released from the duty of rendering honor and obedience simply because he is a member of the clergy or of the church. This is true even if the civil government is either pagan, Islamic, heretical or Christian, good or evil, godly or ungodly, compassionate or severe. It is the duty of elders to stir everyone up to render such honor and obedience. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (Rom 13:1).

Question: Does the civil government exercise any authority at all with regard to the church?

Answer: It has no authority whatsoever *in* the church, but it does have authority with regard *to* the church.

We thus most strenuously oppose the *Erastians and Arminians* who posit all authority and government with the civil government, subordinating all ecclesiastical authority and government to the civil government, from which it is in turn delegated to the church. We have contradicted this notion in the foregoing and shall shortly do so again. We are likewise opposed to the view of the *papists* who remove all who belong to the church from governmental jurisdiction. At the same time, they maintain that the civil government may not render judgment at all in the realm of religion, and that the civil government must merely follow blindly and execute whatever the church has deemed and judged to be correct. We are also opposed to the view of the *Libertines* who insist that the government may not be involved with religion at all, but must permit every religion in its territory to proclaim whatever it wishes. We

declare that the civil government does indeed have authority with regard to the church and is obligated to make use of this, which is a matter we subsequently shall demonstrate to be so.

Question: What authority does the civil government not have?

Answer: It has no authority whatsoever *in* the church and may not rule over the church as lords and masters. Government officials may not act as if they are servants sent of Christ—in Christ's Name preaching, administering the sacraments, using the keys of the kingdom of heaven, commissioning ministers, appointing elders in the church, and decreeing what or what will not be preached concerning divine truths, and what are or are not the fundamental points of the Christian religion. They also have no right to depose and expel ministers who are godly and blameless in doctrine and life, and who have been lawfully called as the ministers of given churches. They may not, as lord and master over the church, reject such men, declare the calling to be null and void, efface it, etc. The government has no authority relative to such ecclesiastical matters, for in doing so she would reach for the crown and scepter of the Lord Jesus, whose prerogative this is. Those governments who are not refrained by the many examples of divine judgment will pay a bitter price for such a practice.

The Lord Jesus Christ: The Only and Sovereign King of His Church

From the following it is evident that the civil government has no authority to rule as lord and master over the church and, by reason of its authority, to decree and govern everything according to its pleasure.

First, *the Lord Jesus is the only and sovereign King over His church*, and is her sole Ruler; He alone legislates (Gal 6:16). He alone gives order as to how His laws are to be made known: by the preaching of the Word (Matt 28:20), by the administration of the sacraments (Matt 28:19; 26:26), and by the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19). He alone appoints and sends forth His own servants (Eph 4:11; Acts 20:28), and it is His will that whatever is done in the church be done in His Name (Matt 16:18-19). Consequently, the civil government has no authority to rule over the church, to impose laws upon her, to issue forth directives as to how these are to be carried out to appoint ministers and elders, or to execute or cause anything to be executed in her name. Let everyone therefore be fearful of infringing upon Christ's jurisdiction and government, lest the same judgment come upon them as rests upon the pope.

Secondly, Christ has delegated the authority to govern His church only to the church and to none other. This we have shown

in the foregoing by way of five proofs. Thus, the civil government neither has authority *over* nor *in* the church, for it is not the church, nor is it a member of the church as a governmental body. Its dominion over the church would therefore be of a foreign and tyrannical nature, which this King will not tolerate.

Thirdly, the servants, whom the Lord Jesus desires to have in His church and to be chosen and sent forth by her, are expressly named in Eph 4:11 and 1 Cor 12:28. This we have confirmed in chapter 27 with three proofs. These servants are *apostles, evangelists, prophets, shepherds and teachers, elders, and deacons*. However, not one word is mentioned about the civil government. Let the civil government, if it wishes to rule over the church, demonstrate that it has received such a charge from the Lord Jesus, and we shall be satisfied. It is, however, not able to do this. Therefore, if it wishes to dominate and control without a charge from the King of the church, this is nothing less than tyranny for which it will pay a bitter price.

The Differences Between Civil and Ecclesiastical Governments

Civil government and ecclesiastical government are so essentially different from each other that it is impossible for one government to rule over both jurisdictions. This is evident from the following reasons:

(1) Civil government has its origin in God as Creator and Preserver. The government of the church originates in and has been established by Christ as Mediator.

(2) Civil government is an authoritative government. In the church, however, there may not be the least lording over the other (1 Pet 5:3). All government in the church is characterized by service and is entirely executed on behalf of another, that is, Christ. In order for the church to belong under the jurisdiction of the civil government, civil government should not be authoritative in nature, but rather would be characterized by ministering in the name of Christ. The government will have to admit, however, that its rule is neither characterized by service nor executed on behalf of Christ, but rather consists of authoritative rulership. Its manner of government can therefore not function within the church.

(3) Civil government pertains to the exercise of worldly power. Its jurisdiction pertains to this world and is executed toward people as people. Its laws and punishments pertain only to the physical realm. On the contrary, the government of the church is of heavenly origin, and those who are governed belong to a kingdom which is not of this world (John 18:36). The laws are of

heavenly origin and punishments are spiritual judgments. That which is of the world can neither be applicable nor pertain to that which is heavenly, for it falls far short of the heavenly and is of an entirely different nature, having entirely different subjects. Thus, as far as the form of government is concerned there is no comparison in degree nor is there any commonality. How then can worldly authority and the use of the sword (which only pertain to the physical realm) have any place in the church?

(4) Civil governments rule by the sword. The church, however, rules by means of the keys of God's kingdom; that is, by proclaiming the gospel, administering the sacraments, forgiving or not forgiving sin, disciplining those who give offense, rebuking, refusing admittance to the sacraments, refusing church fellowship, reinstating those who repent, and commissioning and calling the elders of the church. These things are all interrelated, and the church which does the one, does the others also. Any person who is not devoid of intelligence, or who is not deliberately wicked and ungodly, but yields to reason and the Word of God will have to conclude by all this that civil government has nothing in common with the manner in which the church must be governed. If it wishes to use its authority to control one area, it must of necessity also have control over all other areas, be it immediately or by way of subordinates, which, however, the elders are not. For instead of speaking on behalf of Christ, they would then have to say: On behalf of the government I declare unto you the forgiveness of sins, etc. Such an idea would be repulsive to everyone. If such an idea is repulsive to the civil government, the government likewise ought to be repulsed by the idea of ruling over the church, or allowing such tyranny.

Fifthly, during the time of the apostles and the subsequent rule of the pagan emperors, the church had her own government which at that time functioned at its very best. Consequently the church possesses an authority which is inherently perfect and not subject to any influence from the civil government. Since the church at that time was not dependent upon the civil government, this is also true today, as both the nature and the authority of the church remain the same.

Evasive Argument: The civil governments at that time were either Jewish or pagan and thus were hostile toward the church. Our present governments are Christian and lovers of the church.

Answer (1) I declare that those who wish to dominate over the church are enemies rather than lovers of the church, for they rob

the church of that which Christ the King has given to her for her well-being.

(2) Irrespective of whether the civil government is pagan or Christian, or has either a friendly or hostile disposition toward the church, the distinction between the office of civil government and the church does not change. Both Christian and pagan governments have the same rights. Whatever is the duty of a pagan government is likewise the duty of a Christian government. Upon becoming a Christian, a government official will then join the church and submit himself as a Christian to the government of Christ in His church. The church, however, remains the same and is thereby neither annexed to the civil government nor included in its jurisdiction. If a specific individual belongs to the East Indies Company and attains to a governmental office, the company remains the same. He neither rules the company nor assumes a leadership role any more than he did before. The company is no more subject to the civil government than was true prior to this and is true presently. Such is also true for a father, whether he is pagan or Christian. This neither increases nor diminishes his paternal authority. A man's authority over his wife and a master's authority over his servant do not increase, neither are of a new sort than was true prior to being in government. Such is also the case here. Religion neither increases nor decreases the authority and jurisdiction of the civil government.

From all this it is very evident that the church has received her own administrative authority from Christ and she administers the same on His behalf. The civil government does not have the least authority in, nor power over, the church to thus rule her. This applies to the doctrine, the sacraments, the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the calling and sending forth of ministers and elders of the church.

Objections Answered Pertaining to the Unique Jurisdiction of Civil and Ecclesiastical Governments

Let us now consider the futility of the arguments which could be produced against this, so that the truth may be all the more evident.

Objection #1: Civil government must extend to whatever is located within its jurisdiction; that is, from the greatest entity to the least. Since the church is included in its domain, the civil government must then of necessity control all things and govern everything according to its pleasure.

Answer (1) The jurisdiction of civil government would then also extend to one's wallet and all personal belongings of the citizen.

This would also pertain to the food that would be served at every mealtime in each home, to the rooms where each member of the family will sleep, to the moment when each will enter or leave his home, and the hour certain things are to be done. Then the conscience, the religion of each man, and whatever else an atheist could think of, would also be subject to the civil government. These absurdities make it very evident that the authority of the government does not extend to everything (whether great or small) within its jurisdiction.

(2) The civil government has jurisdiction over whatever promotes a good social interaction between citizens as such. In that sense all members of the church as people, including ministers and elders, are subject to the government. This we admit, but neither God nor the people have vested it with authority beyond that. Thus the proof is invalid in both its first and second proposition. Even if its jurisdiction extends to the entire physical realm of society, it does not follow that therefore it extends to the church as well, for that kingdom is not of this world—this kingdom has no other king than the Lord Jesus. Whatever she performs is executed on behalf of the Lord Jesus who is her all-sufficient King, in spite of those who regret this fact.

Objection #2: If the government of the church were of such a nature, that is, not subject to the civil government, there would be two governments in one country or city. This cannot be true if a country or city is to continue its existence.

Answer: This would be true if both governments were essentially of the same nature, having the same subjects and the same objective in view. This is, however, not the case. In the one case authority is of a ministerial nature and is exercised on behalf of the Lord Jesus. Those who do not wish Him to rule in their land as King would obstruct Him if they could. The other authority is of a ruling nature, which God, as Creator and Preserver, has given to civil government. The one pertains to the spiritual, and the other to the physical realm. The one relates to spiritual life and salvation, and the other to physical life and a harmonious societal life among people. Since these two forms of government are so distinct from each other, they cannot interfere with each other, nor be a hindrance to the other. If they each function within their boundaries, however, they will promote each other's welfare. Since the management of families and of the various organizations within a republic can coexist with the management of the civil government, this is much more true in regard to the function of the government

of the church and the civil government, which are essentially different and thus uphold each other.

Objection #3: Many God-fearing kings in Israel ruled in and over the church. Therefore, the civil government also has a rightful claim to rule over the church.

Answer (1) The deeds of some persons may not be used as the basis for a rightful claim.

(2) Some of the rulers or kings of Israel were also prophets, who received immediate declarations and commands from God. We may not make a logical deduction from these examples as far as others are concerned.

(3) Nowhere is it written that God-fearing kings ruled over the church. We do read, however, that they protected her and actively promoted her improvement after she had been corrupted by ungodly kings. There are several examples of ungodly kings, however, who according to their pleasure, wanted to control the practice of religion and rule over the servants of the Lord. Such was true of *Jeroboam*, the son of *Nebat*, who caused Israel to sin by erecting the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. *Ahaz* caused an altar to be built which resembled the altar of Damascus, and he himself sacrificed upon it. *Uzziah*, “when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. ... And they (the priests) withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord ... go out of the sanctuary ... then Uzziah was wroth ... and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, ... and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him” (2 Chron 26:16-20).

Objection #4: Solomon deposed one high priest and appointed another. “So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord; and Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar” (1 Kings 2:27, 35). The civil government therefore has power to rule over the church.

Answer (1) Except for this one singular example, there are none to be found of a similar nature. You cannot deduce someone’s rightful claim from one act committed by one person. This is furthermore true upon considering that Solomon committed many sinful deeds which are not worthy of imitation, but are rather to be avoided.

(2) *Abiathar* had committed a *crimen laesae majestatis*; that is, the sin of offending royal majesty. Together with *Adonijah*, who exalted

himself as king, he had rebelled and made himself worthy of death. Solomon had mitigated his punishment and changed his death sentence to exile; consequently, Solomon did not remove his priestly dignity from him. Due to exile, however, he was not permitted to minister in the priestly office, which could only occur in Jerusalem. Therefore his not being a priest was not the punishment itself, but the consequence of the punishment. This exile did not pertain to the office itself, but to the administration of the office. He is therefore expressly acknowledged as a priest after he had been sent into exile. “And Zadok and Abiathar were the priests” (1 Kings 4:4).

(3) The appointment of Zadok in the place Abiathar was only intended to protect the divinely established priestly order wherein Zadok, not being designated to this office by his birth, had to succeed Abiathar. In view of this rightful claim, Solomon appointed him and protected him as such. There is therefore here no semblance of evidence that the civil government is permitted to rule over the church and her ministers.

Objection #5: Kings as well as civil governments are the nursing fathers of the church, and thus are authorized to rule over the church. “And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers” (Isa 49:23).

Answer (1) Kings and their wives, that is, *their* queens, are here placed on the same level. We know, however, that the right to govern belongs to the kings and not to their wives, from which it is evident that the reference here is not to rulership, but to an act of benevolence. *Cyrus*, although he was a heathen, was thus a nursing father of the church; this was likewise true for *Ahasuerus*. This is also applicable to *Constantine the Great*, *Theodosius*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Count Frederick III (also called Frederick the Pious)*, etc.

(2) These kings and queens are presented here as being in utmost subjection to the church while humbling themselves before her. We read in the same verse, “They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet” (Isa 49:23). It is therefore far from the truth that they would rule over her. Let him who does not reverently wish to bow before the church, as being the bride of King Jesus, refrain from ruling over her in the presence of her Bridegroom.

(3) The word “nurse” (for “fathers” is not to be found in the original text) does not imply supremacy, but is indicative of the labors of a servant. The nurse of a royal child—this being applicable to the church—is less than the child who is being nursed. A nurse must not treat and direct the child according to her will, but

only according to the express orders of the father: “This you will do, and this you will not do.” A nurse may not refuse to accept the servants whom the father appoints for this child. She may not drive them away and accept others according to her will. A nurse is not permitted to diminish or modify the privileges which the father has given to the child, but it is her duty to protect the child and his privileges, and to prevent any harm from being done to the child. Thus, the idea of dominion is not implied in the word “nurse,” but is expressly excluded.

(4) Civil governments are not the nurses of the church simply because they are governmental bodies. The word “government” has nothing to do with the matter, for civil governments are generally enemies and persecutors of the church. The text in question, however, is a promise that the Lord would stir up the heart of certain great, reputable, and mighty men and women, who with all their might would be benevolent to the church. This is the duty of all who are appointed to high places. We have thus observed that the civil government has no authority whatsoever in the church and may also not rule over her. Nevertheless, all members of the clergy, without exception, must be subject to the civil government as much as other men.

Objection #6: Moses is said to be “instead of God” to Aaron (Exod 4:16). Moses represented the civil government and Aaron represented the church. The civil government thus ruled over the church.

Answer (1) Why does one not conclude the civil government to be the God of the church, since this word is used in reference to Moses? I do not deem it possible that anyone in civil government would dare to give himself the title, “God of the church.”

(2) When God said this to Moses, Aaron was but a simple and ordinary person. He had not been called to the high priestly office as yet; moreover, when he was high priest, he did not constitute the church, and thus this argument has no validity whatsoever.

(3) Israel, at that time, did not constitute a republic, but was in bondage to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God sent Moses to Pharaoh to demand their release. Moses excused himself due to lack of eloquence and God gave to him the eloquent Aaron for the purpose of proclaiming to Pharaoh and the people the prophetic revelations which Moses, the prophet of the Lord, had received. Baruch was likewise the assistant of the prophet Jeremiah. Moses is thus not presented here as a ruler or a king, but as a prophet. This title therefore does not pertain to governments, for they are no prophets.

(4) The word “God” does not mean “ruler” here, since Moses was appointed to be a god unto Pharaoh. “I have made thee a god

to Pharaoh” (Exod 7:1). It is a certain fact, however, that Moses was neither a king over Pharaoh nor was Pharaoh a subject of Moses. Moses stood above Pharaoh as far as his prophetic ministry and majesty was concerned. God had called him to this for the execution of his mission to deliver Israel from Pharaoh’s hand. We have thus demonstrated what authority governments do not have.

The Responsibility of the Civil Government with Regard to the Church

We must now consider also *what authority the civil government has with regard to the church*. Such use of its authority we wholeheartedly uphold.

The duties of the government *with regard to the church* are threefold. It has 1) the power of protection, 2) the power to legislate concerning external circumstances, and 3) the power to subdue evil influences.

First, *the civil government is empowered to protect the church*. It must protect the church from all oppression from without and within, so that no one will disturb or prevent either the exercise of religion or the meetings of consistories, Classes, and Synods. It must preserve the freedoms and the spiritual privileges which Christ has given to the church, so that she may use and exercise them without impediment. It must remove all external obstacles which either could be detrimental to religion or impede the growth and well-being of the church. It must do everything possible to promote religion so that the church may flourish under its protection and “may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim 2:2). Such was the practice of the godly kings David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah—a fact which can generally be observed in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

Secondly, *the civil government has power to legislate concerning external circumstances*. As such it can maintain order as far as the external circumstances of public worship are concerned—such as the most suitable time for and place of worship, as well as that the welfare of the civil state be not impeded. It must also call ecclesiastical synods together, and see to it that other ecclesiastical assemblies are held, so that they in turn may promote the internal well-being of the church.

Thirdly, *the civil government has the power of control with regard to ecclesiastical matters*. It must see to it that members of the clergy—ministers, elders, and deacons—discharge their duties and not be negligent in this regard, as well as that they adhere to the established church order which is according to God’s Word. It must publicly oppose those who by false doctrine and immorality trouble the church, or who by evil philosophies and opinions disturb the civil

state as far as political matters are concerned. It must also prevent the continuation of such practices. It must exterminate false religions. It must promote the reformation of the church if she becomes entirely degenerate in doctrine and morals, and by the use of all political means imaginable restrain opponents and compel those who forsake religion to observe their duty, etc. In this manner Moses (Exod 32), Asa (2 Chron 14), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 17), Hezekiah (2 Chron 29, 30), Josiah (2 Chron 34), and Nehemiah (Neh 13:30-31) were engaged in the work of reformation. How blessed is the church and the civil state which functions in this way, and where the church and the civil government, each within their own sphere of influence, are faithful in the discharge of their tasks!

We thus observe that none ought to be of the opinion that the government is not to be involved in the church at all, ought not to be concerned about her, and ought merely to be the blind executor of whatever the church wishes her to carry out. There is a certain *Jus majestatis circa sacra*; that is, a rightful claim, power, or duty of civil governments with regard to that which is holy. The Belgic Confession speaks of this in Article 36:

And their office is, not only to have regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state; but also that they protect the sacred ministry; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honored and worshipped by everyone, as He commands in His Word.

It is the duty of civil government to uphold not only the second table of the law, but also the first. It must see to it that God is honored. It may not tolerate any idolatry, worship of images, or any false religion within her jurisdiction, but must rather eradicate these. It must prevent the vain use of God's Name practiced by cursing, swearing, and blasphemy. It must prevent the desecration of the Sabbath, punish violators of this commandment, and see to it that the gospel is proclaimed everywhere within its jurisdiction. It must see to it that the church, as the darling of the Lord Jesus, is protected and preserved; and that neither internal dissension nor any external oppression disturb or destroy the church, but that instead she be safely preserved in the use of the privileges and liberties which her King Jesus has given her.

The government must be engaged *with regard to* all these things, but not *formaliter*; that is, by intruding into the very essence of the matter at hand. It must do so *objectively*; that is, deeming her (the church) to be the object of its activity. Therefore we say that the

civil government has authority *with regard to* the church, rather than *in* the church. Neither civil governments nor any other individual may exercise power in or over the church, for Jesus is her only King. The civil government has, however, an obligation *with regard to* the church. There is a significant difference between “in” and “with regard to.” A civil government has authority *with regard to* marriage, but no authority in the marriage; *with regard to* a household, but not within the household. It likewise has authority *with regard to* the church, but not in the church. We have thus shown what authority the civil government has *with regard to* the church, and what authority the elders have in the congregation.

Exhortation to the Faithful Use of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

Since the Lord has given these keys to His church, that is, comprehensive authority to govern the church, and thereby specifically to open the kingdom of heaven for some and to close it for others by the Word of God and Christian discipline, the elders must therefore take great care in the use of these keys, and the members must take great care to submit themselves to this authority.

The Proper Use of the Key of God’s Word

First, the elders must see to it that the keys of the kingdom of heaven are used properly. Since the one key is used primarily by ministers—that is, in opening and closing by means of the Word of God—and the other key, Christian discipline, is used by ministers and elders together, we shall first address the ministers and then speak to both.

The first key is used by ministers when proclaiming the Word of God. To what degree must they be careful and tremble when they use this key? But also, how bold and faithful must they be in using this key?

(1) It must continually weigh upon their heart that this charge has been entrusted to them, and that as ambassadors of Christ they must carry out this charge on His behalf. They are not engaged in their own work but in the work of Christ.

(2) They must continually remind themselves that the eye of the Lord Jesus is upon them, and that He takes careful notice of their frame of heart, their objective, and the zeal with which they engage in their ambassadorship.

(3) They must continually impress upon themselves that the salvation and damnation of the souls entrusted to them are related to the manner in which they use this key. If many individuals had been uncovered as to their spiritual state and had been excluded by this key of the kingdom of heaven—that is, if with great dignity and fortitude it had clearly been declared to them on behalf of the

Lord that they were living in sin and were subject to the wrath of God; that they had neither the forgiveness of sins nor salvation, but rather had to anticipate eternal condemnation if they continued in this way—would they not have been moved and would they not have repented? Again, if many a person who is weak in faith had been uncovered as to the grace they possessed, and if thereupon with great dignity and fortitude both the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation had been promised them, with what joy would they have run their course, have grown in grace, and have increased in strength, since due to the neglect of the use of this key they spend their life in sorrow.

(4) In the preparation of sermons they must continually review the matters they study to ascertain whether it is their objective to say something whereby they will acquire the reputation of being scholarly and gifted, thereby drawing crowds. How such strange fire upon the altar of the Lord ought to be abhorred! Their only objective ought to be the faithful use of this key: to discover to every person his spiritual state, and thereupon proclaim either salvation or condemnation to them, so that an unconverted person may repent and a gracious soul may be comforted and stirred up. If this has been their objective while studying, this objective must likewise give them zeal, while preaching, to proclaim these matters to them as an ambassador of Christ.

(5) They must continually remind themselves of the texts of Holy Scripture which follow (as well as similar texts), in order to preach in a discriminatory manner, and not merely present the truth in a very general sense. They must also be concerned about accurately dealing with the spiritual state of every person, lest either due to ignorance concerning the spiritual state of the soul, or due to fear of man or a desire for man's favor, or an inappropriate love for the ungodly or a sinful aversion for the godly, they either do not present proof texts correctly or apply them incorrectly. Consider therefore the following texts seriously: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him ... Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him;" (Isa 3:10-11); "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezek 3:18); "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned" (Isa 40:1-2); "And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire"

(Jude 22-23). Lest you be in error in this, take the following text to heart: “Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver My people out of your hand” (Ezek 13:22-23).

As faithful and emphatic as the ministers must be in the use of this key, so must the members also be attentive when the kingdom of heaven is opened or closed; that is, when sins are declared to be either forgiven or retained. They must pay careful attention to the description of the states and qualifications of those persons for whom heaven is either opened or closed, and ascertain to which group they belong. They must then apply what is spoken to themselves and consider the act of opening and closing as having been performed in reference to them, as well as the fact that it is the Lord Jesus who thus deals with them, which therefore renders it certain and efficacious. This ought to fill the unconverted with fear and ought to motivate them immediately to repent and thus escape the wrath to come. This ought to cause the converted to rejoice and endeavor, with spiritual joy, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they have been called. Oh, if the keys of God’s kingdom were used and applied in such a manner, what impression the ministers would make!

We warn every member not to become involved in the task (nor to do anything that resembles it) to which the Lord Jesus has appointed ministers only. They have no right to examine everyone, and then to judge them and pronounce the sentence of life or death upon them. In this regard it is true, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt 7:1). Such imitation will take away the impressions when the minister uses this key. It puts a blemish upon godliness which thereby is slandered and hated by others, for it will be said that such individuals judge and condemn others. They are generally people who have a high opinion of themselves, who due to pride and a desire for superiority wish to manifest themselves as extraordinary individuals who tower over others, whereas in reality they frequently possess less grace and are less qualified. They frequently, and as much as in them is, do damage to God’s work in the little ones in grace who often have more grace than those individuals who judge and condemn them. As much as possible they will break the bruised reed and quench the smoking flax. I therefore warn everyone not to think highly of himself, but rather to be in fear and humbly to esteem the other higher than himself. Let him fear God and refrain from engaging in that which the most excellent ministers do with fear

and trembling, lest he be in error one way or another. We also exhort everyone who is weak in the faith not to allow such individuals to trample on their conscience, but to avoid such individuals, to cease having fellowship with them, and to join themselves to other godly members for mutual conversation, so that everyone may be edified, exhorted, stirred up, and comforted.

The Proper Use of the Key of Christian Discipline

The second key, Christian discipline, is used when both ministers and elders are assembled together. If there is any area where degeneration is to be observed, it is in the neglect of the use of this key. It is true that one congregation does more in this regard than another, and some are rather faithful, but in general it seems as if the Lord Jesus did not give this key to His church. Not only are the small foxes which spoil the vine not caught, but great wolves have dominion there. How the wall has been broken down so that the vineyard is vulnerable to being trampled upon! The wild boar is rummaging in her, and the leaven is leavening the entire lump. This causes God's Name and His church to be blasphemed, the sacraments to be desecrated, the good plants to be choked by the weeds, and God's blessing to be withheld from His church. All this takes place because the ungodly have a place among His people. It is therefore to be feared that the Lord may one day remove the candlestick of His Word from such a locality.

What is to be done? There is no hope for improvement, for:

(1) there is no longer an example, and thus it is no longer known how matters ought to be. One no longer knows what behavior is considered to be offensive nor how the church must function if all is well with her. Congregations are considered to be flourishing when many attend the services, when many are accepted as members (even if they are as ignorant as heathens and are entirely worldly), and when there is external peace, although everyone is sleeping the sleep of carelessness.

(2) Many elders are as blind as the shepherds. "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter" (Isa 56:10-11). Many are foolish shepherds with "the instruments of a foolish shepherd" (Zech 11:15). What can be expected of such shepherds?

(3) Those who have discernment do not exercise it, and it is barely noticed if a blatant sin manifests itself spontaneously; one will even turn the head in order not to see it. Many are neither

motivated by the love of God nor the well-being of the church and are not concerned about being faithful to the command of Christ. They therefore allow everything to run its course, neither pursuing that which gives offense nor making any effort to remove it.

(4) Such elders love peace and therefore do not wish to trouble themselves to know all that transpires in the church. This requires too much effort; the use of censure makes people angry, and they will have to endure their sharp tongues and turbulent meetings with them. All of this generates inner disturbance and it is therefore most conducive to peace to leave everything alone.

(5) They solicit the love, esteem, and favor of man, fearing the displeasure of the prominent members, as they have children who could be promoted or advanced by them. They may have a good relationship with certain individuals, be an occasional guest there, and enjoy a good glass of wine at such an occasion. This will close their mouth and tie their hands. Some members are quick with their tongues who will resolutely oppose the imposition of censure. They would then become too deeply involved with such individuals, and it would therefore be best to leave such individuals alone. If any discipline is administered, it is toward some individuals of low social status, of whom much trouble is not to be expected, and it then will pertain to matters which will bring such members in ill repute among the people. If they are able to pursue a godly person, whether he is guilty or innocent, they will be zealous to skin him alive and discipline him in a most severe manner. In doing so they are neither motivated by love, nor by concern for the well-being of the church and their souls, but rather out of envy and a desire to satisfy their passions. What can be expected of such elders?

(6) Due to the Lord's goodness there are still good and faithful elders who are of a disposition to act in this respect, but they either lack light or the ability to follow through. They also observe that there are so many situations where censure must be applied that they do not even know where to begin. Even if they take the initiative, there is no one to assist and they will frequently stand alone. Even of those who support censure, he will encounter so much opposition that he will become discouraged and leave the task undone.

A Final Exhortation to Be Faithful in the Use of the Key of Discipline

If this were but a task of a civil nature, we could be silent. It is, however, a task of the greatest importance and of utmost necessity. In order that we be stirred up, I therefore wish to hold before myself and all elders these brief statements for consideration.

(1) Remind yourself, and take to heart what we have stated in

general to all elders with reference to your office. Go back a few pages (to chapter 28) and attentively read what must motivate you in this office. May it stir you up to reflect thereon and to exercise your duty in this respect.

(2) Take note that this key has been entrusted to you by the Lord Jesus. You are, as it were, the porters of a city. Such porters are most unfaithful who permit the entrance of an approaching enemy coming to destroy the city. You would likewise be unfaithful porters if you permit those enemies to enter and to remain within, and thus destroy the congregation which puts her trust in your faithfulness.

(3) You are the cause that the church is becoming degenerate to the core. You are responsible for all the consequences of this. As a result, God's Name is dishonored, many people are kept from joining the church who otherwise would do so, souls are destroyed who by the use of the keys of God's kingdom would repent, and the flourishing of godliness is obstructed. You will be the cause that one member imitates the other in the commission of evil, and that the godly are oppressed and secretly must sigh over the wretched condition of the church.

(4) Know that the Lord will bring you into judgment for all these things, and that there you will have to give an account of the manner in which you have ruled the church entrusted to you and concerning the souls over whom the Lord appointed you as an overseer. The Lord will demand the blood of all those souls who will perish due to the neglect of the use of this key. Oh, what a weighty responsibility this is, and how dreadful will God's judgment be upon all unfaithful elders! Oh, that many would never have been elders!

Oh, that all elders would be stirred up and, in this matter, would lift up their hearts in the ways of the Lord!

(1) Many—and this is particularly true of elders—are not acquainted with the nature and necessity of this duty. They ought to search the Word of God in order to become acquainted with this key and to learn how to use it. They ought to allow ministers, who are acquainted with this, to instruct them in this matter. If my instruction in this chapter would be conducive to this, it will be a joy to me.

(2) Everyone ought to be much in prayer for both light and a heart that will be faithful in these matters, for it is a battle which is waged against the entire world, a battle in which one either will not dare to participate, or in which one would readily succumb without an extraordinary measure of the Lord's help.

(3) You must engage in this task in the realization that it is the Lord's work, for in doing so you will gain ability and boldness. You will then begin to observe your congregation, neighborhood by

neighborhood, and if you become suspicious about someone, you ought to inquire about this. You should privately address such an individual, exhort and rebuke him, and seek to correct such a person in the spirit of meekness. If he hears you, you will have gained him. If he perseveres in his offensive behavior, you must bring such a person to the attention of the consistory in order that censure may be imposed upon him, and thereafter use this imposition of censure to make an impression upon the heart in private conversations. He will thus be subdued by this, or in anger resist this. It is then the obligation to proceed from one step of censure to the next. If the congregation becomes aware of the fact that she is thus observed in her ways, and that there is an immediate response when someone has committed an offense, there will be fear and shame, and each will walk prudently. To know better what is transpiring, there is need for some members who are most tender in their godliness to be convinced that it is everyone's duty to deal with offensive behavior, be it that this is done privately or becomes public knowledge. We are obligated to provoke one another to love and good works. One is obligated to exercise his duty faithfully, even though it brings hatred and slander upon himself. One must make it evident by his behavior, however, that he does so in love and in faithfulness, having the well-being of souls and the church in view. He must especially refrain from conveying superiority or from creating such an impression.

Members must also observe their duty in this matter, both toward those who are not under censure and toward those who are.

Members must 1) not only exhort and rebuke each other (cf. 1 Thess 5:14; Heb 3:13), but 2) they must also bring those, who are inconsistent in their walk and who are not willing to listen to their exhortations, to the attention of the elders of the church, according to the express command of Christ. "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church" (Matt 18:17).

Toward those who are under censure, members must:

(1) show themselves to be moved with sorrow and compassion, urging them to be sorrowful and to repent. They must do so, however, by maintaining a distance and a distinction between themselves and those who are under censure.

(2) Members must withdraw themselves from such and avoid all fellowship (2 Thess 3:14). This is true for mutual dinner invitations, going for a walk, and whatever other form of fellowship would be indicative of familiarity, so that the one under censure may be put to shame. The degree of such withdrawal must be commensurate with the step of censure.

In order to be faithful in this duty, everyone ought to know that

censure is a matter which pertains to the entire congregation, even though it is to be initiated by its elders. Thus, he who is remiss in this is not faithful to the charge which the Lord Jesus has given him. You who are remiss will be held accountable for the sinner who perseveres in his sin, for the desecration of the sacraments, and also for the fact that the church degenerates and continues to be degenerate. It is truly a matter of great import to make oneself guilty of these things and to be the cause thereof. We therefore exhort everyone to be faithful and active in this, following the example of the household of Chloe who informed Paul concerning the offenses which were present in the congregation (1 Cor 1:11).

Those who are under censure must (1) be very sensitive to the imposition of censure and the committed offense, of which the Lord Jesus says, “It is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea” (Mark 9:42).

(2) They must refrain from being opposed to censure upon themselves, and from responding in anger to the elders of the congregation who are imposing censure. Rather, they should with a tender heart submit themselves to them for it is, first of all, the Lord Jesus Himself who is engaged in this task, and it is performed on His behalf and upon His command. He who therefore opposes this, opposes the Lord Jesus Himself, which is a dreadful matter indeed. Secondly, when they were accepted as members, they have promised to submit themselves to the discipline of the consistory in the event that they would give offense. If someone acts contrary to this, however, he acts contrary to his own solemn vow. Thirdly, censure has in view the welfare of both those who are under censure and of the congregation. Therefore, if someone cherishes his own salvation and the practice of godliness, he must not resist those means which are subservient to this. Even if he were not willing to submit himself for his own benefit, love for the congregation ought to motivate him to this; for when this key does not function, the congregation will degenerate. The use of this key, on the contrary, purifies the congregation, makes others fearful of sinning, and delivers those who are weak from that which offends. It will cause the church to demand respect from those who are without, who in turn will aspire after godliness and salvation and will be enticed to join the church.

Blessed is the congregation where this may be practiced. “For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Ps 133:3).

Soteriology:

The Doctrine of Salvation

CHAPTER THIRTY

The External and Internal Call

Thus far we have discussed the Surety of the covenant and the partakers of this covenant, the church. We shall now proceed to consider the ways in which the Lord brings these partakers of the covenant into the covenant, and how He leads them to the ultimate goal of eternal felicity. The first aspect of this way is *the calling*.

The Calling: God's Declaration of the Gospel to Sinners

The calling is a gracious work of God, whereby He invites the sinner by means of the gospel to exchange the state of sin and wrath for Christ, in order that through Him he may be reconciled to God and obtain godliness and salvation. By means of this calling He also, by the Holy Spirit, efficaciously translates His elect into this state.

The calling is a gracious work of God: "And (the king) sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 22:3, 14); "... Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet 1:3); "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9).

God calls neither by the *law of nature* nor by the *works of nature*, whereby, in doing good, He nevertheless does not leave Himself without witness to the heathen (Acts 14:17). "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him" (Acts 17:27). For in all this Christ is neither proclaimed to them nor are they exhorted to believe in Him. The heathen are subject to the covenant of works, and whatever God does in and toward them has reference to that covenant. They are thus obligated to live according to this rule, "Do this and thou shalt live." Therefore

neither the law of nature, nor God's works belong to the calling; the heathen are not called.

This call also does not occur by way of the *moral law of Scripture*. The moral law must be viewed in a twofold sense: It must be viewed either in its *demands*, whereby it reveals the perfect conditions of the covenant of works, or in its *purpose*, as having been given to the church as a rule of life and as the standard for true holiness. In its first sense the law is preached to convict man of sin (Rom 3:20), thus bringing man to despair of being saved by his works. Here the function of the law ends. If, however, Christ is simultaneously preached by means of the gospel, man, being rejected by the law, is allured by the gospel. Thus, wherever Christ is preached, the law functions as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ (Gal 3:24). The law, however, neither teaches about Christ nor calls to Him, and thus the moral law is not a functional element of the calling. This is different as far as the ceremonial law is concerned, which belongs to the gospel.

The true means whereby we are called, however, is the gospel. "Whereunto He called you by our gospel" (2 Thess 2:14). The word "gospel" means *a good tidings*, the content of which is as follows: "Poor man, you are subject to sin and to the wrath of God. You are traversing upon the way which will end in eternal perdition. God, however, has sent His Son Jesus Christ to be a Surety; in His suffering and death there is the perfect satisfaction of the justice of God, and thus acquittal from guilt and punishment. In His obedience to the law there is perfect holiness, so that He can completely save all who go unto God through Him. Christ offers you all His merits, and therefore eternal salvation." He calls and invites everyone: "Turn unto Me and be saved, receive Me, surrender to Me, enter into a covenant with Me and you will not perish but have everlasting life." This declaration is recorded in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. The first gospel declaration is found in Gen 3:15, where we read that *the Seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent*. Since then, God has frequently and in various ways caused the gospel to be proclaimed (Heb 1:1). "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them" (Heb 4:2). Prior to the coming of Christ it was called the *gospel of promises*. "... separated unto the gospel of God, (which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures)" (Rom 1:1-2). Subsequent to Christ's coming it is called the *gospel of fulfillment*. "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:14-15).

The Distinction Between Law and Gospel

Law and gospel are frequently placed in contradistinction to each other. If in such a contradistinction the reference is to the *ceremonial* law, its purpose is to refer to Christ's coming in the flesh, whose coming was typified by the ceremonies. *The gospel of fulfillment, however, declares that Christ has come.* In the matter itself there can be no contradistinction, since the gospel is comprehended in the ceremonies and proclaimed by them.

However, there is an essential difference between the *moral law* and the *gospel*. The law has first of all been given by God the Lord as the sovereign, majestic, and sole Lawgiver, and is pertinent to all mankind. The gospel, however, is the manifestation of God as being "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod 34:6), and does not pertain to all, but only to some. Secondly, the law can partially be known by nature (Rom 2:15), but the gospel can only be known by revelation (Eph 3:5). Thirdly, the law is a condition of the covenant of works which promised salvation upon the perfect keeping of the law and knows of no forgiveness (cf. Rom 10:8; Matt 19:17). The gospel, however, is a declaration of the covenant of grace, promising believers forgiveness and salvation by Jesus Christ (Rom 10:8-9). Fourthly, the law begets the knowledge of sin in the sinner (Rom 3:20), confronts him with wrath (Rom 4:15), and thus brings forth fear and trembling (Isa 33:14). The gospel, however, is the precious administration of the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). This gospel is the means whereby God calls men unto salvation.

God could immediately and nonverbally reveal Christ to man, bring him to Christ, cause him to believe in Him, and thus lead him to salvation. It has pleased the Lord, however, in order that His manifold wisdom be revealed and His other attributes be glorified, to make man a partaker of this salvation by means of the word of the gospel, leading rational man in a rational way. The use of this means is referred to as *calling*, since all men are going astray on a way which is not good and which leads to destruction. God calls out to men who are going astray that the way upon which they are traversing will make them eternally miserable, and invites them to come to Christ as the only way unto salvation.

The Distinction Between External and Internal Call

Concerning this calling a distinction is made between an *external* and an *internal* call. They both proceed from God, occur by means of this Word, pertain to the same matters, and are presented equally to all. Both calls are addressed to human beings who by

nature are the same. They are, however, distinguishable. The one functions externally only by means of the Word, to which also the Holy Spirit does join Himself in His common operation, resulting in common illumination and historical faith. The other, however, penetrates the very heart of man, powerfully illuminating it with wondrous light, revealing spiritual mysteries to man in their essential form, and powerfully inclines the will to embrace those mysteries in Christ, and to the obedience of faith.

There is an infinite difference between the corrupt intellect of man—that is, the Arminians and other proponents of free will—and the Holy Scriptures. The question is: Does the obtaining of salvation proceed from man? Is he the only and essential cause of his salvation, or is God the only essential cause and can man, being absolutely incapable, do nothing to obtain salvation? The Arminians will readily admit that God has prepared and accomplished salvation and that God has given and revealed Christ the Mediator. However, they attribute this acceptance and entering in upon that way to the good will and power of man. This could be likened to what transpires on a race track. The government has put the prize on display and has prepared the track. The acquisition of the prize, however, is contingent upon the runners themselves.

In order to protect the idol of man's own ability and of his good will as being the cause of his own salvation, the Arminians would prefer to do away with the distinction between the external and internal call, between the noneffectual and the effectual call. They would view them as being the same, and thus recognize only one calling. The effect would then not be due to the efficacious operation of God working more in one person than in another. Instead, it would be related to the outcome; namely, that the one person obeys the call by his free will (which enables him either to respond or to reject this call) and thus be saved. Another person will despise and reject this call by the same neutral free will. Scripture, however, rebukes and refutes such foolish thoughts and demonstrates first of all that the calling is effectual unto salvation as a result of *God's* purpose, "... who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28); "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29). The actual exercise of faith in those who are called proceeds from this purpose. "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

Scripture conveys in the second place that there is no distinction in man himself, but that this distinction originates with God. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou

glory, as if thou hadst not received it” (1 Cor 4:7). Man, however, by attributing the cause of one having more faith than another to his goodness and power, would create such a distinction. There is thus a calling which is of an effectual nature and penetrates the inner man—his intellect, will, and inclinations, changing and sanctifying them. This is the *internal call*. There is a calling by means of the Word of God which is not accompanied by God’s effectual operation (which generates faith and love), but which comes to the external ear only. It leaves man in his natural state, who, in his wickedness, rejects this external call. He despises this call due to his free will which wills by way of necessary consequence. This is true of most who are called (Matt 22:5, 14). We shall discuss both calls individually, considering the external call first.

The External Call: Not Extended to All Men

Concerning the external call the question arises, Is this call universal; that is, does God call all men upon the face of the earth to Christ, and through Him unto salvation? The Lutherans answer in the affirmative. We maintain that this call does not come to all men. Although it does come to entire areas, nations, peoples, and languages, it does not come to all. The entire Scripture and the experience of all ages contradict this. Cain was the first to be driven away from the countenance of God, whereas the gospel remained in the genealogy of Seth. Abraham and his seed were received into the church of God and to them the oracles of God were committed, whereas God left all the heathen to walk in their own ways (Acts 14:16). “He showeth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for His judgments, they have not known them” (Ps 147:19-20).

After Christ’s coming, this calling has also not been universal. The entire continent of America was unknown and remained unknown for at least a thousand years and was thus deprived of the gospel. The interior is still largely unknown.¹³ There have always been countries where the gospel has not been proclaimed. Also today, most nations upon the face of the earth are deprived of the gospel. This fact is so obvious that it cannot be refuted, and it thus remains a certainty that this calling is not universal.

Objection #1: All men have been called in Adam and in Noah, as well as in other ancestors who have had the gospel and rejected it. For this reason God removed the candlestick from them, as is evident in Rev 2-3.

¹³ It must again be remembered that this statement was made in AD 1700.

Answer: We deny that those descendants to whom the gospel has not been proclaimed can be said to have been called simply because their ancestors were called, for it is true what the prophet says, “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father” (Ezek 18:20). Thus, the rejection of the gospel by our ancestors cannot be imputed to their descendants. We deny that all men have been called in Adam, Noah and in other ancestors, for all who are comprehended in Adam and in Noah are not comprehended in the covenant of grace, nor are they the recipients of the offer of grace. In this respect everyone must be viewed individually, none being called by the gospel but those to whom the gospel is proclaimed.

Objection #2: “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4); “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11); “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). From these texts it can be concluded that the calling is universal, and that all men are individually called.

Answer: The word “all” frequently means “various.” Experience confirms that such is the meaning in these texts. These texts pertain to the proclamation of the gospel over the entire world, in contrast to being previously limited to the seed of Abraham. It refers to all sorts of nations without distinction, but not to every nation without exception.

Objection #3: Scripture indicates that there have been many believers who did not live where the church was situated, such as Job, Melchizedek, Balaam, Cornelius, etc. This proves that the calling extends beyond the limits of the visible church, and thus is universal.

Answer: From the calling of some individuals, one cannot deduce the universal calling of all. Some of these individuals lived prior to the time when Abraham’s seed was set apart. Such was true in the life of Shem and the patriarchs, when the knowledge of true religion had not been entirely removed from other generations. Others, even though they did not belong to Abraham’s seed, have lived where the church was situated, and due to such circumstances became believers and proselytes.

Objection #4: There have been many who, though living far from the church, lived godly lives and did good works. Their knowledge was consequently sufficient unto salvation. The calling is thus universal.

Answer: The law of nature is innate in all men. From this proceeds natural religion and thus also natural virtues. In chapter one we demonstrated that this is not sufficient unto salvation. This *natural* knowledge, religion, and virtuousness differ in their essential nature from the true knowledge of God in Christ, and from *true* religion and

virtuousness, so that the one does not necessarily follow the other. From all this it is certain that the calling is not universal.

The External Call of the Gospel in the Old Testament Dispensation

Others, such as the Socinians, hold to an entirely different extreme, and deny *that there was a calling by the gospel prior to Christ*. They will indeed admit that the gospel was known to the prophets themselves who had extraordinary revelations, unless they be so exceedingly foolish as to consider the prophets as being irrational, merely viewing them as organ pipes which unconsciously bring forth musical sounds. Even if they would admit that the prophets were acquainted with the gospel, they wish to deny that the people had any knowledge thereof. Whatever they did comprehend would then only point to future times; namely, that in the days of the Messiah the Gentiles would call out to Him. We maintain, however, that people in the Old Testament were certainly called to believe in the coming Messiah unto justification, sanctification, and salvation—as is now true in the New Testament—albeit with less light and with less efficacy.

This is evident first of all in some very clear texts. “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8). Abraham received the gospel and was called prior to being circumcised. From this the apostle concludes that those who are believers, though uncircumcised, are Abraham’s children. This was not only true for Abraham, but for all his seed to whom He made this known. The Lord Himself testifies of this: “And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord” (Gen 18:17-19). God knew, chose, and called Abraham for this purpose, and thus proclaimed the gospel to him in order that he would make this known to his children and his house after him. They therefore also had this gospel; it was also proclaimed to them.

Also consider Heb 4:2, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” We in the New Testament have the gospel as did they of the Old Testament. This manner of speech gives expression to the fact that those of the Old Testament were somewhat superior, not as far as the clarity of the

gospel is concerned, but in view of the fact that they had the gospel at an earlier time. They had the gospel, and the gospel was intended for them in those days. They heard it and were obligated to embrace it by faith, and it was their sin if they did not do so.

Secondly, this is evident in all the prophetic Scriptures. It is an irrefutable fact that these Scriptures contain many predictions and descriptions of the future Messiah, as well as many exhortations to believe in Him (cf. Ps 2, 45, 72; Isa 40; etc). The prophetic Scriptures are summaries of the sermons which the prophets preached to the people, so that the contents of these prophecies were made known to them. They were thus obligated to repent and by means of these sermons were stirred up to believe. The gospel was thus present in the Old Testament.

Thirdly, the entire ceremonial worship confirms this. All these ceremonies were not given to Israel in order that they would end in the external, and in the performance of rituals, but these were shadows of Christ who is the substance of them (cf. Col 2; Heb 10:1). By way of these shadows they were thus called to look forward to the coming Messiah and to believe in Him, something which the apostle demonstrates in the entire letter to the Hebrews. Therefore these shadows are an essential element of the gospel. Since they had the one, they also had the other.

Fourthly, the believers of the Old Testament were partakers of the benefits presented and promised in the gospel. They were partakers of the covenant of grace (cf. Gen 17; Acts 3:25); they had the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 4:13); God was their Father and they His children (cf. Rom 9:4; Ps 103:13; Jer 31:20). They had the forgiveness of sins (Ps 32:5), and furthermore they had all the benefits of the covenant of grace; they expected and obtained salvation (Heb 11:16). Wherever all these graces are to be found, there the gospel must be as well. Since these existed in the Old Testament, the gospel was also present.

Objection #1: The gospel was concealed prior to the time of Christ. At that time believers had only the promise, but not the matter itself. This is evident from the following texts.

(1) "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (Heb 11:13).

Answer: This text says that they did not have Christ in the flesh whose coming was then promised. We do not read, however, that they had not the gospel, nor that they were not called to believe in the Christ who was to come. We read the contrary: They believed. They were thus called by the gospel, being of identical content (1 Pet 1:20), for faith cometh by hearing.

(2) "... according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom 16:25-26). Here the apostle states expressly that the gospel was kept secret since the world began and only has been revealed in the New Testament.

Answer: The text itself refutes this sentiment, for the apostle speaks of a revelation to the Gentiles and not to the Jews. He says that it has been made known to the Gentiles by the prophetic Scriptures, as the gospel was contained and revealed in them. The Jews did have these Scriptures, however, and it was known to the Jews prior to this time, but was unknown to the Gentiles. Other texts also speak of this mystery which was known to the Jews but hidden from the Gentiles. "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:5-6). This had previously not been revealed as clearly *as it is revealed at this present time*. It had not been revealed to the Gentiles at all, and no one had previously witnessed the fulfillment of the promises concerning the calling of the Gentiles. The apostles, however, witnessed that the Gentiles were converted by their preaching. The same meaning is expressed in the following texts: Eph 3:9; Col 1:26; 2 Tim 1:10-11; Titus 1:2.

Objection #2: Moses was the mediator of the Old Testament, and Christ in the New Testament. Christ was thus not proclaimed to them, and they were not partakers of Christ.

(1) Consider John 1:17, where we read, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Answer (1) Moses testified of Christ and preached Christ to the people (Luke 24). The gospel was thus present during the time of Moses.

(2) The distinction here is not chronological, but pertains to the persons and their work. Moses was the means whereby God gave the law of the ten commandments as a rule of life for the partakers of the covenant and the ceremonial laws as typifying Christ. Neither Moses nor his laws were, however, the substance itself; this is true for Christ who is the same yesterday and today. Christ is the truth, the essence, and the embodiment of the matter which Moses typified.

Additional Objection: Consider Gal 3:19, "It (the law) was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Moses was thus the

mediator of the Old Testament and Christ the Mediator of the New Testament. “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (Heb 7:22); “And for this cause he is the Mediator of the New Testament” (Heb 9:15).

Answer: Moses was a mediator of interposition, who transmitted words back and forth between God and the people. Christ, however, is Surety and Mediator by virtue of atonement. “And for this cause he is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). Moses could only be a mediator as long as he lived, and this was but for a short time, so that succeeding ages did not have Moses as a mediator; Christ, however, is the same yesterday and today. In the ceremonies He has also been slain from before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). Moses being a mediator in the manner just stated made Christ known to the people on God’s behalf, and exhorted them to believe in Christ (Luke 24:27). This was the reason why the ceremonial law was instituted. Thus, the gospel as well as the calling were a reality in the Old Testament.

Objection #3: In the Old Testament people did not possess the spiritual benefits of the covenant of grace. It thus follows that they also did not have the gospel. They were therefore also not called unto salvation.

(1) This is evident in Heb 7:19, “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.”

Answer: It is true that the law *in and of itself* could not give man hope unto salvation; however, the ceremonies led them unto Christ, by which believers of the Old Testament had access to grace by faith. They believed in Christ, and were partakers of the benefits of the covenant as is also true for us in the New Testament (as stated above).

(2) In Heb 9:8 we read “that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing.” “The holiest” refers to heaven. It is a known fact that the way to heaven had not as yet been made manifest. Thus, believers of the Old Testament were not called unto salvation by the gospel.

Answer: First of all, the apostle says in the following verse (vs. 9) that the holiest was “a figure for the time then present.” They therefore had a figure of heaven for themselves at that time. Secondly, the Holy of Holies was separated by a veil so that one could not look into it. This meant that all the ceremonies, considered

by themselves, could not open heaven. It therefore meant that one could not enter heaven by means of this way, but rather that the antitype of those ceremonies, Christ, is the only way by which one can come to God (John 14:6). Thirdly, the apostle states that *the way* was not manifest as yet. He does not say that the holiest was not manifest, but that in the Old Testament they did not have Christ in the flesh, who is the way. Fourthly, he says that the way was not yet *manifest*, which neither implies that this way did not exist as yet, nor that this way was entirely unknown to them. It merely implies that this way was not as clearly known to them as was true after Christ's coming, for they, by way of dark shadows, had to look upon Christ who was to come. Thus in 1 John 3:2 it is written about the children of God that "it doth not yet appear what we shall be," although we nevertheless have some knowledge of it. The text in question refers to the measure of knowledge and the various ways whereby one may get to God through Christ, which then was by way of ceremonies, and now is without them.

(3) "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10). Behold, it was Christ who for the first time brought life to light; it was thus not known prior to this.

Answer: First of all, it has been irrefutably demonstrated above that eternal life was known prior to the coming of Christ, that they sought it after this life, and that they endeavored to become partakers of that life (cf. Lev 18:5; Matt 19:17; John 5:39). This text, therefore, cannot refer to a total ignorance prior to this. Secondly, Christ brought life and immortality to light by making satisfaction for sin in very deed, by delivering His people from death, and by meriting eternal life for them. Thirdly, the prophecies and ceremonies conveyed that He had not come as yet, nor had in reality accomplished this, but that He would come to accomplish all this. The gospel states that Christ has come and has accomplished everything. Fourthly, in former times everything was typified less clearly by way of shadows, which could not be as clear as the substance or the matter itself. In Christ, however, all shadows have been fulfilled so that the matter itself in its true form can be clearly discerned. Fifthly, the apostle actually applies this to the Gentiles who had not been called as yet, but were in blindness. After the coming of Christ, however, they were also called by the gospel to the light of salvation and to eternal bliss, which is evident from the verse which follows: "Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (2 Tim 1:11).

(4) “And these all ... received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:39-40). From this it appears that in the Old Testament they did not partake of the heavenly benefits.

Answer: First, they had the promise of the Messiah’s coming, but they did not receive the fulfillment: Christ’s coming in the flesh. Secondly, believers in the New Testament have *some better thing* than those in the Old Testament. This is not true as far as the matter itself is concerned, for the spiritual benefits of the one were also the portion of the other. Rather, *some better thing* refers to the manner in which they became partakers of it. They became partakers by way of shadows; we, by the matter and truth itself. They anticipated Christ’s coming in the promise, and we may have the fulfillment; they possessed these benefits in hope, and we may view and possess them; they possessed these benefits to a lesser degree, and we may have all things (that is, Spirit, light, and life) in a greater measure. It has pleased the Lord not to send Christ in the flesh immediately after the promise made to Adam and Eve—or to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then they would have already possessed it and there would have been no need for shadows. Since Christ tarried so long, however, causing His people to yearn for the time of fulfillment, and since Christ has come in our era, having accomplished everything, they were not the only partakers of true blessedness. We are partakers with them and they with us, albeit that we may be partakers of a better ministry.

(5) “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (Heb 7:22); “He is the Mediator of a better covenant” (Heb 8:6). From this it is evident that Old Testament believers were partakers of temporal rather than spiritual benefits.

Answer: We deny that the word “better” refers to the matter itself; we have shown the opposite to be true in the above. Instead, the word “better” refers to the manner in which the covenant was administered, which frequently is referred to by the name “covenant” (cf. chapter 16, Vol. 1, p. 427).

We have thus observed that since the fall God has called His people by way of the gospel.

The External Call of the Gospel Comes to All who Hear the Gospel

Question: Does God call all who are under the ministry of the gospel, but who as yet are not saved, or does God call the elect only?

Answer: God calls all and everyone who live under the ministry of the gospel. This must be noted so that one may have liberty to receive Christ by faith, which one would not have if the gospel

were not offered—and also in order that the justice of God would be acknowledged in punishing those who neglect so great a salvation and do not obey the gospel. The following must be noted in order that everyone may be convinced of this matter.

First, compare yourself with the wild Indians, who neither know Christ nor have knowledge of salvation. Do you not see that God deals differently with you than with them? Would you wish to trade places with them? Why not? Is it not because there is more hope for salvation where you are than where they are? Will not the condemnation of those who have lived under the ministration of the gospel, but who do not repent, be greater than the condemnation of the wild heathen? Why would this be if salvation had not been offered to you? This therefore proves that all who hear the gospel are called.

Secondly, everyone who is under the ministry of the gospel hears the voice of the minister as he preaches, exhorts, and rebukes. It is thus addressed to him who hears it. The minister is a servant of Christ, a “steward of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1), and an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:20). Therefore he who hears the minister hears Christ, and he who rejects the minister rejects Him (Luke 10:16). Consider also that the very words of God Himself are contained in Scripture. Since, therefore, everyone hears the voice of the minister and the very words of God resound in his ears, all that is said is addressed to him who hears it and he is called by the gospel.

Thirdly, Scripture states clearly that many who perish had been called. “... many be called, but few chosen” (Matt 20:16); “... and (he) bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luke 14:16-18); “And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come” (Matt 22:3). Had the guest without the wedding garment been invited? He most certainly was. It was not his crime that he did not come, but rather that he came in the wrong way, that is, without a wedding garment. It is thus evident that everyone who is under the ministry is called and invited to come to Christ.

Fourthly, there is a general and unconditional declaration to all, that is, to him who thirsts, who is without money, and who wills (Isa 55:1-2; John 7:37; Rev 22:17). He who neither wills nor is thirsty will refrain from coming. This is his own doing and he will be responsible, having been invited and having heard this general calling.

Fifthly, since many reject the gospel, it is necessarily offered to

them, for whatever is not offered cannot be rejected. “It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). Many are disobedient to the gospel (2 Thess 1:8), and are disobedient to the Son (John 3:36). It thus follows that Christ was offered to them and they were commanded to believe in Christ.

Sixthly, the exhortations to repent and to believe are joined together. No one will be in doubt that the exhortation to repent pertains to everyone, and thus each will also have to acknowledge that the exhortation to believe pertains to everyone, for they are of equivalent importance. “... repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Seventhly, unbelief is a dreadful sin; yes, it is a sin whereby we esteem God to be a liar. “He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son” (1 John 5:10); “And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin ... of sin, because they believe not on Me” (John 16:8-9). If Christ were not offered to him who remains in his unbelief, he would not be accountable and his unbelief would not be a sin. Since his unbelief is a sin, however, it is clearly evident that the gospel was offered to him.

Eighthly, since a dreadful judgment awaits unbelievers, the gospel has most certainly been offered to them, and they have most certainly been called. Observe this in the following texts: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:8); “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin” (John 15:22). If everyone who is under the ministry of the gospel had not been called, and Christ had not been offered to them, how can they then be punished and how can their condemnation be the heavier? Since, however, they are punished for disobedience to the gospel, and are punished more severely than others, it follows that it was offered to them.

Since Christ is offered to all who are under the ministry, it not only follows that everyone may come and no one needs to remain behind for fear whether he is called or not; but it also follows that everyone is obligated to come to Christ and to receive Him in order to be justified, sanctified, preserved, and glorified. One must not interpret this to mean that everyone is under obligation to believe that Christ has died for him and *is* his Savior. Far be it from us to suggest this, for this is not the essence of faith. Faith is not assurance; for assurance is a consequence of faith. Faith consists in

the translation of a soul—perplexed about his wretched condition and desirous for reconciliation, peace, holiness, and glory—from self into Christ. Faith consists in receiving Him who offers Himself and who calls and invites every sinner to Himself, the promise being added that those who will come will not be cast out. It finally consists in a reliance of the soul upon Him as the almighty, true, and faithful Savior. If, however, someone is lively in the exercise of these acts and truly perceives this to be so within himself, only then does the assurance follow that Jesus has died for him. He who lives under the ministry of the gospel is obligated to believe in Christ. However, he is not obligated to believe that Christ has died for him and to be assured of this. Far be it from us to suggest this, for then someone could believe a lie, since faith can have nothing else but truth as its object.

God's Objective in Calling Men

This begets another *question*: In calling the sinner to Christ, does God aim for the salvation of all? In calling all who are under the ministry of the gospel, is it God's objective that all would become partakers of salvation?

Answer: No, for God cannot fail to achieve His objective. Then all who are called would, of necessity, have to be saved.

In order to understand this matter correctly, we should consider the following:

(1) The calling is first and foremost intended to gather in the elect. "And he gave some ... pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). God does not send the gospel to those geographical regions where there are no elect to be found. Furthermore, when the elect in a certain region are gathered in, God generally removes the gospel from that area. Since the elect are in the world, however, and are intermingled with others, the calling comes to all; that is, to all the elect and also to others. By means of the calling, that is, by means of the proclamation of the gospel, God grants repentance and faith to His elect—which He withholds from others.

(2) We must make a distinction between *the objective of God—He who works—and the objective of His work*: the gospel. The very nature of the gospel is suited to lead man unto salvation, as it sufficiently reveals to him the way unto salvation and stirs him to be persuaded to believe. The gospel is not to be blamed when all who hear it are not saved; rather, man himself is the guilty one. He is to be blamed if he does not desire to be taught and led.

Such is the objective of the gospel. God's objective in causing the gospel to be proclaimed to the nonelect is to proclaim and acquaint man with the way of salvation, *to command man* to enter this way, and to display His goodness, presenting all the reasons to him for doing so and promising him salvation upon repentance and true faith in Christ. The Lord would indeed do this upon man fulfilling the condition for which He holds him accountable, and which the human nature, having been created holy in Adam had been capable of doing. If he does not accomplish this, it is not because God hinders him or deprives him of the ability to do so, but because man wills not; and thus man himself is to be blamed, for it is the goodness of God which should lead him to repentance. It is also God's objective *to convict man* of his wickedness in his refusal to come upon such a friendly invitation, as well as of the righteousness of God in punishing such rejecters of this offered salvation (John 15:20). Such is God's purpose and objective in allowing the gospel to be proclaimed to the unconverted. It is, however, neither God's purpose and objective to give to them His Holy Spirit nor to save them. This is evident for the following reasons:

First, it would be contradictory to the omniscience of God. God knows those who are His. He knows that the reprobate will not be saved, and it cannot be His purpose or objective to save them. Man knows that a dead person will not arise; it therefore cannot be his objective to make him alive by calling him. God also knows this concerning the unconverted and the spiritually dead; this therefore cannot be His objective.

Secondly, it would be contradictory to eternal election. God has eternally chosen certain individuals by name and has appointed them to be the recipients of eternal salvation. This is in contrast to others whom He has not chosen, but concerning whom He wills that they remain in their sins and be condemned for their sins. Since He has decreed to condemn them righteously for their sins, it could not have been His objective to save them in having the gospel proclaimed to them. He had different objectives, however, which we have stated in the foregoing.

Thirdly, God cannot be thwarted in the achievement of His objective. He must of necessity accomplish what He has purposed, since He is omniscient, all-wise, and omnipotent. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa 46:10); "For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it" (Isa 14:27). If God had purposed to save them, they of necessity would most certainly be saved. They are not saved, however, and God therefore also did not have their salvation in view.

Those who imagine that man, upon the proclamation of the gospel, has sufficient ability to repent and to believe in Christ (a matter which we shall discuss shortly), object to this. In their view nothing more is necessary than that the gospel be preached. They insist that by allowing the gospel to be preached God has as His objective and intent to save all—and if sinners do not come and believe, this is contrary to God’s objective. God thus does not accomplish what He has purposed; this, however, we have just refuted. They support their proposition as follows:

Objection #1: God would act deceitfully if He were to call someone to salvation, and yet were not sincere in doing so.

Answer: God calls all who hear the gospel unto salvation, and it is His objective and intent to give salvation to all who truly believe. Faith and true repentance are, however, singular gifts of God’s grace, which He gives to all whom He wills to save. Others, however, God leaves to themselves who, being unwilling—and due to their wickedness, blindness, and unwillingness, are unable—do not fulfil this condition, and thus will not be saved. Since God has prior knowledge of this and has decreed not to give them the gifts of grace, and since He cannot be thwarted in the achievement of His purpose, He therefore also cannot have their salvation in view. God nevertheless does not deal deceitfully by making the way of salvation known to them, in obligating them by way of many arguments to enter upon this way, promising to save them upon repentance and faith in Christ. God sincerely and truly has all this in view. In all this He has in view that the unconverted be convinced of His goodness, their wickedness, and His justice—and to punish them in consequence of this. The fact that man is not able to repent and believe is not God’s fault, but man is to be blamed. God did purpose to provide them with all the means unto salvation, withhold additional grace from them, leave them over to themselves, and condemn them for their failure to repent and for their wickedness; however, He did not purpose to save them. One matter may relate to various purposes, and thus by purposing or not purposing one thing, one cannot conclude the purposing or not purposing of something else. Here the objective relates to the means and not to the ultimate end of salvation. The gospel is an able and sufficient way unto salvation.

Objection #2: God invites everyone to come to the wedding feast, that is, salvation (cf. Matt 22:3-4; Luke 14:16). It must thus have been His objective that they would come.

Answer: His purpose is to invite them, obligate them to come, propose salvation upon condition of faith and repentance, and not

hinder them. The invitation contained a condition to come with a wedding garment. The guest without a wedding garment could not be admitted to the wedding feast—not because he was not invited, but because by not having a wedding garment he did not meet the condition included in the invitation. It is God’s objective to provide them with all the means unto salvation and to be acknowledged and glorified in this. In calling to the wedding feast there is, however, not the objective to carry them to the wedding feast and to give them the wedding garment. It is absolutely necessary that the Lord do this for them, since they of themselves neither understand nor are willing, and thus also are not able to do so. Since, however, it is not His objective to do this for them, not being obligated to do so, it follows that it was not His objective to save them. The invitation therefore obligates them to come and to believe, and if they come in the way of repentance and faith, they will also obtain salvation. This does not imply, however, that it is God’s objective to unconditionally give them salvation or to grant them what is needed to meet the condition.

Objection #3: If God does not purpose the salvation of all who are called by the Word, no one would be able to take it seriously, and no one would dare to come, since none would know whether he were addressed by God.

Answer: God’s Word, being the truth, is sufficient for everyone. One may freely rely upon it, and one will not be deceived. That Word promises salvation to all who believe and to all who receive Christ unto justification and sanctification. This declaration is directed to everyone, and everyone must believe it, apply it to himself, and say, “If I believe and truly repent, I shall be saved.” God does have foreknowledge as to who will be unwilling to come. God leaves man over to himself, doing him no injustice by withholding renewing grace from him who once had the ability to obey God in all things. God permits man to exercise his own free will, whereby he voluntarily rejects Christ and all heavenly benefits. However, God grants to the elect, in addition to His Word, the Holy Spirit who bestows upon them faith and repentance. Since the required conditions are thus met in this way, they are saved.

From all this we observe that man from his side must respond to the Word of God and believe that he will be saved if he believes and repents. He thus need not torment himself with the question whether God addresses him personally. He must leave this matter in God’s hands. This is as much as asking: “Is God willing or is He not willing to give faith and repentance to me?” A sinner has no prior knowledge of this, and the Lord will give it to those to whom He

pleases. The sinner, however, must understand it to be his duty to respond to the Word of God, to believe in Christ who is offered to him, to repent, and to believe that he will be saved if he does so.

We have thus observed that God from His side has not purposed to give faith and repentance to all men, and it is therefore also not His objective to save them all, but rather the elect only. He nevertheless does not deal deceitfully with men.

The Internal Call

Having dealt sufficiently with the external call, we shall now proceed to consider the *internal call* which in Scripture is called *a heavenly calling* (Heb 3:1), *a calling according to God's purpose* (Rom 8:28), *the opening of the heart* (Acts 16:14), *a resurrection from the dead and a quickening* (Eph 2:5-6), *God's drawing* (John 6:44), *a deliverance from the power of darkness and a translation into the kingdom of Christ* (Col 1:13), and *a calling out of darkness into His marvelous light* (1 Pet 2:9). All this phraseology gives expression to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit who, in conjunction with and by means of the Word of God, operates upon the inner man, that is, his intellect, its eyes being enlightened eyes (Eph 1:18). Furthermore, He operates upon the will, inclining it toward love for the heavenly benefits to be found in Christ Jesus, and to the very act of receiving Christ (Phil 2:13).

To facilitate clear comprehension concerning this matter and to deal with points of contention related to this, we shall preface our discussion with these remarks.

First, in the internal call God works in a manner which is consistent with man's nature. Man is a rational creature who, gifted with intellect, reasons about matters which he encounters, judging whether it is needful or beneficial to have, pursue, or do such matters. If he judges affirmatively, he will also exercise judgment concerning time, place, and means; that is, *when, where, and in what manner*. This is referred to as one's *practical* judgment, for it presents and limits the matter in such a fashion to the will that the will spontaneously embraces the proposition. The will is a blind faculty which can only will that which is comprehended with the intellect, presenting the matter here and now in its desirability, necessity, and profitability. The will is thus also free and cannot be compelled to will something; it cannot be compelled to do something except (as has been stated) the matter be embraced by the intellect and is presented as being desirable. This freedom is not one of *neutrality*, as if it is immaterial to do or not to do something, or to either do the one thing or the contrary. It is impossible to will

and desire something the intellect perceives to be hateful and to be avoided and presents it to the will as such. This freedom, however, is one of *necessary consequence*, whereby the will, without external compulsion and thus due to its own inclination, wills to do one thing or the other. (For a more comprehensive treatment of this, see chapter 15, Vol. 1, p. 407.) In calling man, God works in harmony with his human nature. The Lord does not compel the will, but the Lord grants the intellect eyes to perceive the spiritual dimension of spiritual things, and by means of that light the Lord penetrates the will and inclines it to embrace the matters with which it is now acquainted and finds desirable. The Lord thus engages both the intellect and the will.

Secondly, when God calls someone internally, this rarely occurs suddenly as appears to have been the case in the conversions of Zacchaeus, the murderer on the cross, and others. Albeit that for some the act whereby a sinner is translated into the kingdom of heaven and made alive—that is, being dead one moment and alive the next moment (there being no intermediate state)—the Lord generally uses some internal and external preparations, such as poverty, tragic occurrences, loss of property or loved ones, earthquakes, war, pestilence, danger of death, illness, or other things. This causes the person to become unsettled; he begins to contemplate repentance, the Word of God takes hold, he is convinced of sin, and he begins to perceive what eternal condemnation is. He also becomes acquainted with the Lord Jesus and with the blessedness of believers, and he desires to be in such a condition. He reads the Word, prays, joins himself to the godly, escapes the gross pollutions of the world, etc. These matters are but common convictions which are experienced by the unconverted as well as the elect. Many such individuals turn back and depart from the way upon which they first seemed to have entered. When the time arrives, however, the Lord will translate His elect into His kingdom by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. These preparatory circumstances mentioned do not proceed from man, but are God's common operations. They also are not a step toward regeneration, nor are they sufficient to transform man. Under such circumstances man is not capable by the exercise of His free will to transform himself, to believe, and to repent. The efficacious and almighty power of God must join itself to such circumstances in order for him to be converted. These preparatory circumstances are but means which God gives and uses to deal with man in a manner consistent with his humanity.

Thirdly, when God calls someone internally, he will acquire a

disposition which is entirely and essentially different from that which could be produced by nature or preparatory circumstances. The illumination and virtuousness of which man becomes a partaker due to the internal call does not differ from the natural state in degree, but in essence. It is not to be compared to the difference between the sun's initial rise and subsequent progression, or the beginning of a child's life and his further growth. The distinction is not by way of increase, such as with a balance. Suppose there is weight in the one scale, but gradually so much sand is added to the other scale that the weight of the sand exceeds the weight on the other scale, causing the balance to go toward the side of the sand. This would suggest that man is born again when human virtue outweighs his flesh and corruption. Far be it from us to hold to such a view, for that would amount to overturning the entire nature of regeneration and to deem pagan knowledge and virtue as being regeneration. No, the light and virtue in regeneration are of an entirely different nature.

The Difference Between a Natural and Spiritual Disposition

Question: Is the difference between spiritual light and virtue and natural light and virtue one of degree or one of essence?

Answer: Socinians maintain that it is one of degree, whereas we maintain that there is an essential difference. We shall first demonstrate this to be true for light and then for virtue.

First, the light of nature proceeds from the impression that there is a God, and is only increased by the Word of God itself. Spiritual light, on the contrary, proceeds from *illumination* of the heart, *by the Holy Spirit who shines in our hearts*, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). The Lord enlightens the eyes of our understanding (Eph 1:18), and draws them out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9). Thus, the very cause of this light is different. The most intelligent, brilliant philosophers and unconverted theologians are blind according to Scripture. "... and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:21-22); "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14); "And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:40-41).

Secondly, natural and spiritual light each focus upon a different

object. The one focuses upon God as He has revealed Himself in nature and relative to the covenant of works (Rom 2:14-15; Rom 1:19-22), whereas the other focuses upon God as He has revealed Himself in the covenant of grace, that is, in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). The glory of God may be seen in Him as in a mirror (2 Cor 3:18). They have the mind of Christ and understand the truth as it is in Christ.

Thirdly, natural light perceives spiritual things in a natural sense, and reduces spiritual things to the realm of the natural, for it is not capable of spiritual discernment (1 Cor 2:14). “But what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 10). However, the spiritual man joins spiritual things to spiritual things, discerns them spiritually (1 Cor 2:13-15), and even spiritualizes natural things.

Fourthly, natural light does not generate warmth, but leaves man cold, dead, and without faith. Spiritual light, however, generates the warmth of love and faith. “Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures” (Luke 24:32).

Fifthly, natural light does not sanctify. The external call will at best stir up man to escape the gross pollutions of the world (2 Pet 2:20). Spiritual light, however, has a transforming effect. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32); “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

From all this it is evident that the light found within the regenerate is of an entirely different nature than the light within the unregenerate. It therefore necessarily follows that the *virtuousness* of the converted and unconverted is also of a distinctly different nature. This is evident for the following reasons:

First, these virtues proceed from different causes. Natural virtue is the result of natural light and relates to the law innate in nature (Rom 2:14-15). Spiritual virtue, however, is the result of the recreating and regenerating power of the Holy Spirit by means of the Word, and thus the result of spiritual light, life, and a spiritual conception of God (cf. John 3:5; 2 Cor 5:17). “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10); “Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth” (James 1:18); “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). They are “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4); “Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20).

This life, which proceeds from being a partaker of the divine nature, flows out of union with Christ and is thus of an entirely different sort from that which proceeds from the natural man.

Secondly, spiritual virtues proceed from faith which receives Christ, the life of the soul, and unites the soul to Him as such. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb 11:6); “... faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6); “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16). This is also confirmed in John 15:4, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” The virtuousness of the regenerate proceeds from union with Christ. This, however, cannot be said of the unconverted, for they are without Christ. There is thus a very essential difference between them.

Thirdly, the unconverted, however great all their virtues may be, are said to be “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:5); believers, however, are spiritually alive (Eph 2:5). All that stirs within a dead body is essentially different from that which proceeds from a living body. This is also true for the virtuousness of the converted and the unconverted.

Fourthly, the spiritual virtues proceeding from union with God in Christ, and thus from faith and spiritual life, are performed in love for God, in the fear of God, and in obedience to God as their Father, and thus with the heart of a child. None but those who believe can truly love God, for “faith worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Whatever does not proceed from love is of no value (1 Cor 13:1-2). Love is the fountain of virtue, and the contents of the law (Matt 22:37). Believers are the saints who fear the Lord (Ps 34:10). “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death” (Prov 14:27). They serve God as obedient children—and not as a God who is strange to them and from whom they are separated. They, in faith, serve Him as their God and Father in Christ, be this faith weak or strong. “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pet 1:14-15). Since the unconverted are not united to Christ, without whom no one can come to God, their activity also does not proceed from this union, and is thus not motivated by love for God, the fear of God, nor obedience to God.

From all this it is as clear as the noonday sun that the virtuousness of the converted is of a mold entirely different from that of the unconverted, and they are thus entirely different in essence. Therefore, both light and virtuousness in the converted and unconverted do not merely differ in *degree*, but their *essential nature* is different.

The Internal Call: A Work of God's Grace

Fifthly, we furthermore wish to state by way of preface that the effectual call is a work of God's grace. The *Arminians* also use the word grace in order to create the illusion that they speak scripturally. They explain it in such a manner, however, that grace is no longer grace. They acknowledge grace to be nothing else but that which enables man to *perform*. They maintain, however, that the ability "to will and to do" originates in man himself. They reason as follows: *I may thank God that I have been able to repent, but I thank myself for the fact that I was willing to repent.* They make a distinction between *sufficient grace* and *efficacious grace*.

The *Arminians* understand *sufficient grace* to mean that God has given sufficient ability to all men—great and small, young and old, Jews, Turks, heathens, and Christians—to repent and to believe in Christ. They refer to this as *quickenings, prevenient, operative, instructional, and suggestive grace*. This grace, however, by whatever name it is called, is entirely subject to the free will of man which determines whether or not it is to be accepted. They furthermore proceed to refer to grace as being *helping, cooperative, and supportive*. They understand this grace to be collateral in nature; that is, operating side by side, each functioning independently and the one assisting the other. Thus, each party operates independently—God from His side and man from his side. If therefore man receives the Word of God and begins to repent, God will assist him, stir him up, and will stimulate him all the more by various motives. This operation remains external, however, and man always remains free and in control to either submit to, or to reject the divine operations. Even after he has repented and becomes a believer, he is yet equally independent and is able to overturn the work of conversion again by the exercise of his free will, which does occasionally occur.

Moreover, the *Arminians* understand *effectual grace* to refer to the *result*. It is not effectual by the almighty power of God who would thus in actuality convert man, but only in reference to the result. If man repents and believes in Christ, his calling is effectual because of what man has done. Others call this grace effectual due to some degree of *suitability (congruitas)*, when God makes use of

opportunities—either a man’s character or his condition being at its weakest and most pliable—making use of a given moment, while simultaneously holding before him and impressing upon him suitable motives which persuade and convince him. All of this, however, culminates in one thing: Free will remains lord and master, having ultimate power to either accept or reject. God is merely a servant or a friend who advises and urges him to act, whereas man himself determines whether or not he will allow himself to be persuaded. All of this we reject.

Over against this we maintain the following:

(1) There must be a distinction between the *gift* of grace and *given* grace. The gift of grace is the goodness of God, the fountain from whom proceeds all the good which man receives. Given grace refers to the benefits which man receives, has, and possesses. Concerning the gift of grace we read, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29). Concerning given grace we read, “For this is thankworthy,¹⁴ if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Pet 2:19).

(2) Grace is either *common* or *special*. God bestows *common grace* upon all men by granting them temporal benefits. “Nevertheless He left not himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven” (Acts 14:17). To this grace also belongs all the good which God bestows upon all who are called, by giving them the Word—the means unto repentance and salvation. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). In addition to this, God generally gives illumination, historical faith, convictions, and inner persuasion to almost become a Christian (cf. Heb 6:4-6).

Special grace is the effectual call whereby man is illuminated with wondrous spiritual light, effectually changing his will, and thus in very deed translating him out of darkness into light, out of death to life, and from the dominion of sin and the devil to Christ and His kingdom. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9); “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13).

From these four prefatory propositions it is evident what the nature of the internal call is. We must now furthermore observe

¹⁴ The Statenbijbel reads: “For this is grace ...

1) how man is involved in his conversion, and 2) what God does in this respect.

A Refutation of the Arminian Error that Man Has a Natural Inclination to Repent and Believe

Question: Does man have some internal disposition, propensity, ability, or power to believe in Christ and to truly repent upon the external presentation of the gospel, however powerfully this may be declared?

Answer: The Arminians and others answer in the affirmative. We, however, answer negatively and prove this as follows:

First, man is *totally blind* as far as spiritual things are concerned. “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (Eph 4:18); “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen. ... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:9, 14). The apostle is here not referring to men as consisting of soul and body. This would be applicable to all men—this also being true for Adam, of whom it must be said that he comprehended spiritual matters. However, the apostle speaks in this chapter of the converted and the unconverted, stating that the converted do discern spiritual things (vss. 9-10). Concerning the unconverted he states (without making a distinction between them as being more or less evil) that they do not discern spiritual things. He refers to the natural man as ψυχικοί: (*psuchikoi*); that is, as having a soul, and thus to men who have a natural intellect whereby they can reason, a natural will whereby they can love and hate, and natural passion whereby they can desire. He is thus in a natural state without the Spirit, of whom Jude writes, “These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 19). Of such the apostle says that they cannot discern spiritual things, which is not to say that it is impossible for a person to imagine them without revelations, for he speaks of such natural men who lived under the ministry of the gospel (vs. 8). This is evident from what he adds, “for they are foolishness to him.” No one can ever speak of or consider to be foolish that which he has never heard. Man is so blind that the ability to see and understand must be given unto him. This is given to some and not to others. “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Matt 13:11). Someone who is blind to such a degree can neither will, repent of himself, nor believe in Christ, even if he hears the gospel.

Secondly, man by nature is of such a wicked and evil disposition that he is not willing to repent, nor can he will to do so, for he cannot respond with his will to that which he does not know. Even if one judges a given matter to be desirable in its very essence, he will have no interest in this *now, here, and for himself*, since the things of this world appear to him as being much more desirable and beneficial *now, here, and for himself*. Since that which is spiritual and that which is sinful stand in direct opposition to each other, one can neither delight in nor be desirous for spiritual things if he finds delight in that which is sinful and of the world. The natural man, however, loves that which is sinful and of the world, and thus he neither can nor is willing to love that which is spiritual. “And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40); “... and ye would not!” (Matt 23:37). If the natural man perceives but a few rays of spiritual light and life, he will hate it at once. “... men loved darkness rather than light. ... For every one that doeth evil hateth the light” (John 3:19-20); “... haters of God” (Rom 1:30); “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me” (John 15:18). Wherever there is such a disposition, it is impossible to be willing and to repent.

Thirdly, since man is ignorant and unwilling, he also cannot repent. “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). The phrase “no man” is all-inclusive. Whoever a person may be, he is unable and does not come. An almighty power and drawing is necessary in order for anyone to come. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7).

In verse 5 the apostle places the converted and unconverted in contradistinction to each other. Of the unconverted he says that they are *after the flesh*; of such he says that their Φρονημα (*phronema*) *mind*, will, thoughts, desires, contemplations, and wisdom are only focused upon that which is visible and sinful. They oppose God as an enemy—they neither subject themselves to His law, nor are they able to do so. Consider also 2 Cor 3:5, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” Paul here refers to both himself and the congregation, which is an “epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor 3:3). He defines what he considers himself and the congregation to be by nature. He thus states not what they are by the Spirit of God, but rather what they are capable of themselves; that is, by nature, stating that they are not sufficient to think of anything that has not been revealed. They can, however, only think of, comprehend, lovingly contemplate upon, and find delight in the spiritual

things which the Spirit of God has written in the hearts of believers. He declares man to be entirely insufficient for this, and thus whatever they had and did was given of God who enabled them to do this. So much said about man's inability.

Fourthly, as far as spiritual life is concerned, man is dead, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:12). The apostle is not only referring to those who had never heard the gospel, but also to those who had heard it, for Paul includes himself. Among the Ephesians there were many Jews (Acts 19:8), and the expression used is general in nature. He is not referring to natural death, but to being spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. Spiritual death consists of the absence of union with God, for spiritual life consists of communion with God (Gal 2:20). Those who are without such a union are *Aθεοι* (*atheoi*), that is, atheists or without God (Eph 2:12); those "having not the Spirit" (Jude 19). He does not speak of the punishment of sin, its wages being death, but of that death which is the very opposite of spiritual life. Since spiritual life is the very opposite of spiritual death, he speaks of spiritual death. "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" (Eph 2:5). Since man is dead, he can therefore not make himself alive. Both nature and Scripture teach us that a dead person cannot do this, regardless of the manner in which he is dead.

Let us draw these four arguments together and arrive at one conclusion. One who is blind and ignorant is so evil that he is unwilling and instead hates; he is so impotent that he is absolutely unable; and he is dead, has no internal disposition, propensity, ability, or power to repent and to believe in Christ.

The absolute impotence of man is also evident from all the texts which demonstrate that the declaration of the Word, however powerfully this may be done, is not sufficient to the conversion of man. Rather, in addition to the Word of God there must also be the effectual work of God in the heart of man. In 2 Tim 2:25 we read, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." This refers to the Word of God and to the lively manner in which it is proclaimed. Is this sufficient however? Does this result in repentance after some time? No, but he adds, "If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." The Word of God must thus be joined by the converting power of God. "Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh," etc.; "yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day" (Deut 29:2-4); "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given"

(Matt 13:11). The Jews heard Christ preach; they had the Scriptures, and yet why did they not believe? The Lord Jesus says that more must happen to depraved man before he will believe; there must be a divine drawing. “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). In order for Lydia to be converted it was not sufficient for her to hear Paul preach; this had to be accompanied by the immediate operation of God. “Lydia ... whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). Man is thus unable to bring about his own conversion.

Sixthly, consider also that conversion is a work of God, being of such a nature that it occurs without the involvement of human activity. It is referred to as *a creating* (Ps 51:11), *a begetting* (James 1:18), *the removal of a stony heart and the giving of a heart of flesh* (Ezek 36:26), *the enlightening of the eyes* (Eph 1:18), *a working both to will and to do* (Phil 2:13), etc. Shortly we shall discuss this more extensively.

Objection #1: “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes” (Isa 5:4). If from His side God has done everything toward man that is necessary unto his conversion, and if He furthermore expects repentance and holiness from man, it must be within man’s power to repent.

Answer (1) The reference is here to the church viewed in contrast to all other nations, with which He has not dealt in such a fashion (Ps 147:20), having permitted them to walk in their own ways (Acts 14:16). This text therefore does not prove that all men have such ability, which is what they had wished to prove.

(2) The reference here is to the external means which lead unto salvation, which can be deduced from the presentation of matters in verses 1-3, and thus not to the work of conversion itself. It is the parable of a farmer who does everything that is required to make the earth fruitful and who, beyond this, can do nothing more toward the bearing of fruit, except to expect this from God. God had likewise done everything to Israel in an external sense as far as the means were concerned, and this obligated them to repent and to bear fruit, worthy of repentance. This is the objective of the parable, and we must not focus on all its particulars and look for analogies.

(3) The fact that God expected fruits neither implies that God could not enable them to bear fruit, nor that God did not know what the outcome would be. It is also not implied that such power is to be found in man who is nothing but barren soil bringing forth thorns and thistles, in spite of the fact that it receives rain and sunshine (Heb 6:7). It rather states that Israel was obligated to bear

fruit. If they did not do this, due to their wickedness, they were to be blamed and would be worthy of being eradicated.

Objection #2: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Since God commands man to repent and to believe, it follows that man is able to do this, for God cannot obligate man toward that which is absolutely impossible for him to do. This would be an unjust as well as futile effort.

Answer (1) God created man so perfectly in Adam that he was able to obey and perform God’s commandments. Even though it was not possible for Adam to believe in Christ, this was not due to inability to believe if God were to have made Him known to Adam. Rather, faith in a Surety for the satisfaction of sin could not be required from him in the state of rectitude. The human nature was therefore able to believe. Since man brought himself into the state of impotence, this does not remove God’s right to demand from, and obligate man to do that which He had enabled him to do. A creditor may demand payment from a debtor even if he is unable to pay due to having wasted his resources. Such exhortations therefore do not imply what man is able to do, but rather what he is obligated to do.

(2) Man must acknowledge and approve of the fact that he is obligated not to sin, but rather to obey God. Man is so evil that he is not willing to do that which he knows to be God’s command as well as his obligation. Would God then not know what is man’s duty, when man acquiesces in the fact that he is obligated to such obedience, even if he is so evil that he is not willing to obey?

(3) Such exhortations are not in vain in spite of the fact that man, being so evil, cannot oblige, for they convince man of his duty and of the justice of God were He to punish him for his sin. It is a means which God uses to bring His elect under conviction and to lead them to repentance and faith. Christ said to the dead Lazarus, “Come forth” (John 11:43). This command did not imply what Lazarus was able to do, and yet it was not issued in vain, for it was the means unto his resurrection. Likewise the command to repent as well as the Word of God are means unto conversion in the hand of God, but not in the hand of man.

Objection #3: Even pagans, as well as many unconverted, do good works as well as the converted. It is thus evident that man has retained the natural ability to do good works.

Answer: (1) Some pagans have so exceeded in the practice of virtue that they put many Christians to shame. If such virtues had been true virtues, why would there be any need for regeneration?

Since regeneration is necessary, however, it is evident that their virtues did not have the nature of true virtues.

(2) There are four types of good works: natural, civil, externally religious, and spiritual good works. Unconverted persons perform the first three types of good works, but not the fourth. Their good works are good in *materialiter*, that is, in a substantial sense, but not as far as essence is concerned. They are not *formaliter* (that is, not truly) good works. Spiritual light, life, and virtue are not distinguished from the natural in degree, but rather in essence, as we have demonstrated above. Therefore we cannot make such an inference.

Objection #4: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (Matt 13:12). This means that those who have sufficient grace—which is true for all—and who use it well, will receive more grace. It thus follows that man possesses the grace and the ability to repent.

Answer (1) The word “for” shows sufficiently that the reference is to those who are converted; that is, to whom had been given what had not been given to others as stated in verse 11, “It is given unto you to know.”

(2) It is evident that the reference is not to what man possesses by nature, but rather to what he has received by means of the Word of God. This is confirmed by the fact that this was said to the disciples who had already been called and converted, and therefore had been given the ability to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, even though they were presented by way of parables. The reference is thus to the growth and increase of truly converted persons.

(3) Those who “have not” are the unconverted who have not received grace. They are of the opinion that they are not blind; they believe they are able to understand these mysteries as well as the most eminent Christian. “Are we blind also” (John 9:40). Those who have heard the preaching of the gospel, but do not understand it, or do not perform what they have understood, would become more blind and more hardened; their darkened heart would become even darker, and while pretending to be wise, they would become fools (Rom 1:21-22). Thus, from them would be taken even that which they seemed to have (Luke 8:18). The abused gifts of nature and the common gifts by way of Scripture would be taken away as a righteous judgment.

The same answer must be given in response to Matt 25:29, where the same words are recorded, and are applied to the good and evil use of the talents. The reference there is neither to gifts

which all men have by nature, nor to the good or evil use of these gifts, but the reference is to the church, the kingdom of heaven (vss. 1, 14). Within the church the Lord Jesus gives various gifts, both saving and common. Everyone is obligated to use these gifts for the benefit of others, that is, to the conversion of others. He whom the Lord gifts with grace to be faithful, and to be instrumental unto the conversion of souls, will be graciously rewarded by the Lord with a special measure of glory. The unfaithful servant, however, who had also received gifts (not graces) was cast into hell. Thus, nothing remains of the argument that there is all-sufficient grace in the state of nature.

Objection #5: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20). Behold, here the act of opening or of not opening is attributed to man. He must therefore possess the ability to do so.

Answer (1) Here the church is addressed, and particularly the church of Laodicea. This therefore cannot be used to prove what ability all men possess by nature.

(2) This shows at best what man’s duty is, but not what he is able to do. This is actually a promise to those who open the door, however, without there being any mention of whether they would open it in their own strength, or whether this would occur by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

(3) The reference is to the external call which is a means used to the conversion of the elect—a means whereby the ungodly are convinced of their wickedness and of God’s justice. This call is therefore not issued forth in vain. We have, at the same time, answered the question as to why Christ calls and knocks if man is not able, and why He does knock and call if He Himself opens the door (Acts 16:14). He uses this as a means.

Man’s Passivity at the Moment of Regeneration

Being as impotent as has been stated, it is clear and self-evident *that man at the very first moment of his conversion is not independently active, nor does he cooperate with the prevenient and quickening grace of God, but is a passive object and solely the recipient of the illuminating and quickening power of God.* We are not speaking here of a man who already has been regenerated, but rather of an unregenerate man being regenerated. Such a person is passive rather than active.

This is first of all evident from what has been stated before concerning the impotence of man who is blind and does not know how matters ought to be; who is evil, unwilling, and hates

that which is spiritual; who is impotent, thus rendering him unable; who is dead, and therefore in the initial moment of regeneration and conversion is not able to cooperate, but is merely passive. Such is the state of man according to the foregoing proposition. It thus follows that he functions neither independently nor cooperatively.

Secondly, since the difference between natural and spiritual light, life, and virtue is not one of degree, but of very essence (as stated in the foregoing), man is not able to change from one state to the other, nor is he able to cooperate in the act of translation from one state to the other. Rather, an almighty power is necessary for this. Who can change a stone into flesh, or an irrational animal into a man? Who then would also be able to change a dead person into a living person?

Thirdly, regeneration is a work that must be attributed solely to God and is an omnipotent work of God:

(1) It is a work of God: "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Ps 100:3); "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13); "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col 1:13); "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

(2) It is an omnipotent work, a work which has man as its only object. It is an act of *creation*, and by way of this creative work a new creature is formed. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor 5:17); "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph 2:10). We know that in the act of creation a creature is brought forth without any cooperation whatsoever. *Regeneration is an act of resurrection from the dead and of making alive.* "And you, being dead in your sins ... hath He quickened together with Him" (Col 2:13). It is an act of being begotten, of being reborn. "Of His own will begat He us" (James 1:18); "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). All these expressions refer to the work of the Creator, the Giver of Life, and the Generator, in which the creature who is resurrected and generated is entirely excluded from any cooperation. It is thus certain that man does not cooperate in the initial moment of regeneration, but is passive, and as the object, is the recipient of this operation. Even if, prior to this, he was human and thus functioned as a man, yet in reference to spiritual life he was dead and thus could no more cooperate in regeneration than a dead person could.

Fourthly, if man were to cooperate in the initial moment of

conversion—if he were to act independently in the most significant and essential aspect of conversion; that is, to be willing of himself to come to Christ upon the invitation of the gospel due to ability which he has in common with all men and is inherent in his nature—a spiritually dead person would not only be able to be active, but would himself be the cause of his salvation and would distinguish himself from other men. This is contrary to the entire Scriptures which attribute this to God rather than to man. “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive” (1 Cor 4:7); “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). Man, therefore, does not cooperate, but he is entirely passive in this matter.

Objection #1: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities” (Rom 8:26).

Answer: The apostle does not refer to the unconverted to whom the point of contention pertains. Rather, he refers to the converted who have been saved in hope (vs. 24). The Holy Spirit teaches such persons how to pray when they know not what to pray for as they ought.

Objection #2: “For we are labourers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9); “We then, as workers together with Him ...” (2 Cor 6:1).

Answer: The reference is not to man’s work in his own conversion, which is the point in question, but to the work of the ministry, that is, the proclamation of the Word of God. In that capacity ministers are the instruments of God and thus work together with Him as means to the conversion of other men. No one will maintain, however, that they are able to convert men in their own strength. They cooperate as an instrument cooperates.

Objection #3: “But I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor 15:10).

Answer: Paul does not refer to his labors prior to and at his conversion, but to his labors after his conversion. This labor did not pertain to himself, rather to others. He states here that his work in the ministry had not been fruitless as far as the benefit of others was concerned, but that he had been extraordinarily abundant and fruitful. However, he did not exalt himself because of this, but instead acknowledged the grace of God as having been operative in him as the cause. Thus, this text, rather than supporting this objection, states the contrary.

Objection #4: If man must be viewed solely as passive in his conversion, and is but merely the object and thus the recipient of divine operation, man can only be considered to be a stock and a block.

Answer: Man cooperates no more than did the body of Adam in

receiving the soul, and as Lazarus did in his resurrection. Man, however, is neither a block nor a stock which is incapable of being the recipient of God's converting power, not being a suitable object for such operation. Instead, man is rational, has intellect, a will, and inclinations, and is thus a suitable object to be the recipient of God's operations toward conversion. Thus, God enlightens the intellect, inclines the will, and makes man willing without violation of the will. In this manner God makes man alive. It is true, however, that man can cooperate no more than that a stock or a block would be able to move from one place to another.

Objection #5: Then man may as well let everything run its course and merely let God work when it pleases Him.

Answer: Even though a blind and crippled person could not help himself, did this mean that he therefore did not have to avail himself of the waters at Bethesda or of a physician? Man's impotence ought to motivate him to use the means unto his conversion and attend church with the hope that it would please the Lord to deal with him. It is also his duty to repent and to believe in Christ. If he fails to do so, he sins and acts contrary to his duty and to his own judgment. It thus remains certain that man does not cooperate.

Having observed what man neither can nor will do toward his regeneration, we shall proceed to consider God's work in the internal call and regeneration, demonstrating that God works powerfully and irresistibly.

The Internal Call: The Immediate and Effectual Operation of God

Question: Is the internal call, even though it occurs by means of the Word, an immediate and effectual operation of God which is exercised upon and changes the intellect, the will, and the inclinations, thereby in a spiritual sense making man alive from the dead?

Arminians answer negatively, whereas we answer affirmatively.

Even though man cannot comprehend God's supernatural operations wherewith by means of the Word the soul is immediately wrought upon, changed, illuminated, regenerated, and endowed with spiritual life, God's Word nevertheless teaches us that God does this. He who changed Saul's heart in one moment (1 Sam 10:9) and forms the heart of all men (Ps 33:15), also transforms the heart of man. Man does not accomplish this himself, but God is the origin and the only cause of this. God endows man with a supernatural propensity by which man, after the endowment of this propensity and regeneration—due to divine cooperation—performs spiritual deeds. God acts in harmony with the object, but the operation itself is supernatural. God indeed uses the Word as

a means, but joined to this means is an immediate, omnipotent operation which touches the soul, thereby powerfully changing the soul as far as intellect, will, and disposition are concerned.

This is first of all evident when considering the evil disposition and impotence of man prior to his conversion, as we have comprehensively shown. In order for one who is totally blind, for whom the crucified Christ is an offense and foolishness, who is only evil, is unwilling and hates that which is spiritual, and one who cannot do anything and is dead, to be converted and changed, an almighty power must be exercised which will interact immediately with him and change him. However, men are indeed converted, and this necessarily requires the exercise of almighty power.

Secondly, Scripture states plainly that the Word alone can have no effect upon the heart of such a person, but that the Word of God must be accompanied by a powerful operation of God upon the soul. He must give eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand (Deut 29:4), and the enlightening of the eyes of the understanding (Eph 1:18). With the revelation of Scripture, God must make the heart to burn within (Luke 24:32). His instruction must be accompanied by the gift of repentance (2 Tim 2:25), and under the hearing of God's Word He must open the heart (Acts 16:14). This is also confirmed in 1 Cor 3:6-7: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." If man cannot accomplish this, and if the Word of God alone cannot exercise such power upon the heart of man, the Word of God must be accompanied by the immediate, almighty power of God to change the heart, which is indeed the case as these texts have shown.

Thirdly, the manner in which God's work is denominated gives expression to such an immediate and efficacious work of God. From God's side conversion is referred to as a creation (Eph 2:10), as begetting (James 1:18), and as a making alive and a resurrecting from the dead (Eph 2:5). For a more comprehensive treatment of this, please refer to the foregoing.

From the following and similar texts it is evident that God indeed promises to work in such an immediate and efficacious manner, and also that He indeed operates in this manner.

(1) God promises to do this: "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer 31:33); "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer 32:40); "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26). Neither man, nor the Word of God

would do it, but God Himself would conquer all opposition. God Himself would work so efficaciously upon the heart unto repentance.

(2) God does work efficaciously upon the heart unto repentance. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Paul writes to the believers (ch. 1:1), exhorting them (ch. 2:12) to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. He further exhorts them to be neither proud nor puffed up, to do all things without murmurings and disputings, and to walk upon the way of godliness with childlike reverence and carefulness. He stresses that their faith and activity did not proceed from them, but that they were active by the power of God, “for it is God which worketh in you,” etc. They have to avail themselves of and act upon this prevenient grace and operation, and be engaged by means of this power. God, who created the will, also recreates the will in His elect. He does not need to deal with man as one man deals with another, who can only by way of a variety of motives seek to persuade someone to be willing in regard to a certain matter. Rather, God works as God, illuminating the intellect with a new light and giving to man a will so that he wills voluntarily and with desire. God causes this willingness to be followed by working.

The apostle demonstrates this very same truth in 2 Thess 1:11, “... that our God would ... fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power.” They had the Word of God and it was preached to them in a most lively manner. The apostle demonstrates this to be insufficient to bring forth believers, that faith *is a gift of God* (Eph 2:8), and that the Word of God must be accompanied by an almighty power of God to thus cause man to believe. “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph 1:19). The apostle says likewise, “(God) make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13:21).

Consider all this together for a moment. Man is as blind, evil, impotent, and dead as has been stated above. God permits the gospel to be preached to many, but this has no effect upon most who hear it. However, others are converted because God joins His Holy Spirit to that Word, working in them what He does not work in others. He illuminates them with a marvelous light which He does not do unto others. He removes the heart of stone from them and gives them a heart of flesh, not doing so to others. He works in them to will and to do the work of faith with power, not doing so in others. It is thus an irrefutable fact that God interacts with the heart of man in an immediate sense and thus changes it.

Objection #1: The Word of God is the seed of regeneration (1 Pet 1:23), enlightens the eyes, converts souls (Ps 19:8-9), is a two-edged sword, is lively and powerful, “to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit” (Heb 4:12). The Word of God is therefore sufficient; nothing needs to be added to it, and it is not accompanied by an immediate, illuminating, and transforming power of God.

Answer (1) All these texts indicate nothing but that God works everything by means of His Word.

(2) If the Word of God had such inherent power, it would likewise have an effect upon all who hear it, that is, upon those who are in like circumstances; however, this is not the case.

(3) Scripture states clearly that the Word of God does not have such inherent power, but that the Word of God must be accompanied by the immediate, efficacious operation of God. “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor 3:6).

Objection #2: If the Word of God needs to be accompanied by the immediate and efficacious operation of God, man lacks a sufficient means unto salvation.

Answer: It is not the means which can be the moving cause to bring forth the effect. The Word of God is not a moving cause, but only a means in God’s hand. The immediate operation is not the means, but is rather the moving cause. God does not give this means, that is, the Word of God, to all men, and wherever God gives this means, He does not interact with all by way of this means, but only with those whom He pleases. If one maintains, however, that the Word of God must still be accompanied by divine operation, and that the Word of God is not sufficient unto man’s salvation, we indeed agree that man cannot convert himself by means of the Word of God.

Objection #3: If the Word of God must be accompanied by a work of God, man is to be excused if he does not repent, for he is not able to.

Answer (1) By way of such reasoning a heathen could also be excused for not perfectly fulfilling the law of nature, for he is not able to do so. The apostle states, however, that they are without excuse (Rom 1:20).

(2) It is not so that man is able to progress to a point; that is, until he encounters the obstacle of his *inability*; but he is already obstructed by his *unwillingness*. If, as some maintain, man has a neutral will enabling him to will or not to will, he has no reason to complain, for he is using his free will to avoid God and to live in sin.

Additional objection: It is maintained, however, that man cannot will to do so, and therefore he is to be excused.

Answer: He is neither hindered nor restrained by either God, His

Word, or by any creature. Instead, man is left to himself and he is so evil and hostile toward God, having such strong inclinations toward sin, that he is not able to will. He is thus to be blamed himself.

Objection #4: By maintaining that there is such an efficacious and immediate operation of God upon the soul, the freedom of man's will is destroyed and removed.

Answer: This we deny. God works in harmony with man's nature; however, He does not do so as one man would interact with another man. God causes man to will voluntarily, as was true when man was created. If God, who created the will in man, touches the will and the soul without removing the freedom of the will, why can this not be true in re-creation? In the first [creation], man and his will did not exist, but were created. In the second [recreation], man and his will are spiritually dead.

Additional Objection: At regeneration the soul already possesses its capabilities and they are activated only in the realm of the spiritual. As the will is activated in the natural realm by natural motives, it is likewise activated in the spiritual realm by spiritual motives. It therefore cannot be maintained that there is an immediate operation of God upon the will without impinging upon the freedom of man's will.

Answer (1) Such reasoning presupposes that natural and spiritual virtue do not differ in essence but in degree. In the above we have shown this not to be so; this argument is therefore futile.

(2) In the natural realm man has some principles, enabling him to will by way of natural motives; however, in the spiritual realm man is entirely dead, entirely evil, and not able to be activated to will and to work spiritually by way of motivation. There is thus a need for an almighty, supernatural power in order to cause the faculties to be engaged in a spiritual sense.

Objection #5: To hold to such an immediate interaction of God with the soul and its faculties is nothing but fanaticism.

Answer: This is not so, for fanaticism adheres to revelations outside of and contrary to God's Word. It yields to passions and sudden motions which override the mind and the will, being but vain delusions and fantasies. Regeneration, however, occurs by means of the Word of God and is active according to the Word of God. If, however, one understands fanaticism to be "being driven by the spirit,"¹⁵ that is, to be regenerated by the Spirit and thus to

¹⁵ The difficulty here is that the word "geestdrijverij," translated in the dictionary as "fanaticism" or "zealotry," can literally be interpreted as "being driven by the spirit." When à Brakel uses this word the second time he undoubtedly interprets it in such a literal sense.

live and walk by the Spirit according to the rule of God's Word, we have no objection, and the proposed absurdity is no absurdity.

We have thus demonstrated that man by nature is entirely impotent and unable. In the initial moment of his conversion he neither acts nor cooperates, but is only passive. God, by a supernatural and almighty power, interacts with and changes the intellect and will in an immediate sense, changing man from being blind to receiving his sight, and from evil to good. That which has been said confirms the validity of the question.

The Irresistible Nature of the Internal Call

Question: Does God work irresistibly in those who are converted, conquering all the opposition of their evil nature, and in very deed translate them from a state of spiritual death to spiritual life?

Answer: The Arminians deny this, but we confirm this. Man by nature hates God and is opposed to God, His Word, and the gospel. Such is the state of all men. If, however, the one person is converted and not the other, this is not to be attributed to man—as if it were true that the one accepts this grace by his free will and the other rejects it; rather this is to be attributed to the effectual operation of God, who works one thing in the one and not in the other. He not only effectually illuminates the intellect—doing so irresistibly—and irresistibly activates man's inclinations, but He also irresistibly works upon the unwilling will in such a manner that the will wills voluntarily. This freedom is not one of *neutrality* (it being immaterial whether or not to do something), but one of *necessary consequence*, a person being willing by his own choice and inclination. This is evident from the three propositions which we have proven in the preceding material.

First, if man is blind and ignorant as to how matters ought to be; if man, who is evil and hostile towards God, hates and opposes whatever he encounters of God in His Word and in the converted; if he is entirely impotent and unable; if he is entirely dead as far as spiritual life is concerned; if he is entirely as we have proven him to be—when such a person is converted, he with all his opposition will then not be able to resist the efficacious operation of God. He will not be able to prevent himself from being changed, nor prevent the translation of his heart and will into another state—as is true for a dead person who, after having been restored to life, cannot resist being alive. Thus, the converting, almighty power of God functions in an irresistible manner.

Secondly, if man is only passive in his conversion, and is the recipient of divine operations only as object, and therefore does

not cooperate at all (as has been proven)—if such a man is converted, he is changed by an almighty, all-conquering, all-penetrating, and irresistible operation of God. Any object which is the passive recipient of action can neither oppose nor cooperate.

Thirdly, if God, in conversion, does not only illuminate the intellect by an almighty power and incline the inclinations, but also in an immediate sense interacts and changes the will, making it from unwilling to be willing—then God’s operation in the conversion of man is irresistible. It is an almighty working power, a creative act, a begetting, a resurrection from the dead, a change of heart, the removal of the heart of stone and the giving of a heart of flesh, etc., as has been shown prior to this. God’s operation in the conversion of men is thus irresistible, almighty, all-conquering, and all-penetrating.

Fourthly, the calling is according to God’s purpose; that is, He gives specific individuals eternal life. In the way of repentance and faith He makes all those partakers of this life, and those only, whom He has elected unto that end (cf. chapter 6: Election). “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom 8:30). Behold, there is thus an unbreakable chain: God leads His elect by way of the calling to eternal felicity. *God saves them and calls them* “with an holy calling ... according to His own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:9). If therefore they are called according to this purpose in order that they might be saved, the calling power of God cannot be resisted, for God will accomplish His purpose. *He has purposed this in His decree* “and who shall disannul it” (Isa 14:27). It is thus both clear and certain that the calling is irresistible. Let us now consider for a moment what objections are made against this.

Objection #1: There are texts which state expressly that man resists this calling, such as, “I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people” (Isa 65:2); “Thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 12:2); “How often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not!” (Matt 23:37); “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51).

Answer: All these texts do not refer to the internal call, nor to the moment of spiritual transformation, nor to regeneration. This is, however, the point in question; namely, whether the operation of the Holy Spirit can be resisted. Instead, these texts refer to the external call and to Christ being offered unto justification, sanctification,

and glorification. We readily admit that the person who is not elected resists this call, for the carnal mind is enmity against God. The natural man hates both God and holiness, and can do nothing else but reject and resist this offer. It does not follow, however, that those who are regenerated would be able to resist the omnipotent operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby He makes a dead person alive, and from being unwilling, to be willing. This we deny, and these texts do not suggest this. Concerning the distinction between the external and internal call, we refer you to that which has been stated before.

Objection #2: “For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt 11:21). It thus appears that man can convert himself, and if this is possible, it is his free and arbitrary choice whether or not he will repent. It therefore follows that conversion does not come about due to the irresistible power of God.

Answer (1) This text does not refer to the true change and regeneration, but rather to an external conversion in sackcloth and ashes, which results from historical faith or as a response to miracles.

(2) This is a hyperbole whereby the Jews were convinced of their irresponsible wickedness and unbelief, this being even greater than that of the heathen. Observe this in Luke 19:40, “I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.”

Objection #3: “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves” (Luke 7:30). If it is possible to reject the counsel of God, this counsel can be resisted.

Answer: “The counsel of God” is not to be understood to refer to God’s purpose, but rather to the external offer of the gospel which gives counsel how we may flee from the wrath of God. We fully agree that this can be resisted and is indeed resisted by the unconverted, until an all-conquering and irresistible operation of God takes place. This irresistible, divine operation, however, is manifested toward none other than the elect. It is God’s will that they will be converted and there is no one who will be able to prevent this.

The objections which remain have already been dealt with previously. The practical application will be dealt with in the two succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Regeneration

Having considered the work of God in the conversion of man, we shall now proceed to the consideration of the person who is the recipient of this divine operation, and thus is regenerated.

Regeneration Defined

Regeneration is a word derived from human birth.¹⁶ We must not understand this to refer only to giving birth itself, but it is inclusive of all that pertains to it, such as conception, fetal growth, and the birth itself. We must not be of the opinion that man possesses life prior to regeneration, as if there were a preparation for regeneration, which we would understand to be conversion. No, man is dead prior to regeneration and receives life by way of regeneration. There is no third state between death and life, and thus also not between being converted and unconverted.

Although we can make a distinction between calling, regeneration, conversion, and sanctification, considering them to be sequential—that is, the one issuing forth from the other—Scripture does not always use this distinction. Instead, Scripture comprehends all these in either one word or the other.

It is not the *justice of God* which requires regeneration, but it is a necessity as far as the will of God is concerned. Without satisfaction of the justice of God, absolutely no man can be saved. Regeneration, however, neither contributes anything toward satisfaction for guilt nor toward obtaining the right to eternal life. It would

¹⁶ The Dutch word for “regeneration” is “wedergeboorte” which literally means “rebirth,” and is a derivative of the verb “to be born again”; hence à Brakel’s reference to human birth.

therefore not be in conflict with His justice if it so pleased the Lord, at the moment of death, to translate a person who is chosen and reconciled through Christ's death into the state of perfection and thus into eternal felicity. This is true for such children who die prior to birth or prior to the years of discretion. All the regenerate, whether they live a longer or shorter period and are converted at an earlier or later date, are made perfect in one moment at the hour of their death. However, it is the will and wisdom of God concerning those who have come to the years of discretion, not to bring them into heaven except He first regenerates them in this life by means of His Word.

The Necessity of Regeneration

The necessity of regeneration is evident from the following:

First, we read, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5); "And make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel" (Ezek 18:31). Therefore those who do not receive a new heart will die.

Secondly, search the entire Bible and you will not find one person who was saved without being born again, regardless of how civil and externally religious he may have been. Even Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel who was a man beyond reproach, and Paul, who was blameless according to the law, were in need of conversion in order to be saved.

Thirdly, (1) how could man have communion with God without regeneration? Man's nature is darkness, evil, hostile toward God, and pollution itself. God, on the contrary, is light and holiness. The ungodly cannot be in His presence (Ps 5:5-7). Therefore, in order for man to have fellowship with God, he of necessity must be converted.

(2) It is also the promise of the covenant that God will convert those who are included in this covenant. "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer 31:33); "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezek 36:26-27). Therefore, he who does not have a new heart is no partaker of the covenant. All who are included in this covenant will receive a new heart.

(3) Regeneration is also the objective of Christ's suffering and

death. “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). He who therefore is included in what Christ has merited will be born again. To whomever Christ has been given unto justification, He has also been given unto sanctification.

If regeneration is so essential that without it no salvation is to be expected, how greatly man ought to be concerned that he be born again! For by nature he is unregenerate, dead, and on the way to perdition. How concerned everyone should be to know what his state is in this respect! How man ought to ask himself: *Am I one of them?* Ask yourself the question: *Have I already been regenerated?* Take heed to your answer, for there is no third state.

(1) Many are so thoroughly evil that they never ask themselves that question. If this question arises in their heart against their will, they push it away without answering it, it being a matter which is repulsive or of no concern to them. It can also be true that they certainly know that such an investigation would not turn out well and that it would cause them to be disturbed; they could then no longer persevere in sin with such delight, and this does not suit them.

(2) Others go to the opposite extreme, imagining themselves to be already regenerated, either because they wish that the life which they lead would indicate regeneration, salvation following upon such a life, or because they do not wish to entertain such gloomy thoughts about themselves—that they are unconverted and in a condition upon which salvation will not follow. It could also be that one considers himself regenerated because at one time he either has been filled with terror concerning condemnation, or has been grieved over the commission of a vile and shameful sin. Having prayed for forgiveness at that time, he now refrains from the commission of many sins in which he previously indulged himself, diligently frequents church, and lives in such a fashion that he is beyond reproach. With such a persuasion man goes to bed, and sleeps peacefully while yet being in sin.

(3) Others, who are more attentive, do not wish to deceive themselves. They are concerned, but cannot come to a conclusion because they are neither well-acquainted with the nature of regeneration, nor do they have sufficient light to know themselves and what things have been granted to them. To all of these we shall explain the nature of regeneration, so that everyone may examine himself in the light of it, the unconverted would come under conviction and seek after regeneration, and the converted would recognize their regenerated state, rejoice, be stirred to manifest their regeneration, and grow in it.

Further Clarification of the Doctrine of Regeneration

We shall speak of the following six aspects of regeneration: 1) that regeneration brings forth a nature which is fundamentally different from anything which is produced by the natural knowledge of God; 2) the state from which man is translated by way of regeneration and the state into which he is translated; 3) the means unto regeneration; 4) the various ways in which regeneration occurs; 5) the diversity of age when regeneration occurs, and 6) the fruits of regeneration.

First, take careful note of the fact that spiritual life issuing forth from regeneration *is of an entirely different nature* from the virtuousness engendered by the light of nature or of the external illumination by the Word of God. The difference is not one of degree, nor as if regeneration would simply induce man to refrain from more sins and stimulate him to exercise more virtue. Such is the imagination of the natural man, who thereby is easily misled to think that he is regenerated. The difference, however, is one of nature and essence (cf. chapter 30).

Secondly, the state from which and into which regeneration translates is from death unto life.

(1) We shall first take notice of the state from which the regenerate are translated, namely, spiritual death. Corporal death consists of a separation of soul and body, and spiritual death consists of a separation between the soul and God. God has created man in such a fashion that he cannot find true delight and pleasure except in God. For this purpose, He made Himself known to man and caused man to live in communion with Him prior to the fall. After the fall, man has become fully separated from God; he does not know, seek, or love God; God is not his delight nor the object of his fear and obedience. Man, thus separated from God, wishes to remain separated from God, and the more he is left alone in this state of separation, the better he likes it. As long as he can find his delight in the things of this world he is satisfied. "Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa 30:11); "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job 21:14). Separated from God, they seek their only delight in the creature, each doing so according to opportunity, nature, and habit. That which is of the world is glorious and delightful in their eyes, and is worthy of being sought and pursued. Man retained the faculties of the soul, that is, intellect, will, and affections, and these must have objects in which they can find their fulfillment and delight. Whether he is dead or alive, is determined by the objects with which he occupies himself. If it is God and a right knowledge of

Him, there is spiritual life. If it is anything other than God, anything that stands in contrast to God, anything that is visible, or anything that is a creature, such a person is spiritually dead. Consequently, all men are spiritually dead. “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18); “... without God in the world” (Eph 2:12); “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (Eph 2:5).

Upon spiritual death follows eternal death. “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Over such the second death exercises its power (Rev 20:6). From this state the elect are delivered by regeneration.

(2) The state into which they are translated is spiritual life, namely, communion with God. When God regenerates a soul, He brings him into light, causing him to see that his misery consists in being separated from God, in not being conformed to Him, and in being subject to His wrath. He also causes him to see that all his salvation, delight, enjoyment, and bliss consists in seeing God, having Him as a reconciled God, living in fellowship with Him, and loving and fearing Him. The soul’s happiness is measured by the clarity with which this is perceived and the degree to which this is enjoyed. As a result of regeneration Christ lives in the soul (Gal 2:20), and the soul is one with God (John 17:21), walks with God (Gen 5:22) and in the light of His countenance (Ps 89:15), and finds fullness of joy in this (Ps 16:11). It is good for such souls to be near unto God and to have Him as their portion (Ps 73:26, 28). By reason of regeneration, God becomes the object of their love, fear, and obedience, and their good works “are wrought in God” (John 3:21). They thus live by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25).

Thirdly, we must consider *the means whereby man is regenerated*. This is the Word of God alone, be it read or heard—or whatever the way may be whereby one comes to the knowledge of the truths which are revealed only in the Word. “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth” (James 1:18); “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23).

God does indeed use external means which cause man to be disturbed and to come to himself—such as poverty, extraordinary judgments upon the nation, the home, or oneself; fear for and being in danger of death; dreams and unrealistic imaginations as if they saw visions; extraordinary deliverances and temporal prosperity; the observation of the godliness of others and their mutual love, as well as other incidents. These, however, are not means unto conversion, but only means to bring them to the Word, to subdue them, and to make them pliable. The Word of God, however,

is the only means. The conversion of those who do not attain to the knowledge of the way of salvation is not true conversion.

Regeneration and its Attending Circumstances

Fourthly, we must consider the *manner* in which regeneration occurs, which varies greatly.

(1) *Some* are converted in a very sudden manner, as in one moment. Such was the case with Zacchaeus, the thief on the cross, many on the day of Pentecost, and the jailer. With others this transpires less rapidly.

(2) *Some* are converted by way of great terror and consternation caused by being confronted with the law, death, and condemnation, such as was the case on the day of Pentecost, and with the jailor (Acts 16:27).

(3) *Some* are converted in a very evangelical manner. The salvation and the fullness of the Mediator Jesus Christ overwhelm the soul, and the sweetness of the benefits of the gospel so fill their souls that they have no time to think upon their sins with terror. They are, as it were, swallowed up by the gospel, and as a Zacchaeus they receive Jesus with joy (Luke 19:3, 10).

(4) *Some* the Lord converts in a very quiet manner by granting them a view of the truth. Quietly they perceive their sins and their state of misery outside of Christ, the salvation of the partakers of the covenant, as well as the veracity of the offer of Christ by means of the gospel to them. In thus observing the truth they are gradually and imperceptibly changed, become obedient to the truth, believe in consequence of knowing the truth, and their heart is purified (1 Pet 1:22). They do not experience much grievous sorrow or ecstatic joy, but find a delight in the truth and there is a sweet approbation of it. This is true in reference to their misery, salvation in Christ, as well as to their receiving of Christ and their trusting in Him. These are generally the most consistent and steadfast Christians.

(5) *Some* are converted in a very gradual fashion, with much vacillation between sorrow and joy, faith and unbelief, strife and victory, and falling and rising again. This is the common method which the Lord generally pursues in the conversion of most people. When I use the word "gradually," I am referring to conversion in a comprehensive and broad sense; that is, from the first conviction until one consciously receives Christ. For it is otherwise a certainty that conversion [that is, regeneration] transpires in one moment, for the soul in one moment passes from death unto life. There is no intermediate state between being dead and alive. Since

this manner of conversion is the most common, we shall deal with it more comprehensively, considering the beginning, continuation, and conclusion of such a conversion. One will thus be able to examine himself accordingly.

We wish to preface this, however, by stating that no one ought to be concerned about the manner of conversion because the manner of his conversion has not been what he himself would prescribe it to be, nor agrees with the manner in which others are converted. If your conversion is a reality, all is well. Therefore, do not be unsettled as you reflect upon the manner in which your conversion has occurred, even if it is such that you have never read or heard of anything like it. The ways of God are mysterious and even in the common way of conversion the one experiences something with which another is not acquainted. One must, however, frequently reflect upon all the providences and ways whereby God has led us. This will give reason for adoration, for glorifying God, and for confirmation of one's spiritual state.

The Common Manner in Which God Converts Sinners

We will now consider the common manner of conversion.

Imagine a group of people who are walking toward a certain destination. While doing so, someone calls out to them, "You are on the wrong way; this way does not lead to the destination of your choice. Do not proceed, for a bit farther you will meet with a group of murderers who will rob and kill you. Come, however, and I shall lead you along a certain and safe way to your desired destination." Some hear the voice of him who calls, but do not understand what he says. It is not worth their effort to stand still and to ascertain what he has to say, and so they proceed. Others do hear and understand the one who is calling, but ridicule him, thinking that they know the way as well as he does, being assured that they are walking upon the right way. They deem this way to be safe and fear no danger, and so they proceed. Others become concerned as to what they ought to do: to proceed or to return. They then either decide to proceed or they vacillate, first leaning this way and then that way, until they are overtaken by the night. Others immediately respond to the call, and readily return. It does not take long, however, and they begin to have second thoughts, for this way is too difficult; the first way is much more enjoyable. They thus forsake the way on which they have entered and proceed on the way they were travelling initially. Others contemplate the matter and believe him who is calling, knowing him to be sincere and knowledgeable. They fear the impending danger and perceive that

the way in which they are directed leads directly to the place where they desire to be, even though this way appears to be somewhat difficult. They thus completely forsake the way upon which they were initially. Steadfastly they follow their guide, and thus come to the desired destination where the others will not arrive. This is but an allegory, which now must be applied to the matter of conversion.

The conversion of man transpires in like fashion. God calls all who are under the ministration of the gospel, warning them of destruction, inviting them to salvation, and revealing to them *the* way, Jesus Christ. Many pay no attention to this whatsoever, and do not consider it to be applicable to them at all. Others listen for a moment, but then go on as before. Others are convinced and are subject to the common operations of the Holy Spirit. I call them common because the elect and the impenitent are partakers of them. These are common convictions about their state of misery, a conception and impression of salvation and condemnation, fear for the wrath of God, knowledge of the Lord Jesus and the mysteries of the faith; they have esteem for the state of God's children and a wish to be also one of them. There will also be a stirring of oneself to repent, to pray, to read God's Word, to exercise historical faith, to join the godly, to flee from the excessive pollutions of the world, etc.

These matters can be found in both the elect and the impenitent. It is quite likely, however, that the elect, for whom such inner stirrings are preparatory to regeneration, experience these matters to a greater degree. Even then they are dead, however, being no closer to life than when they did not have these stirrings. Such preparations are not initial elements of life, nor do they proceed from man himself, but are divine operations within man himself.

Many of those who are called proceed no further than the trembling of a Felix, the persuasion of an Agrippa, the conversion of a Saul, and the change of a Pharaoh. As a dog they return to their vomit, and as a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. They thus continue in their old way.

Others embrace the truth with joy and grow rapidly. However, they have neither root nor true fruit—even if all this were accompanied by an appearance of godliness. They will keep company with the godly and practice godliness as long as it is to their benefit. However, when persecution for the Word's sake arises, or, if by forsaking the way of godliness, they will gain more honor or advantage, they will leave this way and at times become its most bitter enemies.

The Soul-Exercises of the Elect

(1) In the elect, however, in whom the Holy Spirit works these common motions, it being His objective to convert them, the motions mentioned above remain more steadfast. If they seem to disappear entirely, something nevertheless remains which time and again reappears. Convictions will come with greater frequency, and be of a deeper and more serious nature. With some, the thought of being damned causes their “hair to stand up straight” for terror. Salvation, the forgiveness of sin, reconciliation and peace with God, God’s love toward them, and a desire to again know, fear, love, obey, and glorify God are so desirable that they cannot be at peace in their souls without them. If they forget about this for a season due to various circumstances or fleshly lusts, the matter itself nevertheless remains at the bottom of their hearts. Their urgency will redouble and resurface. They find themselves deprived of all salvation, and they must have it no matter what the cost may be.

(2) Those who are thus troubled and desirous—be it that they are not properly instructed in the truth, are without appropriate guidance, or follow their natural inclination more than instruction from the Word of God—will generally give themselves to prayer, weeping, and a restraining from sin. This is not to suggest that these things are evil and ought not to be done; rather, all of this is done without the proper objective, as they are desirous to move God thereby to grant salvation unto them. They are unaware that the initiative must come from God’s side rather than from man’s side. They also do not perceive that God, due to His holiness and justice, cannot be moved to bestow His gracious gifts, but only be moved to wrath by a sinner who is and remains hateful and abominable in himself. When such sinners, after their initiative to seek God and their praying and earnestly striving against sin, perceive that they continue to sin, stumble, and pervert their way, they will become perplexed and discouraged. They believe God’s gracious inclinations toward them, which they had hoped to gain with their good behavior, to have changed again. They thus deal with God as they would deal with a man. They attribute motions to Him as if He were a man, and secretly imagine that the initiative must be theirs, that all depends on their activity. This may continue for some time.

(3) Such individuals, upon receiving a deeper insight into these matters, discover that with all their prayers and good works they can neither move God to help them, nor can they be pleasing to Him. Indeed, they discover that everything is so thoroughly sinful

that it merits God's wrath. Upon this they become desperate and begin to think that they will never be able to be saved. At this point Satan initiates his secret attacks. Many unbelieving and wretched thoughts arise in their own hearts as well, such as: It is too late for you; you have squandered the time of grace; you have sinned too long; you have sinned too grievously. If only you would not have committed such and such a sin, there would perhaps be some hope for grace, but now it is without hope; you have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost and there is no forgiveness for this sin. You are probably not elected and then all is in vain. All your effort is in vain and there is no more hope. Is all this true? Are such not human suggestions? Are they not all imaginary? In addition to this there are at times evil thoughts and blasphemous insinuations. By all these things such souls are fearfully oppressed, and begin to be inclined to desist, to sink down in discouragements, and to discontinue their efforts.

(4) Furthermore, they now perceive clearly that they can neither serve God nor receive any benefit in His favor, unless they are reconciled with God. They perceive that they cannot be reconciled with God except through perfect satisfaction of His justice by bearing both temporal and eternal punishment due upon sin. They also perceive that perfect holiness is a constituent element of salvation. They become convinced within their hearts that they can neither do the one nor the other, and that it is thus hopeless from their side. This in turn brings forth new perplexity.

(5) Being thus engaged, they begin to see the necessity of a Surety and learn to take note somewhat more carefully of Jesus Christ (who previously was but a name for them) in His natures, offices, humiliation, and exaltation. They acknowledge Him to be the suitable Surety who by His suffering death is able to reconcile man (who is nothing but sin) with God, and be unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and eternal salvation. They consider the happiness of those who may have this Lord Jesus as their Savior to be exceedingly great. Oh, if only He were willing to be such a Savior for them! They fear the contrary, however. They even think that if Jesus were as willing to accept them as they are willing to have Him as their Savior, they would most certainly be saved.

(6) At times they begin to receive some hope, and occasionally begin to perceive some encouraging stirrings during sermons, the reading of God's Word, prayer, a conversation, the reading of an edifying book, or whatever the occurrence may be. With this hope they again become active. They do so, however, in their own

strength, and with the wrong objective: to move God. They make the following resolutions: They will carefully be on the watch for sin, they will persevere in prayer, etc., and then they hope that they will move Christ to have compassion upon them and to accept them. The Lord, however, uncovers to them their total inability, and more than ever reveals to them the spirituality of the law (which they did not perceive prior to this) and their own lack of spirituality. More than ever they become conscious of their own darkness in all spiritual matters. He lets them go their way until they see the abominableness of sin, their own loathsomeness, hatefulness, as well as how intolerable and entirely impotent they are, so that in view of this they become as insignificant as a worm and are in a like frame as was the prodigal son. They thus lose all courage as far as their endeavors are concerned.

(7) Having been brought to such depths, they can only wait for God's gracious intervention. Every good thought, every step they take toward Christ, every occasion of lifting up their eyes to heaven for grace, the least tear which drips down, and the least sigh are acknowledged to be a token of God's goodness, and it grieves them that as yet they perceive so little of this.

(8) Furthermore, there is a gradual increase in knowledge and faith concerning the fact that the Lord Jesus calls everyone who hears the gospel, "Whosoever will let him come." He perceives that *he in person* is called by the Lord Jesus, with the promise that He will not cast out those that come to Him. This causes hope to revive and become more pure in its focus. They turn to Him, look unto Him, long for Him, and yearn for Him. Since it is all free grace and since they are impotent, they wait with quiet composure upon Him. They do so—one time with hope and another time with strife and sorrow—until they receive more liberty, receive Him by faith, without any reservation surrender fully to Him, and thus make Him their full reliance. They thus approach unto God with the holiness and satisfaction of their Surety whom they have received by faith. On the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, they ask, "Is not Christ my Surety? Did not He pay for my sins? Am I not now reconciled with Thee? Wilt not Thou then presently receive me in grace?" And thus, turning to God's promises in His Word, which is as an abiding voice from heaven, they either embrace all the promises of the gospel in general, or a particular Scripture is powerfully applied to their heart. By faith they thus hear the promises as an answer from God, and apply them to their heart as being made to them, since they find within themselves the spiritual frames mentioned in these texts. They

thus find themselves justified, their consciences purged from dead works, and as having peace with God through Jesus Christ. They experience this with some clarity or in darkness, with a greater or lesser measure of strife, and with a greater or lesser measure of peace and comfort. They are assured that this is neither imaginary nor the result of self-deception, but that all this is in very truth, their spiritual frame being in agreement with the Word of God. All this is at times accompanied by the sealing power of the Holy Spirit witnessing with their spirit that they are the children of God. From this motive proceeds love to God and Jesus Christ, and this love in turn begets true holiness, the painstaking avoidance of sin, the denial of the world, their own lust and their own will, and a careful observance of various virtues in order that in all things they might be pleasing unto the Lord as their reconciled Father.

The Repetitive Nature of the Exercise of Faith

This application of the satisfaction and holiness of Christ does not occur only once, as if this were a finished matter to be put aside in order that one may then proceed and be diligent in sanctification; rather, this is the daily exercise of believers. In doing so, it is not as if they are without grace again, and as if they receive Christ by faith in the same manner as they did the first time, but it is to live continually in Christ, to receive an ever deeper insight into the way of redemption—a way which can never be fully comprehended. They may often perceive something which they did not see previously, which stirs them up to give thanks unto, to adore, and to magnify God. Since believers, due to their sins, lose the clear perception of their spiritual state and peace within their conscience, there is an ongoing need to make continual application of Christ unto justification. By the act of receiving Christ, one's spiritual state and inner peace are more and more confirmed. This is not to imply that they repeatedly fall out of the state of grace, although many who are feeble and are beginners in grace, due to the weakness of their faith and due to lengthy periods of spiritual desertion, strife, deadness, powerful resurgence of sin, and other such negative circumstances, do come so far that they reject all previous exercises of faith as if these have never been of the right kind, and as if they had never been in the state of grace and had never been regenerated. Such therefore, so to speak, start from the beginning. Those who are further advanced, however, exercise daily application so that they may continually have free access to God, continually delight themselves in

peace with God, be quickened in love flowing out of their union with Christ, and, motivated by love, be stirred up to sanctification.

The Relationship Between Faith and Regeneration

Prior to the first act of faith, man is spiritually dead, irrespective of how many preparatory exercises he may have had. When we speak of preparation, we do not understand this to refer to the initial elements of spiritual life. Far be it from us to suggest this. In all preparatory exercises man is and remains dead, however, and his deeds cannot please God, however virtuous they may seem. The soul receives the very first principle of life simultaneously with the first act of faith. In a chronological sense, faith and spiritual life begin simultaneously, but in the order of grace faith precedes as being the origin of life.¹⁷ There is no spiritual life apart from union with Christ, who is the life of the soul. Faith is the means whereby union with Christ comes about. This exposes the foolishness of those who first seek for self-denial and holiness. Such are in extreme danger of never being born again.

If someone were to ask me how he may know the initial moment of regeneration, I would answer: from the initial act of faith. If one were further to ask if he must and can know the moment when he exercised faith for the first time, I would answer that he neither has to know this time nor is able to know this with certainty. If he were to begin with the first serious conviction, in all probability he did not have faith as yet. If he were to begin with the moment when, for the first time, he exercised faith consciously and in a most heartfelt manner, he would reckon too late, for in all probability he already had faith. I thus maintain that one cannot or rarely can know the precise moment when faith begins and when regeneration occurs. It is also not necessary to know this, and it is sufficient if, upon good grounds from God's Word and from a proper knowledge of one's heart and deeds, one may conclude that he believes and is regenerated. This we shall discuss subsequently.

We must not be of the opinion that each act follows upon the

¹⁷ This statement should not be interpreted as if à Brakel were teaching here that the exercise of faith precedes regeneration. This is graphically confirmed by the fact that the chapter about regeneration (chapter 31, p. ###233) precedes the chapter about faith (chapter 32, p. ###261). Furthermore, the immediate context of this chapter, chapter 32 in its entirety, as well as the context of this entire work make it evident that à Brakel is here referring to the essence or habitus of faith, i.e., the propensity to believe, which God grants to the soul immediately upon and simultaneously with regeneration. For further clarification, see Rev. G. H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 362.

other within the soul in such sequence as we have described it here. We cannot express both acts simultaneously, and therefore we must place the one act after the other. However, all the motions mentioned above are frequently intertwined within the soul. At one time the one act comes to the foreground in the heart, and then again the other. Sometimes they function in one and the same exercise of faith, and thus no one ought to trouble himself about the order in which they occur, either by reflecting upon the manner in which he was exercised or as to the manner in which it began. Although someone is led in a different manner from what I have previously delineated, he ought not be distressed concerning this matter, for there is a wondrous diversity in the Lord's dealings. I have also not recorded all of them here and about some I have purposely been silent, since they are most extraordinary. They are nevertheless by means of, and in accordance with, the Word of God. I myself would hardly have given credence to them if I had not dealt with such souls myself. Those I have mentioned are sufficient; I have stated the latter only to prevent a soul from being disquieted who has been converted in an extraordinary manner. What matters is that it transpired by means of the Word of God. It may be that such a person had a reasonable and discerning knowledge concerning fundamental truths, and it may be that his knowledge is very confused, encompassed by much darkness, is of a general nature, and only the result of either hearing the truth preached or hearing someone speak about it. If he has but heard of Christ and of His suffering and death, I deem such knowledge to have come about by means of the Word, for Christ is revealed in the Word of God alone. Such a person therefore need not have had a specific text of Scripture in view.

The Time of Life when Regeneration Occurs

The fifth matter to be noted in reference to regeneration is *the time or age* at which it occurs. We generally distinguish between four stages of life: childhood, the teenage years, adulthood, and old age. God regenerates souls during each of these stages, and thus no stage is excluded. This is exemplified in the laborers being called to the vineyard, some of whom were called during the first, others at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and the eleventh hour (Matt 20:1-7).

Some are regenerated in *childhood*. The difference between the necessity of satisfaction and regeneration is this: The justice of God requires the first, whereas the latter proceeds from the will of God. A child, prior to the use of his intellect, being elect and

reconciled with God in Christ, can, by the almighty power of God, be converted and changed without the agency of the Word of God, and have its nature sanctified. John the Baptist leaped in His mother's womb when he heard Mary's salutation (Luke 1:41-42).

Experience teaches that children of three, four, five, and six years of age are regenerated. With little instruction such children can come to the knowledge of Christ, and be wrought upon by the Holy Spirit so that they believe and repent. They manifest that God is the focus of their life and that they fear to sin. If they have sinned, they become fearful, and with an eye upon Christ's suffering, prayerfully seek reconciliation. In a childlike manner they experience strife and at times may rejoice in God. Some retain a distinct memory of this, which may even last a lifetime. As they grow up, the experience of such children is not always the same. Some sweetly progress, and as they increase in years there is also an increase in light, faith, and sanctification, be it with a greater or lesser degree of strife, darkness, and falling into sin. With others there are great intervals which can be of such duration and of such a serious nature that, as far as the external appearance is concerned, it appears as if they never possessed grace. Such, however, is not true as far as the internal state of grace is concerned, for there continues to be the light of conviction, the troubled conscience, and a resurgence of sorrow due to backsliding. There will also be intermittent periods when the heart is lifted up, when they pray with feeling, are incited to holiness, and shed tears—all of which may cease again. As the years progress, however, such restorations follow each other with ever shorter intervals. Moreover, those who are called during their teenage years are subject to such intervals and restorations even more than those who are converted in adulthood, since corruption and the lusts of the flesh manifest themselves most strongly during youth. They do not have a special promise to prevent a serious falling into sin anymore than did *Lot, David, and Peter*.

Question: Does the Holy Spirit dwell in all the elect from the very outset, even though regeneration as such is not operative? Also, do all the elect carry within them the seed of regeneration from the very beginning of life, which will germinate at a specified moment?

Answer: I respond negatively to both questions, for 1) I find no basis for this in the Word of God, and 2) the elect, together with all the unconverted, are in the same state of spiritual death (Eph 2:12). Prior to regeneration they are without Christ, without promise, and without God (Eph 2:12). They are children of wrath even as others are (Eph 2:3), and hateful (Titus 3:3). Those who are in such

a state cannot be said to have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and to have the seed of regeneration within them. 3) Wherever the Holy Spirit resides, He cannot be inoperative. If He were in them, He would be operative in them. One observes, however, that many of the elect remain under the dominion of sin and the devil for a long period of time. 4) If this were true, it could not be said of them that they subsequently received the Word by the Spirit, as is evidently true in Scripture.

Objection: “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9). Since all the elect belong to Christ, however, they necessarily have the Spirit.

Answer (1) The elect children of God have been given by the Father to Christ (John 17:9), and Christ as their Surety has brought about their reconciliation. It is upon this basis that a person is the property of Christ and not by reason of the indwelling of the Spirit. It is by this indwelling of the Spirit that those who come to the years of discretion are exercised with, and manifest the reality of, being a partaker of Christ.

(2) The apostle makes reference to adults rather than children, which is evident in nearly every verse of the entire chapter, particularly in this verse itself, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.” “To have the Spirit” is contrasted with being “in the flesh.” To be “in the flesh” is to be unconverted; to be “in the Spirit” is to be converted. This is evident from verse 5, where we read, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” If one wishes to conclude from these words that all the elect have the Spirit dwelling in them from the very first moment of their existence, one must conclude that all the elect are converted from their very youth, something which is refuted by experience.

(3) The apostle here identifies a characteristic by which one may deduce whether or not he has been regenerated, and whether or not he is a partaker of Christ, that is, having the Spirit of Christ. “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:13). The distinguishing marks of grace are intended for adults and not for children—that is, children prior to birth and prior to the use of their intellect. It is thus very evident that it is not the apostle’s objective to state that all the elect have the Holy Spirit prior to regeneration.

(4) Since the possession of the Spirit or the lack of it, proves whether one is regenerated or not, it is clear that children [prior to conversion] as well as all the unconverted (even though they may be elect) do not have the Spirit. If the elect were to have the Spirit already

prior to their conversion, having the Spirit could not be an evidence of a person's conversion.

Question: How should one judge spiritual motions within children, such as an inclination to pray, the desire to read God's Word, inquiry after spiritual matters, a manifestation of virtuousness, and other specific motions? Furthermore, how must one judge when this prevails in the teenage years without, however, any right knowledge of the Lord Jesus and without the exercise of faith?

Answer: Such spiritual motions cannot always be considered as the initial manifestation of regeneration. One may not conclude on the basis of this that he has been converted since his youth, for experience teaches that such persons may become the most ungodly and die in their sins. Such spiritual motions can be a consequence of the light of nature, the external illumination by the Word of God, or the education and good example of virtuous parents. Those who have come to years of discretion may not date their conversion prior to the exercise of faith in Christ. All those spiritual motions prior to that are to be considered such as has been stated; or as the preparatory operations of the Spirit toward their conversion, for there is no conversion except by faith in Christ, agreeably to the Word of God. It is also a known fact, however, that children may already have faith, and exercise it prior to being conscious of it and being able to give expression to their knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It therefore does indeed occur that the virtuous behavior of some small children proceeds from faith and regeneration. Such virtuous behavior is therefore no certain evidence. Since the unconverted, due to the common operations of the Holy Spirit, can have the spiritual motions such as the elect have prior to regeneration, it is therefore evident that the Holy Spirit does indeed work in those who, nevertheless, do not have the Spirit.

Some are regenerated during their *teenage years*. They have had a good education, and since their youth have been externally involved with religion. They have lived civil lives and have practiced religion in an external sense. The Lord has given preparatory convictions to many such persons. There are others who in every way have been like the ungodly, yes, who have belonged to the most ungodly in an internal as well as external sense. This is confirmed by Scripture and experience (1 Cor 6:10-11). Such persons can readily speak of their change—out of what misery they have been drawn, and into what wondrous light and life they have been translated. We cannot limit conversion to a certain age, but experience teaches that in congregations where there has been

an effectual ministry during their lifetime, most people are converted between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five.

The Lord converts some during *adulthood*, regardless of whether they are married or unmarried. This is particularly true in those localities where there has been no ministry, or an effectual ministry has been absent, but is now available for the first time, as we generally observe in the Acts of the Apostles. When one of two marriage partners is converted, and the other is not, the first may expect opposition from his spouse. If someone is converted and yet unmarried, I would not only advise such a person not to be yoked with an unbeliever, but also not with an unconverted professor of religion. Even though the latter is not forbidden, it will nevertheless bring such persons into many temptations. They will meet with much opposition, for fire and water, and life and death can never be compatible. To a considerable extent they will generally rob themselves of the sweetness of marital cohabitation. Two godly persons will mutually support each other, especially if they have similar natures. If such is not the case, however, there can occasionally be conflict. Nevertheless, the root of the matter remains, as well as their mutual judgment of each other's state.

Some are converted at *the end of their life*. Experience teaches that elderly persons who have lived their entire lives under the ministry of God's Word and have resisted much conviction are rarely converted. It does happen, however. Hope is not cut off for anyone as long as they live, and one may therefore not condemn or judge anyone to be lost. It also happens occasionally, although not often, that young or elderly persons are converted at the end of their lives—either on their sickbed or deathbed, or when in the hands of justice. We read of the conversion of a thief on the cross, but only of one. No one therefore ought to postpone his conversion. Everyone ought presently to remember his Creator “in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Eccles 12:1).

The Fruits of Regeneration

The sixth thing that must be considered in reference to regeneration is the *fruits* of the new birth. Regeneration affects all the faculties of the soul; that is, intellect, will, and affections, as well as all the members of the body which are appointed to be instruments of righteousness. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17). Everything is changed. The change is such that it is as if a dead person became alive and arose from the

dead, as if a blind person received vision, as if a deaf person received hearing, and as if a crippled person walked. Nothing is changed perfectly, however, for the old nature remains, together with its motions and operations. This results in a battle between the flesh and the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:17; Rom 7:23).

Question: How is it to be understood that within one person there can simultaneously be an old and a new nature, light and darkness, life and death? Does each occupy or consist of a different portion of this man? Does each protect this part as its own and strive to evict the other from its part?

Answer: They do not each function independently, but are completely intertwined, as is true of light and darkness during dusk, or of cold and heat in lukewarm water. Sometimes the one has the upper hand and then again the other. Such is likewise the case here. Two things which are opposite to each other cannot exist equally to the highest degree within one subject. This is possible, however, when each party is in a mediate position. This will not be a peaceful coexistence, however, for the one will seek to drive out the other. One must thus not deduce his regeneration from the degree of perfection of this new life, nor from the measure in which it manifests itself, but rather from its genuineness. If genuine spiritual life, light, and faith are present, then one is regenerate. Let the old man be as strong as it may be, where there is life it will remain; and wherever there is inner life, it will manifest itself in these and similar fruits.

Since spiritual life originates in heaven, it will always gravitate toward heaven. God is not only the cause of spiritual life, but also the object of its motions. God Himself is all the delight, pleasure, and joy of the regenerate man. He cannot be without God. He wishes for and must enjoy the light of God's countenance, peace with God, and love and communion with God. Due to being united to God, he wishes to be united with His will, and thus to hate and shun what He hates, and to find delight in and in doing whatever God delights in and is pleasing to Him. He perceives at once when he is at a distance from the Lord. This will grieve and trouble him, causing him to lose his liberty, and he will not be able to rest until he is again near to God who is the resting place of his soul. There he finds his life and there he can breathe, as his body breathes the air. "But it is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps 73:28). As delightful as life is to him, so grievous is deadness.

Secondly, a man who has become spiritually alive lifts up, as a newborn child, the eyes of his understanding and beholds this wondrous light with delight. His eyes will repeatedly turn to that

direction; he will take note of that light and by that light will perceive things which he did not see previously. He experiences what the man born blind experienced, who, after receiving light, could not distinguish what he saw, but saw people walking as if they were trees. Nevertheless, this light is precious to him in a most wondrous way. The world and all that is to be found in it—the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, public office, social status, money, clothing, real estate, honor, and the love of man—he sees from an entirely different perspective. All of this has lost its glory, luster, respectability, and desirability. He views all these things as unspeakable vanity, deeming all who seek their delight in this as absolute fools, and deeming himself also to have been a fool bereft of his senses. When he interacts with the Word of God, he discerns its spiritual dimension as well as the desirability of the spiritual matters to be found in it. In a word, he sees everything from an entirely different perspective than formerly. That which he formerly esteemed he now despises, and that which he formerly despised he now deems to be incomparably valuable, desirable, and glorious.

Thirdly, as a result of spiritual life he wills differently from what was previously the case. Whatever he previously delighted in, he now hates, and whatever he hated before, he now delights in. Now all his love and desire are focused upon God, Christ, the godly, purity of heart, self-denial, humility, meekness, uprightness, the manifestation of God's image, and a life unto God's glory. He is enamored with this and faints from desire. It grieves him and is his sorrow when he misses this, as well as when he backslides and becomes entangled in the things of this world. This David manifested when he wrote, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength" (Ps 18:1); "And I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved" (Ps 119:97); "O how love I thy law!" (Ps 119:97).

Fourthly, spiritual life brings forth different thoughts and deliberations. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:5). Formerly, such a person thought and mused upon sin, reflecting on previously committed sins in order to yet find delight in them. He would think upon future sins (or sins never to be committed in the future) in such a fashion as if he were presently committing them, or in order to provide his imagination with sufficient matter to reflect upon. He would devise and formulate means to actually commit such a sin—be it to commit it in very deed or to merely muse about the manner in which this sin could possibly be committed. For sin, rather than God and His will, was the object of his contemplations. Upon having become the recipient

of spiritual life, however, he will devise means to be delivered from such sinful and vain thoughts, since they very much injure, grieve, and offend the soul. Whatever is deemed to be sinful yields sufficient reason for the soul to abhor it. We do not like to reflect upon that which we abhor. Instead, the soul wishes to think upon God and to reflect upon the way of redemption for poor mankind. Now he will think upon how one may seek God and be able to find Him. Such a person finds delight in spiritual reflection. “My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord” (Ps 104:34); “When I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches” (Ps 63:6).

Fifthly, as a result of spiritual life, there will also be a different objective in all his activities. Whatever man did formerly was all for his own benefit, and all ended in himself so that he would have honor, advantage, delight, and love. This propensity functioned in such a proficient manner that he did not even have to stimulate himself to reflect on the objective of his actions, for it of necessity would end in himself, and his ego would motivate him toward this. After conversion, ulterior motives—seeking of self and his ego—become most troublesome, rob him of all freedom to do something, and of all comfort if he has performed a good work. He is now determined, however, to do the will of God in all things as a service to God, and to do all that he does of God, through God, for God, and unto God. It is his desire that in all things he would end in God and be enabled to manifest to others what it means to honor, find delight in, fear, obey, and trust God. If this motive has moved him to be active in such a manner, if it enables him to persevere, and if in all simplicity he ends therein, he will then be comforted and well-satisfied, even if the result of his doing so brings injury, contempt, and adversity. “Do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

Sixthly, spiritual life will generate confidence of a different sort. Formerly such a person was puffed up with his own wisdom, strength, and possessions. He would always search for something in the world to gratify his lusts and acquire peace and pleasure. The strength or weakness of his hope was contingent upon whether or not circumstances and/or friends were favorably disposed toward him. Gold was his confidence (Job 31:24), and he put his trust in man, made flesh his arm and strength, and with his heart departed from the Lord (Jer 17:7). Now, however, all things are but vanity and only beget trouble. He renounces all this and turns toward the Lord Jesus Christ. God being his reconciled God, he will rest in His omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness, doing so in a

general sense as well as in each particular situation, both according to body and soul. He takes refuge in Him as the One who will perfect that which concerneth him and bring it to pass. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is” (Jer 17:7).

Seventhly, spiritual life will result in deeds which are entirely different from before. Formerly, such a person lived according to the lusts of the flesh, being dictated to by the flesh and his thoughts. Formerly, he was void of wisdom, disobedient, in error, indulging in manifold pleasures and lusts, living in wickedness and envy, as well as being hateful and hating one another. However, now such a person will put off concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. He will make it his wholehearted business to forsake all ungodliness and worldly pleasures, and to live modestly, righteously, and godly in this present world. The law of God is his rule which he strictly observes in both great and small things. Although he falls into sin more easily in one thing than in the other, he does not permit himself any liberties in either thing. He is committed to the practice of all virtue, humility, meekness, peacefulness, helpfulness, love, tolerance, moderation, truthfulness in speaking, wisdom, dignity, etc. In this way his godliness becomes manifest to both converted and unconverted alike. The world will hate him and the godly will delight in him. In a word, he has become an entirely different person within and without, in the home and on the street, in company and in solitude, and in silence as well as in speaking. In his dress he will be modest, without being conformed to the world, and thus, without offending anyone, he will endeavor to shine as a light in the world. He will strive to be an example to everyone, conducting himself to the honor of God, so that the unconverted may be exposed and the converted be built up.

Eighthly, spiritual life will result in seeking out different company. Formerly such a person was loved by the world and he loved the world. He formerly loved sinners—those who were wanton and vain, backbiters, mockers, adulterers, drunkards, and gamblers; he found delight to be in the company of such persons. Now, however, he abhors such people and joins himself to the godly. He is a friend of those who fear the Lord. Such are now most glorious in his eyes; he loves them, keeps company with them, and wishes to fall and rise with them. He chooses rather to suffer affliction with God’s people than to live in prosperity with the world and enjoy prestige.

Consider all this together and in doing so examine your heart and your deeds in the presence of an omniscient God, and consider

whether you can come to the conclusion whether or not you are converted.

A Serious Exhortation to the Unconverted

An unconverted person ought to reason as follows:

(1) All men, myself included, are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, separated from God, and subject to the wrath of God. The God of truth thus speaks in His Word, and this is therefore the truth.

(2) Without regeneration no one—and thus also not I—will be saved. This is equally true for all, for God says it in His Word.

(3) I am separated from and live in separation from God. I am not united to Him in Christ Jesus—a union which neither appeals nor is desirable to me. I do not grieve over that which I miss, nor do I seek it. I am satisfied to be without it, as long as I can have my way in the pursuit of worldly things. It is my delight to yield to my lusts and to indulge in the commission of sin. I neither know God nor know of spiritual life with God. It does not appeal to me; I do not love it; it is not my objective; I do not think about it; and I do not occupy my thoughts and considerations therewith. I also do not rest and trust in God, and even if I confess that I do, my heart witnesses that such is not the case. The law is not the rule of my life, but rather self-interest. All that I do is not motivated by love for, fear of, and obedience to God, but I live for the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. All my deeds do not resemble those of the godly, but I am like other people instead, be it in a more or less sinful way. With my entire being (that is, with intellect, will, affections), in joy and sorrow, with eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet, I am not engaged in spiritual things but rather in the things of this world. All my religion is nothing more than fleshly activity and external in nature, and I think about the service of God only in general terms. I do not delight in, but despise, the godly. I neither wish nor desire to be in their company, but it is my delight to be in the company of those who do not speak about God and are engaged in the practice of vanity, regardless of whether the sins indulged in are blatant or civil in nature.

This I observe, and this my heart must acknowledge. I must thus conclude that I am unconverted. I must further conclude that if I remain unconverted I neither can nor will be saved. I have frequently recognized this, but it does not move me. I have also at times made a beginning in this respect, but the way was too narrow for me. I neither wanted, nor was able, to live in such a fashion, even if I must go lost. I therefore desisted from doing so with a sigh, returned to my former life, and soothed myself with thinking upon the mercy of God. I thought that if none will be saved but those who live in such a

fashion, not many will be saved. This I do not believe, however, and therefore the way cannot be that narrow, and I am thus hopeful that I shall nevertheless be saved. If not, have no fear, for there is just as much hope for me as someone else. In view of all of this, you can readily conclude the following about me: *I am unconverted*.

Consider once, you who are now convinced of being unconverted, how wretched you are, and how wretched you will eternally remain if you are not converted prior to your death. May it be a means to your conversion.

First, there is a primary promise in the covenant of grace which includes all other promises: *I shall be your God*. This promise does not pertain to you; God is not your God, and you are thus *without God* (Eph 2:12). There is no rest and safety for you in God; instead He is your enemy. God with His entire being, together with all creatures, is against you and will afflict you with all those terrors which cause a man to be wretched and in pain according to body and soul. God Himself will be a terror unto you and His countenance is against you. Oh, how dreadful it will be for you to fall into the hands of the living God! Where will you hide yourself? Heaven above, hell beneath, your conscience within, and all creatures surrounding you will conspire to bring you into such a condition that your hair will stand up straight if you but consider it. More I cannot say, for it is inexpressible.

Secondly, the Lord Jesus is not your Savior, for he who is in Christ Jesus is a new creature (2 Cor 5:17). You are not a new creature, and thus you are without Christ (Eph 2:12). Freely call Him your Savior as long as you wish, but you will experience that you have no part with Him, and His merits are of no benefit to you. His appearance in the day of judgment will be nothing less than the greatest possible terror to you. If you are of the opinion that you will come into heaven upon death, you will find the door closed, and He will say to you, "Depart ... I know you not" (Matt 25:12).

Thirdly, you know that no one can be saved without faith. You who are unconverted are without faith, and that which you call faith and imagine to possess, is not faith. It will be of no more avail to you than the faith of the devils who also believe that there is a God and that Christ is the Savior; however, they tremble. Yes, your faith will make your condemnation all the heavier since you have not received Him by true faith. "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

Fourthly, you are cursed and accursed of God, and all that is yours and all that you have done is accursed. "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of

thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do” (Deut 28:16-20). If this does not sufficiently terrify you, then also consider Ps 109:17-19: “As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually.” Who does not tremble upon the pronouncement of these curses? Unconverted sinner, these curses rest upon you as long as you remain unconverted.

Fifthly, if this were all, and the curse were to terminate at the end of this life, you could continue in this way, submit to suffering, and hope that your case would not be the worst. For the unconverted observe that the way of the wicked comes to a prosperous end. What is a curse which is not executed? The greatest evil is, however, reserved for hereafter. An eternity is coming when an end will come to all the long-suffering of God. There will be no diversion or comfort for anyone, but rather the curse will eternally have its effect without interruption and without cessation. How dreadful it will be when the devil will carry the soul away to hell, separating it from the body! How dreadful it will be when soul and body will be united on the last day; when the unconverted will find themselves at the left hand of the Judge of heaven and earth; and when both the glory of the Lord Jesus as well as the terrors displayed upon the face of heaven and earth will combine to terrify the sinner! One will then experience what a *curse* is. Then he will see the godly in glory, who will have utter contempt for him, and after having been fully convinced of all his ungodliness, will hear the dreadful sentence, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). This will be followed by the dreadful execution of the sentence. Heaven will be closed for them to all eternity; hell will be their eternal abode where they will dwell without light and rest. Sensitivity and pain will not be reduced, and within there will be the unbearable worm of conscience. They will be filled with God’s wrath, be without grace and hope, and experience an inexpressible despair. “This is the place of him that knoweth not God” (Job 18:21).

Impress these matters upon your heart and do not ignore them. Do not reject these thoughts simply because they are too unpalatable. For if such thoughts are already terrifying, what will the

matter itself be? Meditate upon all these matters and apply them to yourself, saying, “This shall eternally be my portion if I continue on in this way and am not converted,” so that the terror of the Lord would persuade you to believe, for God does use conviction and impressions of terror as a means unto conversion.

Question: “What must I do to be saved?”

Answer: Do you mean this? Do you say this in truth and in earnest? Would you be willing to miss all that is delightful in the world? Would you be willing to part with your sin which you deem to be so delightful, well-intentioned, advantageous, and enjoyable? Is the idea of being reconciled with God, to love, fear, and serve God in all godliness more desirable to you than anything else? Is it your desire to be acquainted with Him? Do you desire it more than anything else? If you say, “Yes, I mean this in earnest,” then I reply, “Repent and believe the gospel.” If you reply in turn that you know very well that you will then be saved indeed, take special note that it is an inexpressible mercy and privilege that you can be saved upon faith and repentance. God is not obligated to save you in this way, but it is His sovereign goodness alone that He promises and bestows salvation in this manner. Therefore, repent!

Question: Am I able to? Is this within the realm of my ability?

Answer (1) Be assured that it is your duty, which is a fact of which you approve.

(2) Try it once, and upon beginning you will first of all experience that you are blind, and that you are neither acquainted with God, Christ, the way to Christ, the regenerate state of the soul, nor with the essential nature of true holiness. How will you respond to that with which you are not acquainted? Furthermore, you will experience that, when it comes to the point of engaging yourself, you will find yourself unwilling. Your unwillingness is the initial step toward neglect. Furthermore, the wickedness of your nature is so great, sin is so strong, and the matter so difficult, that you will indeed not be able. Therefore sink down in your misery and inability, and as far as you yourself are concerned, be without hope and in despair.

Question: What counsel do you have? Is there then no hope for me at all?

Answer: There is no hope to be found *in you*, but there is hope *with God*. There is hope for you since you live under the ministry of the gospel, which is the means—yes, the only means—whereby God converts souls. Rejoice, therefore, that you may live under the means and that God grants you conviction and a desire for repentance and salvation. Be diligent in the use of the means,

in hearing sermons, and in attending catechism classes. Read God's Word frequently and attentively, or let someone read it to you. Join yourself to the godly and request that you be admitted to their gatherings. Yield to the inclinations to pray and to be godly.

Question: Shall I then be converted and saved if I do all this?

Answer: Your efforts will not move God to grant you repentance, but God will also not exclude you if you do not exclude yourself. You have reason to hope since God has thus far brought you under conviction. Wait therefore for the least movement of the Spirit, respond to it, and be careful that you do not resist it. Be thus consistent in your use of the means and do not relent if time and again you are drawn away by your lusts.

A Word to the Regenerate

I now wish to address myself to the truly regenerate. You, who earlier in this chapter have perceived with discernment what the nature of regeneration is, as well as what the various ways are in which God brings about regeneration, compare yourself therefore in the presence of an omniscient God, and consider whether you are in truth a recipient of this life (I am not referring here to the measure of life received). Judge in truth, take note, and do not deny it. If you may possess this life, do not belittle it with a show of humility, as if you had accomplished it and are downplaying your own work. For it is not your work, but rather the work of an omnipotent God. It is a much greater sin to deny grace and to belittle grace in us than it is to boast of grace which one does not possess. Draw the following conclusion therefore by saying, "I am convinced that regeneration is such. I am a partaker of it. I observe it in myself, and my conscience bears witness to this before God. It thus follows that I am regenerate."

Let there not only be such a conclusion, but with the *Ethiopian*, the *jailor*, and *Lydia*, rejoice in this so that you may derive a most certain comfort from it.

(1) Therefore ascend to the fountain from which regeneration has proceeded: the eternal love and election of God. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer 31:3); "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called" (Rom 8:30). You have thus eternally been loved and chosen by God, for you are regenerate.

(2) You are a child of God at this present moment, for God has of His own will begotten you with the Word of truth (James 1:18). You are born of God and therefore you are a child of God (John 1:12-13). God is thus your Father and will deal with you as a loving Father, and as a child you may request all things from Him and trust in Him.

(3) Your spiritual state is certain and unchangeable. “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). Therefore, “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). Therefore rejoice and be not fearful of this good work being rescinded.

(4) By way of your regeneration focus upon eternal felicity as being your certain inheritance, and endeavor to live and rejoice in this expectation and hope. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).

If you are regenerate, part fully with all who are dead, that is, with the unconverted, for they stink as badly as rotting corpses. Instead, join yourself to the living, and be “a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts” (Ps 119:63). Let all your desire be toward “the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent” (Ps 16:3). Neither isolate nor separate yourself from the church, for otherwise your light will grow dim and your walk will be contrary to the nature of regeneration. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

Be not merely satisfied with being regenerate and a partaker of life, but rather strive for growth and increase, for that is characteristic for whatever possesses life. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet 2:2).

Live as a living soul; manifest your life by way of your deeds by the exercise of all virtues, in order that the difference between the dead and the living may thus be apparent. “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13). AMEN.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Concerning Faith

We place faith following regeneration. This is not to suggest that man is first made alive and regenerated, and then is gifted with faith; on the contrary, faith precedes regeneration. This is not true in a chronological sense, but as far as natural order is concerned, for the Word is the seed of regeneration (1 Pet 1:23), and the Word cannot be efficacious except by faith (Heb 4:2). Upon the first act of receiving Jesus and being united with Him, man becomes spiritually alive. It is by faith, however, that one receives Him as such and is united to Him, and by the exercise of faith the life of such a person increases. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith” (Col 2:6-7).

Since atheism is presently manifesting itself on the one side, and temporal faith on the other side, it is all the more necessary that we present and consider the nature of faith from all perspectives. We shall first discuss the *word* “faith,” and then consider the matter itself. In our consideration of the *word* itself we shall deal with 1) its meaning, 2) the diversity of matters represented by the very same word, and 3) other words which are identical in meaning.

The Meaning of the Word “Faith”

We shall first consider the meaning of the word. Each language, being unique, cannot be the rule for another language. We are here discussing the word “faith” as it is recorded in the original Hebrew and Greek. We must therefore observe what the essential meaning of this word is in Hebrew and Greek, rather than what it commonly means in our language, as this paves the way for the misinterpretation of Scripture as far as faith is concerned.

The Hebrews used the word *hemín* (הֵמִין). The word *hemín* has the inherent meaning (approved by linguists): *to conduct oneself*. In our language this is occasionally translated as *to believe*. “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16). In our language the act of believing generally presupposes a promise, or a statement made by another. This, however, is not always true for the Hebrew word. It means *to believe*, even when neither a declaration nor a promise is involved. “He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword” (Job 15:22). This is also true in Job 19:25 and Lam 4:12. Sometimes the same word *hemín* is translated as “to trust,” even when there is no reference whatsoever to either a declaration or a promise. “Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity” (Job 15:31); “Behold, he put no trust in his servants” (Job 4:18). This is likewise true in Job 15:15. *Emouna* (עֲמוּנָה) is derived from this word, which is translated in our language as “faith” (cf. Hos 2:19; Hab 2:4). It is also referred to as “faithfulness” (Isa 25:1; Ps 89:2; Ps 119:75), “truth” (Ps 33:4), and “faithful” (Prov 28:20). These various expressions¹⁸ in our language are expressed by this one word in Hebrew.

The Greek words *pistis* (πίστις) and *pisteuo* (πίστευω) are occasionally translated as faith and to believe respectively, when they have reference to promises. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). Sometimes it is translated as to commit, when there is neither reference to the Word nor to a promise. “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because He knew all men” (John 2:24); “Unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2); “A dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me” (1 Cor. 9:17); “Who will commit to your trust the true riches?” (Luke 16:11).¹⁹

It is beyond refutation that we must define the essence and nature of the word *believe* as it is found in the Hebrew and Greek rather than in our language. The verb *believe* then does not always pertain to promises, and it does not always refer to the act of receiving and the giving of assent to the Word and the promises, but it also means “to trust in,” “to commit to,” and “to rely upon.” Since the word “believe” does not really have this meaning in our

¹⁸ The variety of expressions in the “Statenbijbel” is much greater than in the KJV. The Dutch words “vastigheid,” “waarheid,” and “getrouwheid” are all translated by the word “faithfulness” in the KJV.

¹⁹ Also in this instance the diversity of vocabulary is greater in Dutch than in English. The following Dutch words found in the Statenvertaling are all translated as “to commit” in the KJV: *betrouwen*, *toebetrouwen*, *vertrouwen*.

language, we would rather use the French or the original Latin word *crediter* or *crediteur*, which means “to believe” in these languages, for these words do not merely have reference to holding someone’s words to be true, but they also express the act of entrusting something to someone.

The foregoing clearly confirms that one would make serious mistakes if one were to understand the word “believe” only as we customarily do in our language, and if one were to base a description of saving faith upon this meaning. This explains why there is such ignorance concerning the nature of faith in those who merely focus on their own language and pay no attention to the meaning of this word in the original language. Consequently, the word means *to trust in* (or to entrust to).

The second thing to be observed in considering this word is that this one word “faith” refers to a variety of matters which are essentially different.

(1) Sometimes it refers to faithfulness in fulfilling one’s promises. “Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect” (Rom 3:3).

(2) Sometimes it refers to the doctrine of faith. “Holding faith, and a good conscience” (1 Tim 1:19).

(3) Occasionally it also refers to the confession of truths which are believed. “... your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8).

(4) At times it also refers to the actual exercise of the soul whereby one believes the truths of Scripture. In reference to such faith Scripture speaks of four kinds: historical faith, miraculous faith, temporal faith, and saving faith. These differ in essence from each other, even though they are called by the same name. This must be clearly noted, lest one be misled by the sound of the word, for we shall here only discuss saving faith.

Historical, Temporal, Miraculous, and Saving Faith

First, *historical faith* is called such since it pertains to the knowledge of the history of the Word of God (that is, the record of the matters contained in it), and acknowledges and embraces this as truth. Those, however, who have such faith are not exercised with these matters; they have no more effect upon such persons than secular history. It does not stir them within, and sometimes it does not even solicit a confession of the truth. “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19); “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest” (Acts 26:27).

Secondly, *temporal faith* is a knowledge of, and assent to, evangelical truth as being veritable. It generates some natural motions within the affections of the soul, a confession of these truths with the church, and external behavior which is consistent with their confession—however, all this without being united to Christ unto justification, sanctification, and salvation. The following passages speak of such faith: “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended” (Matt 13:20-21); “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance” (Heb 6:4-6); “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet 2:20). A bit further on, we shall deal more comprehensively with the difference between temporal and saving faith.

Thirdly, *miraculous faith* is a heartfelt conviction generated by the immediate operation of God, that a given supernatural act will either occur due to a command given by us, or will be wrought upon us. However, the power for the execution of miracles is not to be found in man, but God executes them by His omnipotent power in response to this faith. This is to be observed in the following passages: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt 17:20); “... and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains ...” (1 Cor 13:2); “The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked” (Acts 14:9-10). This faith was especially prevalent in the days of Christ and the apostles, its purpose being the confirmation of the doctrine of the gospel. These three types of faith mentioned we shall not discuss in this chapter.

Fourthly, there is *saving faith*, which is also referred to as justifying faith. Both refer to the objective attained by this faith, which differs from the others in its very essence. This faith we shall subsequently discuss. We have thus eliminated the ambiguity of the word itself.

Additional Biblical Terminology Describing Faith

In considering this word, the third thing to be noted is the other

vocabulary with which saving faith is denominated in Scripture, and whereby the nature of this faith can be clearly discerned from a variety of perspectives. As the word *heemin* means “to believe,” “to commit to,” this is likewise true for the word $\eta\sigma\xi$ (*chasa*). It can mean *to put your trust in someone*. “Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him” (Ps 2:12). It can mean *to trust in someone*. “... my shield, and He in whom I trust” (Ps 144:1-2). “The Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall trust in it” (Isa 14:32). “... therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings” (Ps 36:7).²⁰ The meaning of the word “believe” is also expressed by $\xi+\beta\equiv$ (*batach*). This also means *to trust*. “His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord” (Ps 112:7); “And they that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee” (Ps 9:10-11); “Trust ye not in lying words” (Jer 7:4); “They shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images” (Isa 42:17).²¹

The meaning of the verb “believe” is also expressed by $\text{Κ7}\mu\sigma$ (*samach*) which means “to lean upon someone.” “By Thee have I been holden up from the womb” (Ps 71:6).²²

The Greek words *pistis* and *pisteuo* mean “to believe,” “to trust,” and “to commit,” and this is likewise true for the words $\pi\epsilon\iota/\theta\omega$ and $\pi\epsilon\iota/\theta\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ (*peitho* and *peithomai*), as well as $\pi\epsilon\pi\omicron\upsilon/\theta\eta\sigma\iota\omega$ (*pepoithesis*), which can mean “to persuade to faith.” “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor 5:11). It can mean “to believe.” “And some of them believed” (Acts 17:4). It can mean “to trust in.” “He trusted in God” (Matt 27:43). It can also mean “to put one’s trust in someone.” “... them that trust in riches” (Mark 10:24); “I will put my trust in Him” (Heb 2:13); “And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward” (2 Cor 3:4).

When one therefore considers all these expressions together, he cannot but be fully convinced that the act of believing does not merely consist in assenting to the truths of the gospel, but is the exercising of a heartfelt trust in God through Christ, entrusting oneself to Him.

²⁰ In Dutch à Brakel lists the following expressions found in each of the texts just quoted as found in the Statenvertaling: “betrouwen op iemand,” “toevlucht hebben tot iemand,” “toevlucht nemen.” All these expressions are translated in the KJV by the phrase “to trust in.”

²¹ Again, the nuances of meaning conveyed by the Dutch are simply not expressed in the KJV. The following expressions are translated with the verb “to trust”: “betrouwen,” “vertrouwen,” “zich vertrouwen op,” “zich verlaten op.”

²² The literal translation of the Statenvertaling reads: “I have leaned upon Thee from the womb.”

We have thus discussed the meaning of the word comprehensively, so that someone who is ignorant as far as languages are concerned may perceive what “to believe” signifies in Hebrew and in Greek. We shall now proceed to consider the matter itself. In doing so we shall consider the following matters individually:

- (1) The *existence* of faith in the world and the *necessity* thereof;
- (2) The *genus* or type of activity which is connected with faith;
- (3) The *subject* in which faith is present;
- (4) The *object* concerning which faith is exercised;
- (5) The *form* or *unique essence* of faith;
- (6) The *moving and secondary causes* of faith;
- (7) The *objective* of faith;
- (8) The additional *characteristics* of faith;
- (9) The *effects* or fruits of faith;
- (10) The *similarities and differences* when compared with other types of faith;
- (11) The *opposite* of faith;
- (12) The *description* of faith.

The Necessity of Faith

Christians and all who believe the Word of God need no proof that faith is necessary and that without it no one can be saved. This is confirmed by the following texts: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son (*that is, who does not believe in the Son*) shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36); “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

The Genus of Faith

The genus or very nature of faith is that it is a *propensity*. Propensities complement the functioning of the intellect and the will. Such propensities are either acquired by much exercise, or *implanted* in the soul of man by God. The latter is true for faith, hope, love, etc. All of man’s activity to obtain faith is not in the least degree sufficient to enable him to acquire faith. God initially gives it, God preserves and increases it, and God finishes it. He who desires to have it must request it from God and expect it from Him. He who may have it must gratefully acknowledge that he has received it from God and prayerfully expect the increase from Him.

The Subject of Faith

The *subject* or *seat* of faith is man, more particularly the soul, and most particularly the will. Man is the subject of faith; however, this is not true of all men,

but of the elect only. “For all men have not faith” (2 Thess 3:2); “... according to the faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1); “And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

Question: Do infants in baptism receive the essence of faith? Do baptized infants exercise faith?

Answer: We answer negatively. 1) This is nowhere stated in Scripture, and therefore it ought to be rejected and is not to be believed. 2) Infants do not use their intellect. Rationality is innate, but the act of reasoning does not begin until later. The act of reasoning is essential in the exercise of faith. 3) Children, prior to the age of reason, have no knowledge of anything. How then will they be able to believe, since knowledge of divine truths is a necessity for this? 4) Small children prior to the age of reason do not actually commit either good or evil (Rom 9:11),²³ and thus they also do not exercise faith, this being a virtue. 5) Faith is by hearing (Rom 10:17), and thus infants are not able to believe, for they cannot yet hear the Word of God.

Objection #1: “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me ...” (Matt 18:6).

Answer: The text refers to those who have the use of their intellect, for they are capable of being offended. Christ does not refer to the child whom he used as an example (vss. 2-3), but rather to those who are in spiritual infancy.

Objection #2: “Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:14).

Answer (1) It cannot be proven that these children were so small that they were not able to exercise their intellect as yet. This would have to be clearly proven in order to use this as a proof text. The opposite is probable, for children of two or three years old are able to believe.

(2) Theirs is the kingdom of heaven by reason of the satisfaction of Christ which God has imputed to them, and thus not due to the exercise of faith; however, not all children are entitled to salvation, but only those who are elect.

Objection #3: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength” (Ps 8:2).

Answer: This does not suggest that small children and infants are able to speak (if this were so, then the objection would be nullified), but they rather magnify God in an *objective* sense, that is, they give adults reason to magnify God in His works, as the heavens and the firmament do day and night (Ps 19:2-3).

²³ The actual reference in Rom 9:11 is to unborn children.

Objection #4: There are examples of small children who had faith, such as Jeremiah (Jer 1:5).

Answer (1) The text speaks of God's *foreknowledge* according to election and of being *sanctified* or set apart for the prophetic office according to the counsel of God.

(2) It is one thing to be sanctified by God's Spirit (which God is capable of doing), and it is a different matter actually to exercise faith. Man's nature can be sanctified without being actually exercised as far as holiness itself is concerned. This can also be in the absence of faith.

Additional Objection: We have the example of Timothy. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15).

Answer: The text does not refer to Timothy prior to the age of reason, but to the time when he was capable of being instructed in the Word of God by his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice. This therefore does not prove the exercise of faith prior to the age of reason.

Additional Objection: We have the example of John the Baptist (Luke 1:41).

Answer (1) We do not read that he believed, but rather that he leaped upon the salutation of Mary to his mother Elizabeth.

(2) We neither know what the omnipotence of God wrought in him, nor what caused him to leap. One may not use the extraordinary to draw a conclusion for the ordinary.

(3) John was neither circumcised nor baptized. Thus his leaping was not due to the efficacy of baptism—this being the matter we wish to prove.

Additional Question: Do all the elect from the moment of their conception have the seed of faith in them, even though they do not actually exercise faith?

Answer: We answer negatively, for first of all, Scripture does not speak anywhere of *the seed of faith* or of *faith in seminal form*. It is therefore rather bold to maintain this and to establish an entire doctrine on this. Scripture does speak of the seed of regeneration, which is the Word of God (1 Pet 1:23). This, however, is not to be found in children, but in the Lord's time is a means unto their conversion. If the seed of faith were to be the beginning of faith, they would actually possess it already.

Secondly, men (and thus also the elect), prior to regeneration, are spiritually dead, children of wrath, without Christ, without promise, without God, and thus also without faith (Eph 2:2-3,12).

The Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit did watch over them as Father, Savior, and Sanctifier, from the moment they came into existence. In and of themselves, however, they were in the same spiritual state as all others.

Thirdly, no one receives faith except by hearing (cf. Rom 10:17; Gal 3:2). Man is thereby transformed from an unbeliever into a believer. Man cannot be said to have received faith, to become a believer, and to receive faith by the preaching of the gospel if he already had the essence of faith prior to this, and thus already was a believer.

Objection #1: The elect children are in the covenant and therefore must also have had faith at the very beginning, for none can be in the covenant without faith.

Answer (1) All elect children are not in the covenant, for thousands are converted whose parents were heathens. Or do only children of partakers of the covenant have the seed of faith and not other elect children? What proof do we have for such a distinction among elect children?

(2) To be in the covenant as children does not presuppose that there is anything in these children, or else one would have to conclude that in actuality they have faith and are regenerated. Since this cannot be concluded, this objection is also not true.

Objection #2: Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:14).

Answer: See prior comments.

Objection #3: Such was true for Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Timothy.

Answer: See prior comments.

Objection #4: Natural righteousness would have been perpetuated if Adam had not sinned. Why then can this not be true for supernatural regeneration in the seed of partakers of the covenant?

Answer (1) We know that God would have been able to do this, but we also know that we may not draw a logical conclusion from possibility to reality.

(2) The question “Why not?” cannot be used to confirm something. God is not accountable for any of His deeds, and we are not capable of advancing reasons for God’s work and actions. We therefore may not maintain or deny something simply because we can or cannot give a reason, but we must rather turn to the Word of God to observe what has or has not been revealed there.

(3) Experience teaches that the seed of faith is not to be found in all elect children of God-fearing partakers of the covenant. Some are among the most ungodly until the end of their life, a fact which contradicts their possession of the seed of faith. For to have

the seed of faith is truly to have faith itself, be it in its beginning stage. Many children of the heathen are also among the elect who, however, would not have the seed of faith. It then would follow that God converts the children of the heathen in a different manner from the elect children of partakers of the covenant. The latter would then repent due to the germination of this seed which is in them, whereas faith would be given to the former without the presence of such seed.

Objection #5: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6).

Answer: See prior comments.

Objection #6: They have the Spirit of faith, for otherwise they would not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9).

Answer: See prior comments in chapter 31.

It thus remains certain that the elect do not possess the seed of faith from the moment of their conception. The text refers to adults.

Knowledge of the Truth: An Essential Element of the Exercise of Faith

Since the elect therefore are the subject of faith, we must thus investigate more carefully where in man faith is seated. Faith is not seated in the body, although it manifests its operation by way of the body in confessing the truth and in the practice of good works. Rather, the real seat of faith is the soul. “For with the heart man believeth” (Rom 10:10). The soul has its faculties whereby it is operative: intellect, will, and affections. The existence of these can be intelligently deduced and considered individually. They are thus distinct from each other. The intellect is neither the will nor the affections. The will is neither the intellect nor the affections. Likewise, the inclinations are neither of these two. They are distinct in their operations. The intellect has the elements of comprehension, judgment (which is speculative as well as applicatory), and conscience. The will lovingly embraces those matters which are desirable and is repulsed by any matter which it perceives to be hateful. The affections are the soul’s desires or yearnings for fulfillment. The soul can neither be its own fulfillment nor find delight and satisfaction within itself, but must find its fulfillment in something outside of itself. However, even though one can deduce the existence of each by means of our intellect and consider them individually (which we must do if we, in an intelligent manner, wish to be conscious of our deeds and their nature), they are nevertheless not fully distinguished when man is operative. If we make too much of a distinction in the operation of these faculties in man, we shall

engender as much perplexity and confusion as when we intermix them. Applying this to faith, this means that the believing soul is engaged in understanding, willing, and desiring. When a man believes, all his faculties function simultaneously.

Question: In order to believe, must one know the truths he believes, or is a mere blind assent satisfactory, so that faith could best be described as a lack of knowledge?

Answer: Papists deny the first proposition and affirm the second. We maintain that assent is not sufficient, but that knowledge is absolutely essential for faith. I am not referring to a perfect knowledge of the truth whereby one would be able to comprehend and perceive with clarity and discernment the intricate interrelationships between the matters believed. For then there are very many matters (which neither can nor may be doubted), which we would not believe. Take, for example, the doctrines concerning God's essence, His eternity, His infinity, and the union of the two natures in Christ. Which of these revealed mysteries would one then believe? Rather, we are referring to a knowledge whereby the acquaintance with revealed truth is such that one comprehends and has a proper and true understanding of the truth, be it with more or less light. By maintaining that knowledge is an element of faith, we are not saying that faith is equivalent to knowledge. We are also not saying that one believes a truth merely because he knows and perceives it. Neither are we saying that knowledge and faith are one and the same matter. We are saying, however, that knowledge of both the doctrines and the revelation of these doctrines in the Word of God is a requisite for believing these truths. It is evident that knowledge is a requisite for the exercise of faith for the following reasons:

First, this is evident from texts which expressly state this. "By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11). The Hebrew word $\omega\tau\equiv(\delta\beta\equiv$ (*bedaéto*) means *in or by means of His knowledge*. On account of this word, it can refer to either the knowledge which Christ has, or to the knowledge which man has of Christ. The context of this text indicates, however, that it refers to the knowledge which one has of Christ, for Christ does not justify anyone by His own knowledge, but rather by His suffering and obedience (cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Rom 5:10, 17-19). Man from his side is justified by faith (Rom 5:1). Whatever is attributed to faith there (Rom 5:1) is attributed to knowledge here (Isa 53:11). It is neither suggested that faith and knowledge are one and the same thing, nor that knowledge alone, without assent and trust, would justify a man, for there are many who

have knowledge who nevertheless do not have true faith. Justification is here attributed to knowledge, however, since the reference here is to faith in a comprehensive sense and in the totality of its exercise, of which knowledge is the initial element, being requisite for faith. Salvation is therefore promised upon the basis of the fruits of faith, such as confessing the truth, being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, being godly, etc. These in and of themselves cannot be pleasing to God, unless they proceed from faith as its fruits. It thus follows that knowledge is a requisite for faith.

Furthermore, consider John 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.” Christ is not referring to beholding God in heaven, which is placed in contradistinction to faith in 2 Cor 5:7. Rather, He refers to that which transpires here upon earth, being the way to heaven and the immediate beholding of God. Faith functions upon earth, and eternal life is promised upon this faith rather than upon bare knowledge. The text thus refers to faith in the totality of its exercise, knowledge being an element of this exercise both initially as well as in its progression. For this reason knowledge and faith are joined together. “And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life” (John 6:40).

Secondly, the fact that knowledge is a requisite for faith is also evident from the means by which faith is wrought: the hearing of the Word. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17); “Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me” (John 6:45). It is an obvious fact, however, that the Word can be of no benefit, and that none can obtain faith by the hearing of the Word, unless one understands it. “... but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience” (2 Cor 4:2).

Thirdly, since every believer is obligated to confess Christ (Matt 10:32), to give an account of his faith (1 Pet 3:15), it is therefore absolutely necessary that he have knowledge of those matters which he believes. He can neither confess nor give an account of that which he does not know.

Objection #1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Faith therefore excludes knowledge.

Answer: The apostle does not say that faith is without knowledge and is blind. To the contrary, he says that faith proves something and establishes the certainty of something—which is the essential meaning of the word ἐλεγχος (*elenchos*). However, without knowledge

of the matter in question, one can neither demonstrate nor prove anything. “Things not seen” are those things which can neither be observed by the physical eye, nor can the natural intellect find out or uncover. Such is true for the mysteries of Christ. God, however, reveals those things to His own by His Word and Spirit, and faith embraces them as undoubted truth. Therefore this text even proves most clearly that faith consists of knowledge and light.

Objection #2: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Since all imaginations must be cast down, and all thoughts must be brought into captivity, it follows that all knowledge is excluded from faith.

Answer: The apostle here speaks of imaginations and thoughts which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God and the obedience of Christ, thus proceeding from the corrupt, natural mind which is enmity against God (Rom 8:7). These the apostle opposes, and he overcomes them by means of divinely revealed truths, thus bringing man to the true knowledge of God and to the obedience of Christ, which is faith. This is evident from John 3:36 where faith and disobedience are contrasted with each other.

Assent: An Additional Element of the Exercise of Faith

Having observed that knowledge is requisite to faith, of necessity there must, in addition to this knowledge, also be *assent*; that is, the validation of the veracity, not only of all that God has spoken in His Word, but specifically of all that which God has revealed concerning His Son and the salvation merited by Him. For if one is to trust, rest, and rely upon something, he must first be convinced that its foundation is true and steadfast. Refer to Heb 11:1 where the apostle calls faith “the substance of things hoped for,” a being sure of a truth placed in opposition to fabrication, a foundation, a most certain matter which is so certain, true, and steadfast as if one *saw it with his own eyes and touched it with one’s own hands* (1 John 1:1). For this reason the apostle attributes πληροφοριαν (*plerophorian*), that is, *full assurance*, to faith (Heb 10:22). The necessity of assent is also evident in the following passages: “He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33); “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of

His Son” (1 John 5:9-10); “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15).

We have thus demonstrated that knowledge and assent are requisite to faith. This raises a question.

Question: Is the essential nature of saving faith seated in the intellect or in the will? In other words, does faith in its essence consist of *knowledge and assent*, which both are to be attributed to the intellect, or does saving faith consist in *trusting* in God through Jesus Christ in order to be justified, sanctified, and glorified, which trusting is to be attributed to the will?

Answer: It consists of trusting, and thus is to be attributed to the will. This question will be understood more clearly when we deal with this in discussing the essence of faith.

The Object of Faith

Having considered the *subject* or seat of faith, we will now proceed to consider the *object* upon which faith focuses itself in its exercise.

The object of faith is first of all the Word of God in general, that is, all that God has revealed in His Word in both Old and New Testaments. This is particularly true for all that God has revealed and promised in the gospel, which contains all the promises pertaining to reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, peace, holiness and salvation. All of this in both Testaments is offered and promised to believers. “Believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15); “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17); “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2; cf. Rom 1:16; John 3:16). Since the Word of God is truth (John 17:17) and since God is the God of truth (Isa 65:16), God can do no other than present truth to man and command him to believe the truth. Therefore, whenever commands, promises, or threats are presented in the Word of God which do not harmonize with the final outcome, they must be understood as being of a contingent nature. They thus continue to be the truth and are believed as such.

Secondly, faith does not focus on the Word alone, but proceeds by means of the Word to Christ, the Surety and the Mediator. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36); “Believe also in Me” (John 14:1); “... that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Thirdly, faith does not only focus on Christ as Mediator, but proceeds through Christ to God. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Heb 7:25);

“He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life” (John 5:24); “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:5). There is a distinction between believing God and believing *in* God. *To believe God* consists in a focusing upon the truth of God’s promises. This not only gives man liberty to come to God through Christ and to believe in Him, but he will also, while presently believing God, strengthen himself, both as far as his confidence and his expectation are concerned. However, *in believing in God and in Christ*, the focus is upon God and Christ Himself, not only as a promising and a true God, but also as a God who is omnipotent, faithful, wise, and good, so that man puts His trust in Him, entrusting soul and body to Him in order to be justified, sanctified, and glorified.

The Unique Essence of Faith

From the object of faith, we now proceed to the *form* or the unique essence and nature of faith. The essence of a matter is that which defines the matter to be what it is. The essence of a matter identifies it and distinguishes it from all others. A matter can have but one essence. If there are two, there are also two matters. Faith likewise has an essence which is unique to faith alone.

Here we must note wherein the essential nature of faith does not consist, and then wherein the essential nature of faith does consist.

First, *faith does not consist in love*, which is what papists and the Arminians maintain. Love is not the essence of faith, for 1) faith and love are two distinct virtues. “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor 13:13). It is rather obvious that one virtue cannot be the essence of another virtue. 2) Love is the fruit of faith. “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Faith, therefore, does not derive its efficacy from love, but rather faith is efficacious toward the operation of love, as well as the practice of all virtuousness by way of love. Consider also the thrust of the word $\epsilon/\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon/\omega$ (*energeo*) (cf. Rom 7:5; Col 1:29). The result of something cannot be its essence.

Secondly, *faith does not consist in obedience to and observance of God’s commandments*, which is something the above mentioned parties maintain. For faith is expressly distinguished from works (1 Cor 13:13). “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Tim 1:5). Yes, in the matter of justification, works and faith are contrasted with each other. “Therefore we conclude that a man is

justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28); “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works” (James 2:18).

True faith is the fountain of good works. Good works are fruits of faith and characteristic of it, and it is thus evident that where good works are absent, true faith is also absent. “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26). You can be certain that the body is dead if breathing has ceased. You may likewise know that faith is dead, that is, that true faith is not present, when it does not manifest itself.

Even though we maintain that love and the observance of the commandments is not the form or essential nature of faith, far be it from us to maintain that faith can exist without love. When man is made a believer, he not only receives enlightened eyes of understanding and to some degree is acquainted with the Mediator and the benefits of the covenant, but he also becomes enamored thereby. He rejoices in the fact that there is salvation, forgiveness of sins, and a Spirit to sanctify him. He rejoices in the fact that there is a Christ and that Christ is offered to him. He has love for the truth (2 Thess 2:10). Having now received Christ by faith and being united to Him by faith, his love toward God and Christ is ignited and with all willingness he desires to be obedient. “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Thirdly, the very essence of faith does not consist in trusting that Christ is my Savior. For,

(1) Christ did not die for all men. Everyone would thus need solid grounds upon which he would be able to conclude that Christ died for Him and is His Savior.

(2) God has indeed commanded all who hear His word to believe, but He has not commanded all to believe that Christ is their Savior. There is not one text in the Bible in support of this, so that it is sheer imagination to maintain that everyone must believe that Christ is his Savior. He would believe a lie and go to hell when adhering to such an illusion.

(3) To believe that Christ is my Savior belongs to assurance. This is a fruit of faith, which can vary in degree and can be entirely absent. True faith, however, abides and he who possesses it remains a true believer.

(4) Many temporal believers are fully assured within themselves and do not have the least doubt that Christ is their Savior and has died for them. They nevertheless do not have true faith and will find themselves to be deceived. It thus follows that true faith does not consist in trusting that Christ has died for me.

Fourthly, *the essence of faith does not consist in being desirous to have*

Jesus as one's Savior. To be desirous or willing can be considered as an internal act. One perceives the truth, necessity, and desirability of having Jesus as his Savior, and is thus desirous to have Him as such. This internal desire focuses on the matter itself, but not on the attending circumstances—such as that one must forsake his worldly life, must seek Christ in truth (frequently doing so), must in truth enter into covenant with Christ, and find his delight in Him alone. He must also have the world as his enemy, bear witness against it, engage in battle against it, and be willing for Christ's sake to endure all poverty, nakedness, persecutions, and ridicule. This, however, does not suit such persons, and therefore they leave Christ for what He is and yield to their lusts. Their desire is therefore nothing more than the desire of a Balaam. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Num 23:10).

Such a desire can also be of an *outgoing* nature; that is, the outgoing being toward Christ, whereby one declares and demonstrates to the Lord Jesus his upright desire for Him and His benefits, with the forsaking of all else. Since his heart does not condemn him, this gives him freedom to go to Christ and to receive Him by faith as His Savior. "And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17). Thus, having the desire does not precede the exercise of faith, as far as the nature of the matter is concerned, although wherever there is such an outgoing desire, there is also true faith.

Fifthly, *the essence of faith does not consist in an assent to the truth of the gospel.* Someone may have a very clear comprehension of all the mysteries of the faith, both as far as the truths and their desirability are concerned. Let him assent with full assurance to these truths as truths and to their desirability—it is nevertheless not true faith. It is indeed true that believers also have knowledge and assent, but they cannot rest in this. They know and experience that this does not cause them to be partakers of Christ, and therefore they go beyond this and appropriate Christ. They rest in Him, entrusting their soul and body to Him in order that He would justify them, etc. Therefore, if someone has no more than knowledge and assent, he must be assured that he has merely historical or temporal faith. If someone perceives within himself the true exercise of trusting in Christ and considers it as a fruit of his assent (deeming this to be the essential act of faith), he does have true faith. He is, however, in error by considering knowledge to be the essential nature of faith. This we shall further illustrate in the following question. The unique essence or form of faith does not consist in these six matters mentioned above.

We must now consider wherein the unique and essential act of faith does consist.

Question: Does the essential act of faith consist in assenting to the divine truths and promises of the gospel, or does it consist in a heartfelt trust in Christ to be justified, sanctified, and to be led to felicity by Him?

Answer: Before we answer, we wish to state that:

(1) We do not understand this *trusting* to be equivalent to assurance—the confidence that one personally is a partaker of Christ and all His promises, or the resulting peace and quietude within the soul. For these are fruits of faith, which are more evident in the one and less in the other. Rather, we understand by trusting the outgoing act of the heart whereby one, in surrendering to Christ and receiving Him, entrusts soul and body to Him in order that He would save him. This can be compared to a creditor who entrusts his money to someone by giving it to him. It can also be compared to someone placing himself upon the shoulders of a strong man to be carried through water, entrusting himself to, and leaning and relying upon, him and thus allowing himself to be carried to a designated location.

(2) We maintain that a knowledge of gospel truths and assent thereto are necessary prerequisites for such confidence. We maintain that afterward faith is also continually focused upon and activated by the promises. Having said this by way of preface, we shall now answer the question.

The Exercise of Faith: An Act of the Will

True saving faith does not consist in assenting to the promises of the gospel, but it consists in a heartfelt trust to be brought to salvation by Christ—this on the basis of His free offer and the promises made to those who trust in Him. We therefore immediately establish *that faith is not seated in the intellect, but in the will*. If it does not consist in the assent to the truth, it can also not be seated in the intellect; and if it consists of trust, it follows that it is seated in the will.

The truth of the foregoing is evident from the following reasons:

First, it is evident from the name itself. What we refer to as “believing” Scripture refers to as “trusting,” “entrusting to,” and “having confidence in.” This is true even when there are no promises at all to which this relates. We have clearly and irrefutably demonstrated this in the foregoing. We know, however, that in dealing with divine things revealed in the Word of God only, we must not focus on our language alone, for this causes many to err.

Rather, we must interpret and speak according to the characteristics and nature of the Hebrew and Greek languages in which the Word of God was written. Since, in our language, the word “believing” implies the acceptance of promises and incidents related to us on the basis of someone else’s testimony, one must therefore not focus on our language only but on the thrust of meaning expressed in the original languages. The words *heemin*, *pisteuo*, *chasa*, *batach*, *samach*, should therefore not only be translated as “to believe,” but rather as “to trust,” “to entrust,” “to rely upon,” and “to lean upon”—also when there is no relation to the words or promises of someone else. In the exercise of this trust, however, these play a role, not as being the nature of this trust, but to enable one thereby to rely upon Christ Himself and to entrust himself to Him.

Secondly, Scripture attributes faith to the heart. “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10); “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). The heart or the will is exercised in entrusting itself to Him and to believe in Him.

Evasive Argument: The heart can also refer to the intellect.

Answer: This is rarely the case. Even when this is so, it is not expressly limited to the intellect only, but generally signifies the will; or it is a comprehensive reference to the soul in all its operations. We thus hold to the general meaning and understand it as referring to the will, especially since believing signifies an act of the will.

Thirdly, if the essential act of faith consisted in assenting to the truth of the promises:

(1) It would be possible to believe in a saving manner without receiving Christ and trusting in Him. Feel free to know, acknowledge, and assent to the fact that Christ is the Savior as long as you wish; but what union and communion do you then have with Christ? The receiving of Christ and the act of leaning upon and trusting in Christ would then merely be fruits and consequences of faith. However, a consequence does not perfect the essence of a matter—a matter already perfect prior to the occurrence of the consequence.

(2) The nature of saving faith would not differ from the nature of historical faith. Both would be the same, for historical faith also consists in assenting to the veracity of the promises. The devils, as well as the unconverted, also do this in exercising temporal faith. This is abundantly evident from Scripture and is also common knowledge.

Evasive Argument: Knowledge and assent are spiritual in the one person and not in the other.

Answer (1) It is true that the knowledge of the unconverted is of a different nature than that of the converted (not as far as preparatory knowledge is concerned); nevertheless the matter itself, however differently it may be perceived, is the same. The knowledge of both pertains to historical truth, and when anyone assents to this truth, this faith is historical in the one as well as in the other.

(2) Scripture never defines the difference between saving faith and historical faith as being the spirituality of the knowledge of and the assenting to historical truths.

(3) It is furthermore a certainty that if someone is not converted and does not put his trust in Christ (which is saving faith), the knowledge of such faith is not spiritual. One would then never be able to deduce from faith itself whether one truly believed or not, except by the fruits. This is an entirely erroneous view.

Fourthly, saving faith believes in God, that is, *in Christ*. It does not focus only on the Word of God, and its nature is not perfected in and by assenting to the truth only, but it rather proceeds through the Word to the Person of Christ and trusts in Him. "... them also which shall believe on Me through their word" (John 17:20). It is here that faith accomplishes its objective, gives expression to its nature, and finds its fulfillment. Saving faith is therefore generally expressed in Scripture as believing *in God*, that is, *in Christ*. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). To believe in *Christ* is faith itself, and not a fruit of faith, which would have to be true if faith were to consist in knowledge and assent.

Evasive Argument: Assent to the truth by the unconverted is also expressed at times as believing in *Christ* (cf. John 8:30-31; 12:42; Exod 14:31). It therefore cannot be inferred from the expression *believing in Christ* that saving faith consists in trust.

Answer (1) We draw our conclusion not merely by considering this manner of speech independently, but by considering this manner of speech in relation to the matter at hand, considering the text in its context. This is true, for instance, for the quoted text, John 17:20. A clear distinction is obviously made between the Word of God and the Person of Christ, and between embracing this testimony and believing in the Person of Christ. Faith in Christ by means of the Word (which faith, prior to this, has accepted as truth), is therefore not the acceptance of His testimony, but a trusting of the soul in Him.

(2) If merely receiving Christ's testimony is expressed as being equivalent to believing in Him (which is rarely the case), it is recorded in such a manner, and the context is such it can clearly

be perceived that the reference is not to saving faith, but to the reception of Christ's testimony by the unconverted who are without saving faith. Such persons are referred to in John 12:42, which is very likely the case as well in John 8:30-31.

(3) He whose views are contrary to this will neither be able nor dare to say that each reference to believing in God and in Christ merely means "to believe God" and to believe that either God or Christ speaks the truth. They must thus be convinced themselves that believing in Christ is to put one's trust in Christ.

(4) As far as Exod 14:31 is concerned, it is common knowledge that when a word is prefaced by the letter *beth*, it means "on" as well as "in," and that it must be understood and translated in accordance with the matter to which it is affixed. Therefore our translators have translated this excellently by stating, "And the people ... believed (in) the Lord, and (on) His servant Moses."²⁴

Fifthly, faith itself unites the soul with Christ, appropriates the promises as being made to the soul, satisfies the conscience, and gives liberty to approach unto God and to address Him as Father (cf. Eph 2:17; John 3:36; Rom 5:1; Eph 3:12). Assenting to the truth of the promises does not engender this, however, but rather the putting of one's trust in Christ. You may assent as long and with as much clarity as you wish, but not one promise pertains to you, nor does it unite your heart to Christ or satisfy your soul. It does not give freedom to cry out "Abba, Father." It thus follows that assent is not saving faith.

Evasive Argument: The objective of assent is to receive Christ, to put one's trust in Him, and in this manner to receive what is stated in the foregoing. All of this, therefore, proceeds from assenting to the truth.

Answer (1) One thing is certain: The act of assenting by itself cannot accomplish anything, but rather the fruits of this assent do so. The assent must in the first place engender the acts of receiving and trusting. Assent is therefore not the essence of faith. Scripture states furthermore that faith itself and not its fruits accomplishes this.

(2) By way of the same argument, as knowledge is the very beginning of all that pertains to faith, we would then consider that the *knowledge* of the mysteries of the gospel brings forth the same matters: union with Christ, being a partaker of the promises, and peace and liberty. Since this is an absurdity, however, it is likewise

²⁴ The rendering of the Statenvertaling is as follows: "And the people believed *in* the Lord and *on* Moses His servant."

absurd to maintain that this is brought about by assent. It thus remains certain that trust rather than assent is the essence of saving faith.

Sixthly, the opposite of saving faith is not the rejection of the truths of the gospel, but a doubting, that is, not trusting in, relying upon, and leaning upon Christ. “He that believeth on the Son ... he that believeth not the Son” (John 3:36); “Let not your heart be troubled: ... believe also in Me” (John 14:1); “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt” (Matt 14:31); “... Where is your faith” (Luke 8:25). Faith is here contrasted with “trembling for fear.” True faith therefore does not consist in assenting but in trusting.

From all this, it is evident that the actual act of faith does not consist in assenting to the truths and promises of the gospel, but in trusting in Jesus, and in entrusting oneself to Him.

A Response to Those who Object to Faith Being the Exercise of One's Will

We shall now consider the objections which could be advanced against this.

Objection #1: The entire world understands the act of believing to mean nothing else than the acceptance of someone's testimony, and to hold it for true.

Answer (1) The entire world expresses itself in the same manner as we do in the Dutch language, rather than in harmony with the Hebrew and Greek languages; in them alone the mysteries of faith are revealed. One must therefore conform himself to the nature of these languages in which (as shown above) “to believe” means “to trust.”

(2) The entire world understands the word “faith” to refer to historical faith. This we do likewise, but not in reference to saving faith. The word is the same, but they differ in the very essence of the matter. When two different matters are referred to by the same word (which is frequently the case), even an uneducated person will know that one ought not to conclude that whatever is characteristic for the one is also characteristic for the other. For example, “light” can be an antonym for “heavy” and for “dark.” The word is one and the same, but the matters themselves have nothing in common. He who therefore wishes to deal wisely must not be prejudiced by the sound of the word “to believe,” thereby allowing himself to be misled.

Objection #2: This trust which is characterized by a believing reception is the fruit of faith, that is, an assent of gospel mysteries and promises relative to the truth. Faith does therefore not consist in trusting but in assenting.

Answer: (1) This returns us to where we started, for this is the very difference.

(2) We admit that there can be no confidence without a prior assent and acceptance of the matter as truth; however, it therefore does not follow that assent is saving faith.

(3) If saving faith does not consist in trust (due to assent being a prerequisite), assent would also not constitute saving faith since assent is a consequence of knowledge which is a prerequisite for assent. By the same logical argument, therefore, faith then would consist in the knowledge of gospel truths.

Objection #3: True faith is that faith upon which eternal life is promised. However, eternal life is promised upon assenting to gospel truths which is evident in the following passages: “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. And what He hath seen and heard, that He testifieth; and no man receiveth His testimony. He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:12, 15, 32-33); “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (John 11:25-27).

Answer: We can deal with John 3:12, 15, 32-33 as it were with one word. Verse 12 speaks of historical faith; verse 15 is not conjoined to verse 12 as if verse 15 pertains to the same as is stated in verse 12, that is, as if eternal life is promised upon the faith mentioned in verse 12. Instead, it is promised to those *who believe in Him*. Verses 32 and 33 are also not conjoined to verse 12. Historical believers and temporal believers, as well as true believers, set to their seal that God is true by the reception of His testimony. In John 11:25-27 eternal life is not promised to Martha in consequence of believing that *whoever believes in Christ shall live*. Many believe this who will never be saved. Salvation is not even promised here to Martha. She is only asked whether she believed Christ’s words to be true.

Additional Objection: Eternal life is promised upon assent to the truth, and assent is therefore saving faith. “He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life” (John 5:24); “... brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).

Answer: (1) When Scripture speaks of saving faith, it does not always give expression to the formal act of faith, but either makes mention of that which precedes saving faith or of that which follows. In doing so, Scripture considers it in its full ramification and promises salvation upon this. We therefore read, “By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many” (Isa 53:11); “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee ... and Jesus Christ” (John 17:3). Salvation is thus promised upon the fruits of faith (cf. Matt 5:3-16). This is also stated in Acts 16:31, where we read, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). Therefore, *to believe in God* is to believe as God has commanded us to believe. When faith is called a *belief of the truth*, this does not pertain to the formal act of faith, but it indicates that faith is founded upon truth. With this we fully agree.

(2) Such manner of speech does not exclude trust, but rather includes it; for otherwise temporal believers would have saving faith, yes, sometimes to a much stronger degree than true believers who are often in darkness in this respect and experience much strife.

Objection #4: Faith is expressly distinguished from trust. “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him” (Eph 3:12). Consequently, faith does not consist in trust.

Answer (1) The word “trust” is viewed in a twofold sense in Scripture. It can be used in the sense of “to entrust to,” that is, to entrust oneself to someone. This is faith itself, and the word *πιστις* (*pistis*) is frequently translated as such. (Refer to the foregoing where it has been shown that faith consists in trusting.) “Trust” can also mean *peace, liberty, fearlessness, boldness, or assurance*, which flows out of trusting as out of its cause. (cf. 2 Cor 2:3; Gal 5:10; Phil 1:6; 2 Cor 3:4). It is to such a confidence the text refers, which implies liberty, assurance, and peace.

(2) He who entrusts himself to Jesus then becomes a partaker of Him and all His benefits; he is then partaker of all the promises and an heir of the promises. The believer is then capable of being active with the promises, and is indeed active with them. He thereby receives strength, peace, and liberty to approach unto God *εὐν πεποιθησει* (*en pepoithesei*), that is, with full assurance and conviction, and to address Him as Father.

Objection #5: That faith by which a man is justified is truly saving faith. Man, however, is justified only by assenting to the veracity of the promises of God. Assent is therefore faith. This is evident in the justification of Abraham. In Gen 15:5 God promised Abraham the multiplication of his seed. This is followed by verse 6, where we read, “And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it

to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Add to this Rom 4:3 and James 2:23 where the same words are quoted.

Answer (1) It is certain that Abraham was already justified and was a believer prior to this. The reference is therefore not to the act of faith whereby Abraham initially became a believer, but rather to that act which he performed as a believer.

(2) Abraham’s faith did not consist in an assenting to the veracity of God’s promises, but rather in trusting. The text states that “he believed in the Lord.” This can clearly be observed in Rom 4, where we read, “Who against hope believed in hope, ... and being not weak in faith ... but was strong in faith, ... being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (vss. 18-21). This is indicative of being at peace and of a heartfelt reliance upon the promises, even though everything was to the contrary. He was *πληροφορεθει/ω* (*plerophoretheis*), fully persuaded, that is, he trusted in an extraordinary measure. He had full confidence in them; that is, it was more than an esteeming the promises to be true; he trusted in them. Furthermore, this full persuasion did not only relate to the promises, but also to God’s *omnipotence*. His faith was thus a trusting in God as being true, omnipotent, and faithful. This trust in God was so strong that it engendered a full assurance and rest in his heart. This faith was accounted unto him for righteousness. “And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness” (Rom 4:22). It is thus evident that the stated objection effectively refutes itself, and it is clearly demonstrated that faith consists in trust.

(3) Consider also what has been stated above, for sometimes the reference is to an act of faith when in fact faith in its full signification is to be understood by it. Furthermore, faith is conversely also not always named after its formal act.

(4) We have also shown previously that a believer whose faith is exercised is continually active with and through the promises, encouraging himself in them. These same answers are applicable to James 2:23.

Objection #6: That faith by which man is entitled to the use of the sacraments (which are the seals of the righteousness of faith) is true saving faith. One is entitled, however, to use the sacraments by assenting to the veracity of the promises, and thus assent is faith. This is evident in Acts 8:36-38, where we read, “And the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God ... and he baptized him.”

Answer (1) A minister, when baptizing, does not have the assurance that a person is either truly converted or a believer. Rather, he does so on the basis of a good confession which is consistent with a person's life. *By asking him whether he believed with all his heart*, Philip had appealed to the conscience of the eunuch. With his confession that *Jesus Christ is the Son of God* he confessed, "Yes, I believe with all my heart." Thus, we do not have the least proof here that assenting to divine truths constitutes the essential and formal act of faith.

(2) Even when faith is mentioned in reference to one of its essential elements, it must (as we have shown above) frequently be understood in a comprehensive sense. To believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God includes everything which is required unto faith. It does not exclude trust, but includes it. Otherwise all temporal believers would be entitled to use the sacraments, for they make the same confession and believe the same truths. With this answer we have also dealt with all the texts in which faith is mentioned in reference to one of its necessary requirements, even though the essential act of faith itself is not expressed (cf. Rom 10:6-10).

We have thus demonstrated that the essential, formal act of faith does not consist in assenting to gospel truths, but in a heartfelt trust in Christ to thus be justified, sanctified, and brought to the state of felicity by Him. Since trust neither stands nor acts alone but is accompanied by several other acts, it will therefore be useful to furnish a comprehensive description of faith.

A Comprehensive Description of Saving Faith

First, prior to believing, it is through the preaching of the Word that there is engendered in man a conviction of his miserable condition in himself, and a dissatisfaction and perplexity concerning his condition in reference to both his sinfulness and his guilt. This transpires with more or less emotion, in either a legal or an evangelical manner. He perceives himself to be separated from God, and understands that his salvation consists of being united to Him and in the enjoyment of His favor. He finds solution neither within himself nor with any other creature as to how he will satisfy the justice of God and acquire a perfect righteousness. He hears mention made of Jesus Christ as Surety, and begins to become acquainted with Him in His natures, offices, humiliation, and exaltation, becoming desirous to have Him as his Surety.

Secondly, he becomes acquainted with the offer of Christ in a general sense, but also in a specific sense; that is, that Christ is also offered to him, for he hears the gospel in which He is offered to

everyone. No one is excluded, for whoever will may come, and to this the promise is annexed that whoever comes will in no wise be cast out. He believes all of this to be infallibly true, and rejoices that God has designed such a way of salvation, as well as that this way is made known to him. He approves of this way with his entire heart, and wishes to be saved in that way and in none other, there being no other way. With Peter he says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68-69).

Thirdly, he becomes hungry and thirsty. He becomes very desirous to become a partaker of Christ and all His benefits, to be reconciled to God through Him, and to walk with Him in peace, love, humility, and obedience. His desire is: Oh, that I had Christ, that I had reconciliation, and that I had Spirit and life! Thus, *Christ is precious to Him* (1 Pet 2:7). He is encouraged by the promise, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt 5:6).

Fourthly, he turns to Christ, and takes refuge in Him, albeit from afar as the publican did (Luke 18:13). At times he either dares not, is in darkness, or is discouraged by a view of his sins, and yet his heart will nevertheless quietly turn to Him again. At times he cannot speak a word, and at another time he will say, “I so much desire to have Him.” Such is his condition and he knows not where to turn. He yearns, he waits, and he longs for light, grace, the Spirit, and strength, often doing so quietly and with tears in his eyes. “Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation” (Mic 7:7); he thus tarries for the Lord (Hab 2:3); “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” (Isa 45:22); “How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings” (Ps 36:7).

Fifthly, as he thus wrestles, he receives liberty to receive Him by faith. He knows himself to be destitute, and he perceives Jesus as suitable, fully sufficient, willing, truthful, offering Himself, and promising that no one will be cast out who comes to Him. He receives Him, accepts His offer and invitation, and with all his heart he gives Him his hand, heart—yes, everything. He ponders at times whether the Lord Jesus would be as willing to accept him as he is willing to have Him, for then he would certainly be saved. “Yes,” he continues, “Jesus is willing, yes, more willing than I am, for He Himself takes the initiative, presents Himself, invites me, and He Himself draws me.” While thus wrestling he surrenders himself. “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). “As ye have therefore

received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Col 2:6); “Yield yourselves unto the Lord” (2 Chron 30:8).

Sixthly, he entrusts his body, soul, and salvation to Christ. He relies upon Him, allows himself to be borne by Christ, leaning and resting upon Him. And even if He has no peace or assurance as yet, and is tossed to and fro by fear, being confronted with strife, he nevertheless betakes himself to Him. He relies upon Him, exercises trust in Him, and entrusts himself to Him. “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16); “... the remnant of Israel ... shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth” (Isa 10:20); “For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel” (Isa 48:2); “Who is among you that feareth the Lord ... let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God” (Isa 50:10); “Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him” (Ps 2:12).

Seventhly, this engenders the assurance and the confidence that Christ is His Savior. While he exercises faith, prays and wrestles, he comes to a conclusion about his spiritual state, doing so one time by considering the acts of faith of which his soul becomes conscious, then by considering the fulness of Jesus, and then again by considering the promises and their certainty. On this basis he concludes: Jesus is mine and I am His (Song 2:16). At times the Holy Spirit very powerfully puts His seal upon this (Eph 4:30). This in turn engenders quietness, peace, joy, and delight, which we shall subsequently discuss when considering the fruits of faith. The fruits of assurance, peace, etc, are, however, not always experienced by the soul. He is frequently hindered in this; one time this will be due to the weakness of his faith, and then again due to strife.

Eighthly, this engenders holiness. “... purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9); “... faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Consider also James 2:17.

We have presented these acts to you in a sequential order. This is not to suggest that when someone exercises faith these acts are always identifiable, following each other in this manner. They are intertwined, and at one time the soul is more active in one respect, and then again in another respect. We cannot present them all simultaneously, and therefore to present them in a clear fashion and to make them clearly understood, we need to deal with each of them individually.

The Cause of Faith

We now come to the *cause of faith*. Man of himself is blind and cannot understand the very essence of those matters which he

must believe. He has an evil heart and does not concern himself therewith. He does not know God in His veracity, and therefore has an unbelieving heart. In order for man to believe, it must be given to him. “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29); “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

The Holy Spirit gives even historical faith, that is, the conviction that the Word of God is truth, and that Christ is the Savior. “It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6); “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor 12:3).

He is therefore called *the Spirit of faith* (2 Cor 4:13). Yes, both the origin and continuation of faith are of the Lord. “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:32); “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Pet 1:5). The increase of faith is likewise of the Lord, and therefore the disciples prayed, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). All of this must be wrought by the same almighty power of God. “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe” (Eph 1:19). God therefore not only reveals the mysteries of the gospel, as well as encouraging and stirring man up to believe, but God Himself molds the heart and by His immediate operation causes man to believe, not compelling him against his will, but inclining him and working in him both to will and to do (Phil 2:13).

Due to His almighty power, God needs no means to impart faith to someone, but it is His wisdom to do so. The fact that God works all things by means is much more of a mystery than we are aware of. It is His goodness that He works faith by means of His Word, be it 1) in written or printed form, 2) through the preaching of divinely sent ministers, 3) by statements made by individuals, or 4) by one’s own reading. Since knowledge of a revealed matter is a requisite unto faith (and thus also the act of assenting and holding for true), it is therefore necessary that the matter which one must know and assent to be revealed to us. Furthermore, if by way of this knowledge and assent, one is led to rest upon Christ, to entrust himself to Him, and to trust Him, it is likewise necessary that the believing soul have promises whereby he, now being a believer, actively seeks justification, sanctification, and comfort. Since these matters are such as I have stated them to be, it must be deemed as an extraordinary manifestation of God’s goodness that He does not speak to us in passing, but that He has caused His revelations to be recorded for us. This is of a permanent nature—as if God is continually

speaking unto us. This Word is the means whereby God works and strengthens faith. "... the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom 1:16); "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom 10:14, 17).

The Objective of Faith

We must now consider *the objective of faith*. In exercising faith one glorifies God in all His perfections, as they shine forth in the face of Jesus Christ. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord ..." (2 Cor 3:18); "For God ... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In exercising faith one magnifies:

(1) the justice of God, which is so pure that no sin can remain unpunished. "To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness" (Rom 3:26);

(2) His love for humanity, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16);

(3) His grace, "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6);

(4) His wisdom to devise such a means whereby, simultaneously, the justice of God is satisfied and man is saved, "We preach ... Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23-24); "... the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10);

(5) His omnipotence, "But was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom 4:20-21);

(6) His truth, "He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true" (John 3:33). See also 1 John 5:9-11;

(7) His faithfulness, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (Rom 4:16);

(8) His all-sufficiency, "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell" (Col 1:19); "And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16; cf. Heb 7:25). Thus, by believing in Christ, God is glorified by believers. He who therefore wishes to render honor and glory unto God, let him believe in His Son.

From man's side, the objective of faith is justification, peace, adoption, sanctification (which we shall subsequently discuss when

considering the fruits), and hereafter eternal felicity. “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet 1:9). He who desires all these things, let him exercise faith.

The Additional Characteristics of Faith

The characteristics which belong to faith are various and differ in degree. This is true in reference to different believers, some of whom are children, others are young men, and again others are men in Christ. This is also true for the same persons at various times, since faith is at times stronger and more active, and at other times is weaker.

These characteristics are:

- (1) Holiness, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (Jude 1:20);
- (2) Sincerity, “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee” (2 Tim 1:5);
- (3) Activity, “... faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6);
- (4) Durability, “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:32); “Who are kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Pet 1:5).
- (5) Salvific, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16).

The Effects or Fruits of Faith

The effects or fruits of true and saving faith are very glorious and desirable. They are the following:

- (1) Justification, as it pertains to both guilt and punishment, as well as to the right unto eternal life, “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference. ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:21-22, 28);
- (2) Peace with God, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1);
- (3) Boldness to approach unto God, “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom 5:2); “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him” (Eph 3:12);
- (4) Union with Christ, and through Him with God, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17); “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17); “... that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21);

(5) The adoption to children, “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name” (John 1:12); “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26);

(6) The purification of heart, “purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9);

(7) Victory over the devil, “Whom resist stedfast in the faith” (1 Pet 5:9);

(8) Victory over the world, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4);

(9) Love, “... faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6);

(10) All manner of good works, “Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18). In a word, faith is that whereby the soul lives, is suitable unto all things (both temporal and spiritual), and must always be exercised if one wishes to run his course well and with joy.

Saving Faith Compared with Temporal Faith

We shall now consider *the similarities and the differences* between saving faith and temporal faith. There is some similarity between historical and temporal faith. The object of both is the Word of God. Knowledge of divine truths is requisite for both, and an assent to the veracity of the Word is essential.

There is, however, a great difference between saving faith and temporal faith, both of which include historical faith.

First of all, there is a difference as far as the *intellect* is concerned. Temporal faith observes and knows the truth only in the letter, as it were by a false light. However, it does not perceive truth in its essential nature. True believers, on the contrary, have *enlightened eyes of understanding* (Eph 1:18), *have the mind of Christ* (1 Cor 2:16), and are taught of Him, as the truth is in Christ Jesus.

Secondly, temporal believers *do not have a good heart*, but it is and remains a rock which is not fit to bear fruit (Luke 8:13). Such a heart is contrasted with an honest and good heart (vs. 15). Man by nature has a stony heart. This is removed in regeneration and God gives a heart of flesh in its place (Ezek 36:26). The stony heart remains in temporal believers and is not changed. Whatever they are and do apart from conversion is but natural and their heart is not purified by obedience to the truth (1 Pet 1:22). True believers, however, have a new heart, a heart of flesh, and a heart purified by faith (Acts 15:9). The one is truly dead and the other is truly alive.

Thirdly, temporal believers know of *no union with Christ by faith*.

They do not believe in Christ, do not set their hearts upon Him, and do not entrust their souls to Jesus to be justified and sanctified. They know of no perplexity concerning this, do not desire it, and do not have it in view. It suffices for them to hold to a general opinion that they will be saved, doing so without strife, without examination of their heart, and neither with any love for, nor having in view those things in which salvation consists. They repeatedly assure themselves that they will indeed arrive in heaven. They are thus like the foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps, and came too late, desiring to gain entrance (Matt 25). When they find themselves deceived by their illusion, they lead themselves to believe that they ought to have been admitted, saying, “We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence” (Luke 13:26); “Have we not prophesied in Thy Name? and in Thy Name have cast out devils? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works” (Matt 7:22).

True believers, however, observing the benefits of the covenant with supernatural light, receiving the witness of the true God as being infallibly true, being overcome with a great desire to be partakers of these benefits, and knowing that no one will be a partaker of these things except through the Lord Jesus Christ, are assured that Christ in calling and inviting them to come to Him, offers Himself to this end. They thus receive Christ to that end (John 1:12), surrender themselves to Him (2 Cor 8:5), put their trust in Him (Ps 2:12), rely on Him, lean upon Him, and entrust themselves to Him (Ps 9:11; 71:6; Jer 17:7).

Fourthly, temporal believers have a *joy without root*. “When they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root” (Luke 8:13). As the physical eye delights itself in light, likewise the intellect delights itself in the acquisition of knowledge. The more hidden and excellent a subject matter may be, the more the intellect will delight itself. When temporal believers therefore hear and understand the mysteries of the gospel, they consider these to be beautiful and have a desire to reflect upon them. To have the forgiveness of sins and the friendship and favor of God, to have Christ as a Savior, to be among the godly and in church, and hereafter to enter into heaven, are to them most excellent matters. To have an understanding of the Word of God, to be able to speak of it, to gain esteem by means of this, to be loved by the godly, are most desirable to them and they find a sweet delight in it. Since they imagine themselves to be partakers of these, they consequently rejoice. *They have no root*, however, since they have a natural and stony heart. The Word of God can therefore not

penetrate and bear root downward in the heart. All their activity is therefore only of a superficial nature.

In true believers, however, there is depth of earth. The heart, due to many concerns, sorrows, and much strife is plowed by the Word; the Word thus falls into this fleshly, soft, and pliable heart. It consequently bears root downward into Christ (Col 2:7), after which the believer increases in Him. This in turn brings forth joy in various degrees; that is, a joy in the Lord and a delighting in Him, which in turn engenders a tender heart inclined towards obedience.

Fifthly, the temporal and true believer also differ as far as *fruit-bearing* is concerned. “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the Word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matt 13:23). Since temporal believers have no root and dry up, they do not bring forth fruit, and all apparent fruits are in essence nothing but evil fruits coming from an evil tree.

Since a correct understanding of this distinction is of the greatest importance for the conviction of the unconverted and the comfort of the converted, we shall deal with this distinction more comprehensively in the next chapter.

Unbelief: The Opposite of True Faith

Lastly, we must consider the *direct opposite* of true faith. Those who are of such a disposition are either outside or within the church. To those persons who possess the contrary of true faith outside the church belong all who reject the true doctrine of faith, such as divers heathens, the Mohammedans, the Jews, the Socinians, and various Anabaptists. Among the papists, Lutherans, and Arminians—although they seriously err in many doctrinal points—temporal believers, yes, even true believers, can be found, since Christ is preached there, albeit not purely.

There are also unbelievers within the church, either entirely ignorant or merely able to mention the name of Christ—but not knowing Him in His natures, offices, states of humiliation and exaltation, indispensability, nor how and to what purpose they must make use of Him. They run their course carelessly, having little or no impression of heaven or hell. If spoken to concerning this and asked how they think they will be saved, they have a ready answer: God is merciful. They hope upon His grace, they will pray and do their best. They are not permitted to be in doubt about their salvation; that would be a grievous thing. A great multitude is thus on their way to hell, and those ministers and elders who allow them to go on so

peacefully in their ignorance, and permit them to come to the holy table, will be responsible for their condemnation.

An Urgent Exhortation to Believe in Christ

We have thus dealt with faith from all perspectives. From all that has been said we can readily arrive at the following definition of faith: *Faith is a heartfelt trust in Christ—and through Him in God—in order to be justified, sanctified, and glorified, leaning upon Christ’s voluntary offer of Himself and upon His promises that He will perform this to all who receive Him and rely upon Him to that end.*

Therefore come, whoever you may be, pause for a moment and let me persuade you to believe. Since I shall deal with a variety of readers and hearers, I shall first seek to make them acquainted with themselves and then endeavor to bring them to Christ.

(1) Some people have no knowledge of self, nor of Christ, spiritual life, heaven, or hell. That impression, which they naturally have concerning God and eternity, they deaden by not reflecting upon it. Thus concerning spiritual things, they therefore live as if they were irrational animals. They either do not hear the sermons or do not listen to them, but are entertaining other thoughts during the sermon. If they do listen, they do not understand it, or only understand when blatant sins are rebuked and when known and common virtues are recommended. Faith in Christ, however, as well as the life of faith, are and remain hidden to them. Thus they perish in their ignorance. “It is a people of no understanding: therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour” (Isa 27:11). Know assuredly that you are not able to believe. Without faith, however, you will not be able to be saved, but must be eternally damned, for “how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard” (Rom 10:14). Therefore, from this moment on endeavor to acquire knowledge and to be of such a disposition that my exhortation may persuade you to believe.

(2) Some, albeit they are in the same state of ignorance, although having a knowledge of the letter, are so attached to the things of this world—to riches, prestige, and the lusts of the flesh—that they cannot focus their thoughts upon spiritual matters. If they do, they reject them, and it is as if they say, “I have no desire.” They thus willingly and knowingly turn themselves away from Christ, depart from Him, and return to their lusts. To them this is applicable, “And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). Reflect frequently upon the following text: “Because I have called, and ye refused. ... Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not

answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord” (Prov 1:24, 28-29). Some will say to themselves, “I know it very well, but I nevertheless do not desire to depart from my way in order to be united to Christ; and if there be no other way, so be it.” Oh man, if you were truly to perceive what this means, you would not speak in this fashion! Therefore, let the terror of the Lord persuade you to believe.

(3) Some are so overtaken with labor, difficulties, and sorrow, that they must slave from early morning to late evening. The husband must earn a living and the wife must provide for all her children; thus there remains no time to reflect upon these matters. If they occasionally come under some conviction, all their business will quench such good inner motions. I regret that such is the case. If your heart were truly fixed upon spiritual things, however, you would certainly be able to find time. It is therefore an indication that you esteem earthly things higher than eternal things; be assured that God will not excuse you. Therefore, you also ought to allow yourself to be persuaded to believe, for without faith you will not be saved.

(4) Some imagine that they already are believers, for they have a clear perception of faith. They are baptized, partake of the Lord’s Supper, diligently frequent church, read God’s Word, offer their prayers, give alms, live in a manner which is beyond reproach, and upon sinning grieve over it, etc. But this, poor man, is not faith (as is evident from the preceding), and upon this way you will most certainly perish. But you may say, “Let this not trouble you, but let this be my business.” I say to you, however, that you ought to take heed and not deceive yourself. Do not harden yourself by resisting the Word of God, but rather allow yourself to be persuaded to believe, for the way upon which you are leads to destruction.

(5) Some are not far from the kingdom of heaven, but they nevertheless do not enter; they remain who they are. After many years there is no change. They have some perception of their misery, and eternity is at times greatly bound upon their heart. They are acquainted with Christ, do desire to have Him, and do desire to live differently; nevertheless, nothing comes of all this. They thus remain focused on self through unbelief: they are too great a sinner; Christ would not be willing to have them; they are not sufficiently brokenhearted in their estimation; they do not know whether they truly desire it; and then again they spoil everything through sin. The true cause, however, is a lack of concern; they are lazy, have a divided heart, and are not steadfast.

Oh, become concerned and permit yourself to be persuaded to believe! Do not maintain such an intermediate position, for you will thus perish.

(6) Some are so accustomed to spiritual matters by either hearing or speaking about them, that all impressions made thereby are lost entirely. This explains why scholars who are duty-bound to deal with spiritual matters are so rarely converted, for they treat these matters as a blacksmith deals with his iron. We also address you. Examine yourself and become as children. Do not overlook this, but search your own heart and examine yourself as to whether those matters which you hold before others are truly to be found in you; whether you are enamored with them. Stir up a concern within yourself to consider if, while leading others to salvation, you yourself will go lost.

Come, all whom I have named and also those to whom I have not alluded; come murderers, adulterers, fornicators, unjust persons, thieves, drunkards, you who revel in sin, gamblers, dancers, you criminals who have been given over to yourself, liars, backbiters, perjurers; come whoever you may be and whatever your circumstances may be; come to Jesus, believe in Him, and you will be saved. If someone objects that I am making the way too wide, I respond by saying that I am not maintaining that they are saved or will be saved, but rather that Christ also calls such ones, and that among such there are also those who will become partakers of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:11). None are to lose courage, for there is such a fullness of grace in Christ. It must be presupposed, however, that such persons are weary of sin, grieve over their former abominations, and with all their heart are desirous for reconciliation with God and for a holy life. Unless a person is in such a frame, he will not be desirous to come.

Motives unto Faith

Let everyone therefore come. Allow yourself to be persuaded to believe and consider the following reasons:

First, your spiritual state is as wretched as can possibly be imagined—yes, more wretched than anyone can comprehend. Oh consider, can anything be more dreadful than to be without God, to be confronted with God as an angry Judge, to be eternally outside of heaven, to have all that is desirable and sought after here to be hostile toward you, and hereafter to be forever condemned in the pool of fire? Even if this does not now move you, you are nevertheless such a one, and this will eternally come upon you. If you still remain insensitive and continue in this way, there

is no hope that you will escape eternal condemnation, and with sorrow we must observe that you are on your way to hell. You who are at the very edge of hell, however, if you would once awaken and quietly consider your danger, if fear would come upon you regarding this future declaration, “Depart from Me, ye cursed,” and if you then would begin to be desirous for salvation, for reconciliation, for the Spirit, and for a holy life, I may say to you that there is still hope and you can still be saved. There is still a way, but there is only one way and that way is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is due to the unsearchable goodness of God that He has yet provided such a way. How blessed you are that you may hear of this way, that you may come to Him! Therefore seek the Lord while He may be found. Give diligence to become acquainted with the Lord Jesus, and with sincerity and desire, seek Him to be your Surety for redemption and salvation. Humbly surrender yourself to Him, rest upon Him, entrust yourself to Him to that end, and thus believe in Him and you will be saved.

Outside of Christ, there is nothing but restlessness and hostility. This causes the soul to be shaken and tossed to and fro as a ship in a violent storm. Rest and support are nowhere to be found. The dove which was let out of the ark found no rest for the sole of its foot, as there was only water everywhere. Such is the condition of a soul outside of Christ. Neither riches, friends, nor one’s own wisdom or strength can give rest to the soul. They are all broken reeds which not only provide no support, but which moreover cause the one who leans upon them to fall and be injured. Therefore no longer seek refuge there, but forsake it all.

Christ: An All-Sufficient, Suitable, and Able Savior

Secondly, in Christ there is a fullness to meet all your needs and fulfill all your desires. “For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell” (Col 1:19). In Him there is a complete fullness:

- (1) to remove all your sins. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7);
- (2) to reconcile us with God. “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10); “... but by His own blood He ... obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12);
- (3) to deliver us from the eternal wrath of God and from condemnation. “... which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10); “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1);
- (4) in Him there is a fullness of the Spirit. “For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (John 3:34);

(5) of light, “A light to lighten the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32);

(6) of life, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear” (Col 3:4);

(7) of peace, “For He is our peace” (Eph 2:14);

(8) and of a full salvation, “And I give unto them eternal life” (John 10:28); “He that is our God is the God of salvation” (Ps 68:20).

(9) All these are to be found in Him only, and outside of Him none of these are to be sought or to be found. “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); “Neither is there salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12).

(10) All this, and whatever you could imagine or desire, is to be found in Christ. Why then do you continue to focus upon yourself, since nothing but corruption is to be found there? Why then would you look to people and things which are of the earth, in whom and in which no salvation is to be found, and which will forsake you in the day of evil? I beseech you, turn away from everything, and turn to this Savior to receive grace for grace out of His fullness.

(11) Christ is, furthermore, omnipotent to make you a partaker of all these benefits, for all power is given unto Him to soften the hardest heart, to incline the most wicked heart, to sanctify the most sinful heart, to cause the most unbelieving heart to believe, and to preserve in the faith those who come to Him. No creature can move or stir without His will. The devil could not enter into the swine without His approval. Esau must kiss him whom he came to kill; a wrathful Laban could only speak friendly words; the ravens must bring bread and flesh, and the flour and the oil neither wasted nor failed—yes, and the oil increased until the poor widow had a sufficient supply. The dead were resurrected, the blind received their sight, the deaf their hearing, the dumb their speech, and the crippled received the ability to walk. In one word, nothing is too wonderful for Him. Believe this truth in a lively manner and believe in Him as the omnipotent One.

(12) The Lord Jesus is inexpressibly good. Even though He is the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, He nevertheless takes note of all who betake themselves to Him, and is of tender mercy toward wretched ones. He is good to the soul who seeks Him. He delights in mercy and it is His joy to comfort those that mourn, to counsel those who are at wits’ end, to teach and guide the ignorant, to strengthen the weak, to deliver those who are assaulted out of the hand of the mighty, and to bring back those who have gone astray—doing all this with unquestionable friendliness and longsuffering. A simultaneous consideration of His power and goodness yields a perfect foundation upon which to trust without fear.

(13) The Lord Jesus is faithful and He will not forsake the works

of His hands. He will finish the good work which He has begun in someone, and He does not cast away those who fall down, but strengthens their hands. He does not allow those who stray to continue, but instead He brings them back again. He is the Good Shepherd and the faithful High Priest. One may therefore entrust himself to Him, and abide peacefully in Him as in a safe hiding place, saying, "The Lord shall finish it for me."

The Personal Nature of Christ's Offer of Salvation to All Who Hear the Gospel

Thirdly, Christ offers you this complete fullness of salvation. This is a great matter transcending all adoration. The Lord does not do this to all men, and very few nations have this privilege. This is concealed from nearly the entire world. To you, however, it is revealed, and particularly to you who may live under the ministry of the gospel, may hear the Word of God preached, and may read His Word. As a sent servant of Christ and on His behalf I declare to all who read or hear this read, "Come; for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17); "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17); "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

Come therefore, you, the chief of sinners, or whoever you may be, and in whatever sin you may have lived until now, and ask me, "Does Christ also call me? May I come? Would Christ also be willing to accept and save me?" I answer you in Christ's Name, "Yes, He calls you and promises you that if you come and believe in Him, He will save you." In order that you might be further convinced, read what we have already said concerning this in chapter 30.

You are now convinced (which indeed you ought to be) that the Lord Jesus offers you grace and salvation, and calls you. I do not say to the unconverted, ungodly, and worldly-minded that Christ is your Savior and that you will be saved. On the contrary, I declare to you that He will eternally condemn you if you proceed in this way and die in such a state. I do say, however, that He invites you in a most congenial manner, and therefore you ought to rejoice in this great privilege of yours. You ought therefore to be the more earnest to go outside of yourself, forsake your ungodly life, turn to the Lord Jesus, receive Him by faith, surrender yourself to Him, and entrust yourself to Him, in order that He may convert you, reconcile you with God, sanctify you by His Spirit, and thus save you. Then I say, then will He accept you and grant you the desire of your soul. Therefore, if your heart has been somewhat moved,

neither tarry nor delay but go to Him as the prodigal son did. Act not as Lot's wife by turning back again to the world.

Fourthly, as Christ calls all of you, He likewise promises to all that He will neither send anyone away (whoever he or she may be), nor refuse His grace, who comes to Him to that end, but that He will receive them all. Hear and believe His express testimony, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37); "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). Search the entire Bible and take note whether He has ever refused grace to anyone or sent any away who came to Him in truth to be reconciled, sanctified, and saved. Then He will likewise also not reject you. Therefore, come!

Fifthly, He does not only call and invite you by the promise of salvation, but He also issues you a command. God, who has a right to issue you a command, says, "Hear Him" (Matt 17:5). Christ says to you, "Repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). In like manner the apostle speaks in His Name, "And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 3:23). It is therefore no optional matter, but you are under obligation. When you come and believe, you are obedient; and if you do not, you are disobedient to the Son, and woe unto that man who is disobedient to the voice of Christ!

The Exceeding Wickedness of not Believing in Christ

Sixthly, if you do not come and believe in Christ, you commit the most abominable of all sins, with the exception of the sin against the Holy Ghost and the express act of blasphemy towards God, for the following reasons:

(1) You deem the true God to be a liar. "He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son" (1 John 5:10). No one is so foolish that he would not desire his well-being and life itself. Man will seek this, even if it is in the things of this world. God, however, testifies that life and salvation are in His Son. Therefore not to avail yourself of the Son, and to seek your rest, joy, and delight in something else, is to say, "It is not true that life is to be found in the Son, that is, in Christ, but it is in the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life." Take note that in doing so you expressly accuse God of being a liar.

(2) You thereby despise Christ in His friendly invitation and offer relative to all that pertains to salvation. To despise someone who comes to help us is inhumane. To be evil because someone else is good is contrary to all civility. Think for a moment how intolerable

it is for Christ to be despised by a sinner, especially when considering that He comes to help in a most friendly manner.

(3) You are despising all true and heavenly benefits, and all that pertains to your salvation both here and forever. To kick with your feet against those benefits which alone are rich, genuine, glorious, delightful, satisfying, and eternal, is the work of one who is bereft of his senses and who is the most wicked person imaginable. You cannot but be convinced now that you must come and believe in Christ. If you refuse, be assured that you are guilty of a most abominable sin.

Know therefore that you will also bear the greatest of all punishments and will endure a most dreadful hell. Therefore hear your sentence, you who will neither repent nor believe: “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36); “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of (that is, who do not believe in) our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:8).

Seventhly, it is an extraordinary honor for the Lord Jesus to be so completely trusted by someone to receive wretched ones, to safely protect those who, persecuted by enemies, take refuge in Him, to satisfy the hungry one, and to bear those that are weak. Abraham conducted himself in this fashion. He “was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20).

Obstacles in Coming to Christ Identified and Removed

At this moment consider all these motives together, reflect upon them attentively, keep still, and permit the strength of these motives to affect your heart. May it please the Lord to translate you from the power of Satan and of darkness into His kingdom—yes, to bring you to Himself in order that here and forever you may live in communion with Him. What other reasons can be advanced to persuade a man? What hinders you, who at this moment are inwardly moved, to come to Christ?

Is it *ignorance*? Then be most diligent to become acquainted with Him. You have the means available to you; use them.

Is it *unwillingness*? Well, go on then, but it will be your own fault if you perish. Reflect upon the following passage and apply it to yourself; more dealings I shall not have with you. “As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones” (Ps 109:17-18).

Is it *fear*? Do you not dare? Examine yourself whether this is true

and whether “*I dare not*” is not really “*I will not*” and is thus laziness. This is as much as if someone lying in the water and in danger of drowning would not dare to accept an outstretched hand because the person was of too high a rank. Come, examine yourself as to what makes you fearful.

Are you too *sinful*? Can someone also be too filthy to be cleansed? You must know that in the salvation of man God intends to display His grace in such a magnificent manner that angels and man will be eternally amazed, and this adoration will constitute a portion of their salvation. The greater a sinner someone may be who in dismay comes to Christ, surrendering himself to Him for cleansing, relying upon and entrusting himself to Him, the more he honors God for His infinite grace and Christ for the perfection of His merits. Therefore, delight yourself in magnifying God. May God’s objective in saving a sinner move you to be desirous of being saved. Attentively reflect upon the following texts: “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6); “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all” (Rom 11:32); “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom 5:20). Do you now see that you must not stay away because of the multitude and greatness of your sins, but must be moved to come? “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim 1:15).

Do you not dare because your *broken-heartedness is insufficient*? Do you imagine within yourself that you must have a certain degree of humility and must thus be sore broken, sensibly convicted, have a clear knowledge of Christ, and must hunger and thirst to such and such a degree before you may come to Christ?

Then I answer, “Away with such imaginations, for this is not according to God’s Word.” The prerequisites upon which one may or may not come are not to be brokenhearted, to be desirous, to have knowledge, and to hunger and thirst; rather, these are only necessary because one neither will nor can come without them. If you then have been moved to such a degree that you would be willing to surrender yourself for the reasons mentioned—to be justified, sanctified, and saved—come forward with boldness, receive Him, and surrender yourself to Him. If you were to lie upon your deathbed and have a lively sense of the seriousness of your situation, you would not ask, “May I,” but you would rather go forward and say, “I must have Him or else I perish.”

Question: May one, upon being convicted and being desirous for Christ, immediately go to Christ at the very outset?

Answer: Yes, you may go at once, for apart from Him you will neither become better nor more suitable to believe in Him, but you will be in danger that your conviction will pass.

A Final Word to True Believers

True believers, you who may have the root of faith within you, I yet wish to exhort you with a word or two. It grieves me that you make so little progress in faith, and trust so little in Christ. It grieves me that when trusting you are so little exercised with the promises and are so infrequently engaged in reflecting upon God's perfections in Christ.

Many are slow of heart to believe and frequently neglect the exercises of faith. Intermissions are frequent and of long duration, albeit that faith is not entirely absent, for faith does not cease. Sometimes it occurs that the godly are overwhelmed and are swept away by the lusts of the flesh, laziness, or lack of desire. Sometimes it is due to discouragement, fearing that they will prove to be no partakers of Christ, or at times due to the violent assaults of Satan. It can also be due to ignorance concerning the nature of faith, they being of the opinion that faith consists in the assurance of being a child of God and in the sensible enjoyment of the mercies of God. Such, when they come to the right place again, are continually tampering with their spiritual state, and some are peevish, being continually engaged in seeking for evidence that they are without grace, as if they had obtained a great victory by excluding themselves from grace and from Christ. Be it known to all, however, that you sin very grievously and stand in your own way as far as running your course with joy and holiness is concerned. This is the cause of your self-inflicted melancholy; this is the reason you remain so entangled in material things and that you neither glorify God privately nor in the presence of others.

Therefore, believers, you have stumbled along for too great a length of time, and you have learned to your own detriment that you are making no progress in this way.

(1) Give diligence to increase in faith. To that end read and reread what we have stated above concerning the nature of faith, so that you may have a clear conception of it as consisting in: setting your heart upon Jesus; giving yourself and your salvation into the hands of Jesus; entrusting yourself to Him and relying upon Him; resting and leaning upon Him; allowing yourself to be borne by Him; and letting Him care for you in all things in order that He may justify, sanctify, and save your soul, since He is omnipotent, faithful, true, and wise. What can be more appropriate,

safer, and Christ-glorifying than that? Reflect upon what we have stated concerning the objective of faith. In doing so, you will perceive how God and Christ are glorified and how, in believing, one gives glory to Him for His righteousness, love for humanity, grace, wisdom, omnipotence, truth, faithfulness, efficacious atonement, and all-sufficiency.

Reflect also upon what we have said previously concerning the fruits of faith—how that faith when in exercise engenders peace and joy within the soul, gives boldness to approach unto God, causes the soul to live in continual union with God, translates and preserves him in the state of spiritual childhood, purifies the heart, conquers the world and the devil, and brings forth a diversity of good works as well as gratitude.

When attentively reflecting upon these matters, it cannot but be that the soul in which the root of faith is to be found will receive wings to take refuge under the shadow of Christ's wings, and there entrust herself to Him. Proceed therefore, entrusting everything to Him, and from this moment forward be neither anxious nor fearful for the future and about the outcome of specific cases, for He cares for you and will make all things well. It is all in the hand of an omnipotent, faithful, good, and wise Jesus. It is a particular delight to Him if one thus puts his trust in Him, casts all upon Him, and may rest in doing so.

(2) While believing in Christ, make continual use of the promises of which you have become an heir, which are all yea and amen in Christ. In whatever situations you may be, according to either soul or body, seek for a promise which is applicable to such a situation and acknowledge it as infallible truth. Then apply it to yourself as having been made to you, encourage your heart with it, rejoice in it, and with assurance await its fulfillment. You will thus glorify God and with courage endure all tribulations.

By faith go to God Himself so that you may continually live in His communion and in reflecting upon His attributes, the view of which constitutes eternal felicity. In doing so, however, do not think that in having become a partaker of Christ by faith, you may now bypass Him and consider this as something that has passed. This also must not be understood as if from now on one should exercise immediate fellowship with God and only be engaged in the work of sanctification, and not imagine that this would be a higher state of a Christian. No, this is by no means the case. It is true that the soul does not always need to begin from the beginning in his dealings with Christ; he must nevertheless continually make use of Christ. He must not only do so when he has sinned

and thereby receive peace and reconciliation again through Him, but also when reflecting upon the attributes of God. This is spiritual growth, and the highest degree of perfection consists in an increased beholding of the attributes of God in both Christ and in His work of redemption relative to a sinner. This the apostle teaches in the following passages: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18), “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Thus believing and living by that faith, one will go forth from strength to strength until he will enter into glory. There he will no longer live by faith but will be occupied with beholding. There, faith and hope will be done away, and perfect love will endure. Amen.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Distinguishing Marks of Saving Faith

Faith is the soul of Christianity; whoever is in error here, errs unto his eternal damnation. Many, having a false notion concerning this, perish with a false peace; others spend their days in sorrow, being fearful that they do not possess true faith, whereas, being true believers, they have reason to go on their way rejoicing. It is therefore necessary to distinguish in the clearest possible manner between true and temporal faith. May the Lord grant me grace and ability to do so.

We have done so briefly in the previous chapter, as much as the explanation of the nature of faith necessitated this. For the purpose of self-examination, however, further explanation and application are necessary. Thus we promised to treat this subject more extensively in this chapter.

One should not imagine that true faith and temporal faith resemble each other so closely that they can scarcely be distinguished from each other, merely differing in degree and duration. They differ from each other in their essential nature. The difference between them is comparable to the difference between death and life, light and darkness. The difficulty in distinguishing between them is to be found in man, however, and in the manner in which he discriminates in applying this to himself. A true believer, having received light to distinguish between various matters, can be more readily convinced that he possesses true faith than a temporal believer of the contrary. For the temporal believer is ignorant of the true essence and unique nature of saving faith, even though he is able to discourse about it on the basis of God's Word, as well as by means of what he has read and heard from God's children who have spoken or written about it.

We wish to pursue this further and demonstrate, 1) the necessity of self-examination; 2) the various types of people to be considered in reference to self-examination; 3) several false foundations upon which some put themselves at ease, but who will perish forever; 4) the fundamental nature of true faith in its origin, essence, and fruit.

The Necessity of Self-Examination

Whoever you are, as you read or hear this read, I ask you—give your answer to an omniscient God—what do you say about yourself? Are you a true believer or not? Come, search yourself closely and examine yourself, for:

First, you are at this present moment either a child of God or a child of Satan; you cannot be both at once nor can you be neutral, as there is no third option. Impress this upon your heart, regardless of how prominent or despised you are, or how blessed or wretched you are. Is it not worth the effort to examine yourself as to who you are? Should one be careless in such a weighty matter? For such is the practice of foolish virgins, upon whose end we should reflect.

Secondly, not those who are baptized, and not all who attend church and partake of the Lord's Supper are true believers. Yes, only a few, and by far the smallest number of them are true believers on the way to eternal felicity. Think of a multitude as you would find in the marketplace where people can be seen mingling together as ants—or as you would find gathered in a filled church. While doing so consider the following: Simon the sorcerer was baptized (Acts 8:13); the guest without the wedding garment sat at the table (Matt 22:11); half of the virgins were foolish (Matt 25:2). Only few are chosen (Matt 20:16). Only few find the narrow way and enter through the narrow gate, while there are many who are on the broad way who, through the wide gate, run to their damnation (Matt 7:13-14). And thus our focus is upon *you*—and should you not ask yourself what hope you are entertaining about yourself? “Lord, is it I” (Matt 26:22); “Master, is it I” (vs. 25).

Thirdly, it is most detrimental to neglect self-examination and the searching of one's heart. Such neglect holds man captive in the sleep of carelessness. It causes him to waste time. It renders the means of grace useless and impotent. It hardens his heart against all the threatenings and judgments of God. It holds him captive to the world and to sin; yes, it is the key whereby he closes heaven and opens hell for himself.

Fourthly, self-examination is very beneficial. It causes one to become conscious of the evils which dwell in the heart. It causes

one to become acquainted with the avenging justice of God. It causes one to become concerned, frightened, and perplexed. It causes one to flee to Jesus for justification and sanctification. It causes one to become serious in heart. And if one may perceive grace, light, life, and faith, it cannot be expressed what joy this generates in the heart and what a strengthening effect this has! It repeatedly provides a person with new courage; he receives more liberty in prayer and he becomes acquainted with the ways in which God deals with souls. It gladdens his heart and it has a sanctifying influence upon all his actions. “And every man that has this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Fifthly, to neglect this self-examination due to laziness, discouragement, or despair, robs a person of all comfort and joy, obstructs his growth, and denies God His honor. Therefore, examine yourself frequently, and often give answer to the question, “Simon, lovest thou Me” (John 21:17).

It is also God’s express command; whoever neglects this, not surrendering to His will, is disobedient toward God. How can such a person prosper? “Let us search and try our ways” (Lam 3:40); “Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired” (Zeph 2:1).²⁵ “Let a man examine himself” (1 Cor 11:28); “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates” (2 Cor 13:5).

Submit to the counsel and command of God, and you will prosper.

Sixthly, it is possible for one to come to the knowledge of his spiritual state—whether one is in the covenant of grace with God, and whether or not one is a believer. To imagine that such is impossible causes a decline in serious concern about spiritual matters and therefore I wish to state that it is possible for one to know this. The bride knew that Jesus was hers: “My Beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song 2:16). “For I know that my Redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25); “... and thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob” (Isa 60:16). “For I am persuaded,” etc. (Rom 8:38). “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor 2:12). “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live” (Gal 2:20).

Thus it should be noted that it is possible for a person to be

²⁵ A literal rendering of Statenvertaling reads, “Search yourself closely, yea closely, O nation void of desire.”

assured. Therefore, strive to attain to such assurance. It is also possible, however, for a natural man to be convinced that he is still in an unregenerate state.

Seventhly, even though it is possible to come to this realization by the grace of the Holy Spirit, not every one does. Many thousands will go to hell who imagine that they will enter heaven. There will also be many, however, who will enter heaven who feared that they would not arrive there. And even those who at times may stand strong, can readily become weak and come into darkness. “In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by Thy favor Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled” (Ps 30:6-7).

In some true partakers of the covenant of grace there is still much darkness, so that they do not have a clear perception of what constitutes sufficient light and life. Although they know this when considering it divorced from themselves, and would be capable of stating this clearly to others, they nevertheless lack sufficient light to observe these graces in themselves. Moreover, so much of the old man yet remains in them—a fact upon which they focus to such an extent that they question whether this can coexist with grace—that they live between hope and fear. Hence they are poor, even though they possess much that is good. Others have good opinions of themselves, but they deceive themselves miserably. “There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Prov 30:12). Consider, therefore, how necessary it is that we scrutinize our hearts and examine ourselves as to who and how we are.

Various Forms of Self-Deceit Identified and False Foundations Exposed

To be of assistance in this matter, I shall describe several spiritual frames, so that you may examine yourself as to what sort of person you are.

First, there are people who neither have knowledge, nor desire, nor do they meditate upon or have discussions about God, heaven, hell, the soul, the covenant, the Mediator, faith, or conversion. Their thoughts do not transcend this earth and do not penetrate beyond that which is visible; of invisible things they cannot speak a word. Is the soul immortal? Is there a heaven and a hell? This they will discover after their death; in the meantime they passively wait for where God will send them. They leave the matter to God, as it is not for them to search this out. They who have the privilege

to go to heaven will then be well off; the others necessarily entertain a good hope about themselves. What fools you are!

Secondly, others know very well that they are ungodly, worldly, and unregenerate; they admit freely that if they continue in this manner, they cannot be saved. Yet there is no evidence of emotion or sorrow, neither is there an earnest determination to forsake their sinful life and to be converted; they are bewitched and possessed of Satan. They do not wish to focus upon their heart and spiritual condition, knowing quite well what the results would be. This could cause them to be distraught and fearful, which is something they do not desire. They do not wish to hear about sorrow, nor do they wish to hear the “jabbering” of ministers who, either from the pulpit or in private, uncover their sins; they do not wish to have the lid removed from this pot. They hate those who rebuke them, as in Isa 30:9-11, “This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.” Such have already condemned themselves, and they will be judged by that which proceeds from their heart and mouth.

Thirdly, others are not as ungodly; they are good-natured, have a meek character, and are externally religious. Nevertheless they are aware that they do not possess spiritual life, are not indwelt by the Spirit, have no communion with God, nor have faith, but are living for that which is visible. They are fully convinced that they are without grace, but it does not trouble their heart very much. There is no earnest concern, no anxiety; and even if occasionally there is an inclination truly to repent, a bosom sin will hinder them, and they will depart from this inclination with a sigh, choosing the things of this world as the young ruler, of whom it is written, “He went away sorrowful” (Matt 19:22).

Fourthly, others come even a step closer, having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet 2:20). They join the fellowship of the godly, and are active in many things, as Herod in Mark 6:20. However, they do not come to an ultimate conclusion concerning their spiritual state. They leave this unresolved as they do not know what it is. Yes, they complain much about their spiritual poverty to the God-fearing, and speak of a great fear that they have not been regenerated. Their secret objective is to gain the respect, love, and pity of the godly, however; for if someone ventures to deal faithfully with

them, declaring to them that they still appear to be in a natural state, rather than being regenerate, they become offended and change their manner of expression in an effort to defend themselves. The outcome often reveals that they have deceived others and have kept themselves from being genuinely concerned. Among such there are, however, also those who are very concerned and fearful, living in anxiety with this conviction during their entire lifetime. They nevertheless remain who they are—without Spirit and life.

Fifthly, there are others who have great thoughts about the state of their heart. They “know” that all is well with them as far as their relationship with God is concerned; they will most certainly be saved. There is no doubt in their mind about this. Even if all ministers would unite, they would not succeed in taking away this faith and assurance from them. However, what foundation do these people have? Some have no foundation at all; others rest upon false foundations. Others appear to rest upon a true foundation, but they appropriate it to themselves unjustly, thereby deceiving themselves. Such we now wish to identify, while simultaneously demonstrating to the true partakers of the covenant of grace that their case is different from these.

Sixthly, others claim assurance without any foundation. These are generally ignorant people who neither have knowledge of God, the Mediator, the Spirit, nor of spiritual life. They comprehend that hell is a terrible place and they have no desire to be there. They reason that such a reality would cause them to be too ill at ease. Because it appears too melancholy to them, they imagine within themselves that it will not be necessary for them to come there. Since after death they wish to be in their imagined or so-called heaven, they are of the opinion that they will arrive there. Being confident of this, they continue their life upon earth. Such people are sleeping at the very edge of hell and are often not awakened until, too late, they open their eyes in hell (cf. Luke 16:23).

It is indeed true that many godly persons whose knowledge is limited are assured by the Spirit of God in their hearts, and yet cannot relate the basis for their assurance. They have a basis, however, even though they cannot relate it to others. They are able to perceive and experience what others are able to express, for they know that during the enjoyment of their assurance they have communion with God in Christ. Such persons we shall describe more particularly in the conclusion of this chapter.

Seventhly, others assure themselves upon false foundations, living in the state of nature and for that which is visible. They quiet their conscience, or prevent themselves from becoming uneasy by

referring to many self-defined and self-made marks of grace. Among those marks the following are most prominent:

(1) God is gracious and merciful, and how could He bring Himself to punish His creatures so severely, especially if they plead with Him for mercy? He who prays will receive; he who knocks, to him it will be opened.

Answer: Know that “God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (Ps 73:1); “The face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (Ps 34:16); the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to God; and in John 9:31 it is recorded, “God heareth not sinners”; “Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear” (Isa 1:15). The foolish virgins in Matt 25 knocked and also called, but were not given entrance. In Prov 1:28 it is stated, “Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer.” God’s grace does not consist in allowing sin to go unpunished, but in the gift of a Surety, as well as in granting a person faith and repentance.

(2) Christ has died for us all; if we have sin, we are again reconciled in Him.

Answer: This is not true; Christ gives eternal life to His sheep; however, there are those who do not belong to His sheep (John 10:26-27). “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9). If the foregoing presupposition were true, how is it possible that the goats on His left hand will be condemned?

(3) I do not live such an ungodly life; I have been baptized; I partake of the Lord’s Supper; I diligently go to church; I am upright in my conversation; I do not curse; I do not party; I am not boastful; I read God’s Word; I say my prayers. What more can you ask of me? If one cannot be saved in this manner, who then can be saved? Then many will remain outside of heaven.

Answer: Why not add to this: I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess; or: Oh God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are (Luke 18:12, 11). I declare to you that such individuals are in hell by the thousands, and that such will still arrive there by the thousands, and that you who build on this foundation will also go there. Therefore, repent, before it is too late. “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20); “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10); “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10).

(4) God blesses me very abundantly, which I consider as a sign that He loves me.

Answer: “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power” (Job 21:7). “Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places” (Ps 73:18); “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them” (Prov 1:32). Did not the rich man receive that which is good in this life? Nevertheless his end was in hell (Luke 16:25).

(5) God chastises me, and I have much sorrow and adversity in my life. I believe that God chastises those whom He loves. I must suffer so much here in order that I need not suffer in the hereafter.

Answer: God chastises His children in order that they may become partakers of His holiness, but He punishes the ungodly in His wrath. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa 57:21). The miseries of the ungodly are often the beginning of eternal damnation. Far be it from us, therefore, that we should deduce God’s love from external tribulations. Thus, you can see that all these things are not a basis upon which one may conclude what his spiritual state is, and imagine salvation for himself. If you have been resting on these foundations, you have deceived yourself. Therefore, awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.

Eighthly, others deceive themselves, who, even though they hold to proper and sound marks of grace, appropriate them unjustly to themselves, even though these matters are not to be found in them. The marks of grace which they generally posit are as follows: sorrow over sin and the birth pangs of regeneration; faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the joy of the Spirit ensuing from this, as well as repentance and a sanctified walk of life.

Initially we may say of such individuals:

(1) They do not sincerely examine themselves. They do not unpretentiously come into the presence of God, being concerned with self-deception, praying with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps 139:23-24). Rather, the determination of their own spiritual state passes quickly from their minds, as they do not dare to suspect themselves. In response to a glimmer of that which appears to be good, they entertain good thoughts about themselves, however, and they speak with a liberty which transcends the true condition of their heart. They are accustomed to focus upon matters in a manner divorced from their own condition, discussing them passionately without any reflection upon their own heart. The upright in heart, on the contrary, must generally cope with much internal anxiety.

(2) The foundations upon which they build, consistent with the manner in which they determine their spiritual state, are only superficial and spurious. Their sorrow, faith, and sanctification do

not proceed from the heart, but only from a general intellectual notion, manifesting themselves only externally, being merely the fruit of a natural disposition. Their case does not go beyond the surface, neither do their concerns, sorrows, and desires; they maintain themselves by thinking and speaking of the matters themselves such as faith, hope, and love, and the essential nature of each. They will also speak about the condition of the church, complaining of the lack of spirituality, as well as failures to be discerned in others, etc. In these matters, which relate to all that is external, they are generally first to express themselves most vehemently. The subject matter being spiritual in nature, they delight to speak seriously about these things.

However, the objective of true believers is to discern and experience these matters in their hearts. Their desires are after God, and their eyes and hearts are focused upon Him. Spiritual matters lead them to God; and if such is not the case, true believers do not find delight in them. They cannot be content with these matters as such.

(3) Temporal believers do not examine themselves sincerely; they also do not wish to be exposed by others. When the marks of grace are presented from the pulpit, they do not apply them to themselves. They do not give heed or do so only for the purpose of learning, in order that they may be able to present these matters to others, and thus be esteemed for their wisdom, spirituality, and experience. When they do pay careful attention, they have others in mind, thinking that this applies to such and such an individual and that he should take this to heart. Hence, they become more and more established in this frame of mind, and this in turn makes them all the more careless. If, however, someone deals with such temporal believers in an earnest and most personal manner, exposing them in such a manner that they cannot remain concealed, they become unpleasant, defend themselves most vehemently, and seek to take away from the love and esteem such upright individuals may enjoy. Whereas such temporal believers were able to maintain a reputation for godliness while traversing upon the broad way, thereby creating the distinct impression of being wise, they will now readily depart from the right way as such people are very much motivated by the objective of having the love and esteem of others.

Those who truly fear God, however, are very desirous to be uncovered. The uncovering of their failures and the sinful condition of their soul is something most valuable to them. It causes them to rejoice within, even though at times they perceive that their flesh initially resists such discovery. "Let the righteous smite

me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil” (Ps 141:5). And if such discovery makes them conscious that God has glorified His grace in them, they not only rejoice over this, but it draws them in a sweet manner to God. They perceive within themselves a revival of faith and love as well as a sincere resolution to live a more godly life. “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself” (1 John 3:3).

Having stated this generally by way of introduction, let us now focus in particular upon each spiritual foundation, so that we may discern more clearly between temporal and true believers.

Temporal and True Believers Distinguished in Their Sorrow over Sin

The first matter is sorrow over sin. The temporal believer reasons as follows: “Scripture states, ‘Blessed are they that mourn’ (Matt 5:4). God dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit and will revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa 57:15). Well, I am sorrowful, and I am disturbed when I have sinned; I have experienced much strife and anxiety. Therefore I consider myself to be a child of God, to be included in the covenant of grace, and to be a believer.”

My response is that not all sorrow within man proceeds from spiritual light and life, and therefore not all sorrow is of the right sort—the sort to which the promise of salvation and comfort is attached. Paul speaks of a godly sorrow and a sorrow of the world (2 Cor 7:10). Consider Saul for instance: “... Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil ... the Lord reward thee good” (1 Sam 24:16-17, 19); “Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm” (1 Sam 26:21). Notice that he accuses himself, he confesses his crime, he weeps, and he wishes God’s blessing upon the one who rebuked him—nevertheless he remained Saul. Consider also Ahab: “And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (1 Kings 21:27).

See how he displayed sorrow to the greatest degree, appeared to succumb to this sorrow, and fasted. And did not Esau seek the place of repentance with sorrow when he heard that he had lost his blessing? He sought to persuade his father by means of tears to rescind the blessing, and to bless him instead (Heb 12:17). And was not Judas remorseful? (Matt 27:3). Are you of the opinion that these were external and in appearance only? I am of the opinion

that it was most definitely heartfelt. Are you of the opinion that you may have comfort and peace in your soul because you once wept and prayed? Saul also wept. The natural man who lives under the ministry of the gospel—however ungodly he may be—will in times of perplexity and anxiety within his conscience also weep and pray. Upon weeping he will feel some relief, for weeping physically relieves inner anxiety. Papists experience a wonderful peace after they have been to confession, because they believe they have received complete absolution. Such is also the case with an individual who in his sorrow has humbled himself, and has confessed his sins; he believes that they are forgiven, thinking that God has seen his tears and heard his prayers. Or if by means of other pretenses, he has pacified himself so that he has become much more peaceful, he hopes that all will now be well. From the foregoing you should therefore be convinced that sorrow and weeping cannot be the basis upon which to determine your spiritual state. The crucial issue is the *cause* of this sorrow, the manner in which this sorrow is experienced, as well as the spiritual frame of the soul associated with this sorrow.

The causes of sorrow in unregenerate persons are as follows: Some are sorrowful as a result of depression and are naturally inclined toward melancholy. Regardless of the origin of their depression, these individuals will be sorrowful and despondent while dealing with spiritual matters such as salvation and sin. These individuals are identifiable by the fact that they cannot give a reason for, nor do they strive to be delivered from, this sorrow; they always remain the same unless their melancholy mood lifts temporarily. Then, without reason, they vacillate too far to the other extreme, talking excessively in a state of exhilaration, being joyous for no apparent reason. Such will assure themselves of their salvation, even though most often they live in fear.

Some are sorrowful for fear of damnation. Their conscience becomes active, focusing upon their sinful life, the justice of God, and the dreadfulness of damnation. This anxiety will not allow them to sleep, but causes them to complain, weep, and cry. At that moment such will not assure themselves; however, after the experience passes, some will take this for evidence that they have experienced the birth pangs of regeneration, that they are converted, that they have won the battle, and this then gives them peace. But to such we say, that if this did not result in true repentance and faith, then your fear and trembling were no better than that of Felix (Acts 24:25). Then you have trembled as the devil

does (James 2:19), and you would thus deceive yourself if such were the basis upon which you determine your spiritual state.

Some are moved, and cry, only because they are affected by the dramatic motions and the manner of exhortation utilized by the minister, as well as the fact that others are stirred. They also become heavy-hearted, which causes them to weep as well. Such was the case in the days of Nehemiah: “For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law” (Neh 8:9).

Some are sorrowful, because in committing sin they have brought themselves into disgrace with the people, they have suffered loss so that they come in a condition of poverty and trouble, or they fear the retribution of the government. This causes much inner anxiety, and such a situation can generate melancholy thoughts pertaining to salvation.

Some are sorrowful over sin in view of its magnitude. It was committed against the light of nature, in spite of a tender conscience, contrary to a good upbringing—all of which troubles them. If it involves another person, they feel sorrow for the trouble they have caused that person. Such would be the case with someone who has murdered his father, and who would always feel remorse. This could also be experienced with sins of a lesser nature. To make a conclusion on the basis of such sorrow that one is in the state of grace is also erroneous, for even the heathen experience sorrow and are pricked in their conscience (Rom 2:14-15).

You who gauge your spiritual state by the degree or intensity of your perplexity and sorrow, consider if your experience is consistent with what has just been stated about this matter. I urge you to awake, for you are deceiving yourself, as has now been demonstrated.

To convince you even further, while simultaneously communicating to the mourners in Zion about the grace which they possess, let us now consider the causes and characteristics of sorrow which are to be found only in the children of God. I preface this by stating that what has been said about sorrow in the above, can also be found in those who truly fear God. In addition to this, however, they experience also different matters and spiritual frames.

First, true sorrow pertains to sin as *sin*; that is, the godly see beyond the deed itself. They bring themselves into the presence of God and mourn before His countenance. They perceive that they have sinned against the goodness and holiness of God, having violated the relationship which existed between the creature and the Creator. They perceive that they have acted contrary to the fear, love, and obedience to which they were obliged before God. Even if in their sorrow they are not able to distinguish these

matters so clearly, this reality is nevertheless to be found in their heart. This grieves them and makes them tenderhearted. Even if at times they cannot believe with assurance that they have been accepted as children, there is nevertheless a secret yearning for God. It burdens them to have sinned against God. They acquiesce in the justice of God if it would please Him to punish them. Their sentence is experienced in their heart as a heavy chastisement: Behold, “against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest” (Ps 51:4).

Secondly, true sorrow does not only concern itself with sinful deeds and greater sins, but also with lesser sins, neglect of duty, absence of holy motives in the exercise of duty, and with indecent, vain, and sinful thoughts which are even contrary to their will. Yes, it pertains to our sinful nature, wickedness, instability, and thus our impotence to make any improvements in the future. At the occasion of sin committed one considers himself entirely sinful within and without, and in view of this exclaims with perplexity and sorrow, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5); “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing. ... O wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:18, 24a).

Thirdly, true sorrow is related to the absence of communion with God and to a yearning for this communion. The believer’s sorrow is indeed caused by sin, but it reaches beyond this. Even if the soul is not conscious of a particular sin, she is often sorrowful, and if you would ask the question, “Woman, why weepest thou” (John 20:15), the heart would be ready to answer: Because the Lord is absent. It is because I am so estranged from God and because the Lord hides Himself from me. In such a condition I cannot live; it is so dark within, and I am so sinful. Oh, that I were as in former days! Why does the Lord hide His countenance from me, while He perceives that it causes me to languish? Oh, that my heart would be more steadfast toward Him, that I would be more diligent and persevering in prayer, that I would fear Him more tenderly. “Oh when wilt Thou come unto me” (Ps 101:2). “For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the Comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me” (Lam 1:16); “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:2).

Fourthly, true sorrow tends to become more intense and spiritual in nature. The sorrow of the temporal believer will readily disappear, since it is only related to various deeds or some moments of anxiety. The temporal believer seeks to evade this sorrow, either by means of diversion, or by countering it with appropriate

words of Scripture, or it is worn away by time. True believers, on the contrary, complain often, and mourn over the hardness and insensitivity of their heart. If only they could be truly contrite, perceive the wickedness of sin and God's wrath toward them, and thus be truly humbled in the dust. Such is their wish. If they do not perceive such motions within, they become sorrowful and complain, "O Lord, why hast Thou made us to err from Thy ways, and hardened our heart from Thy fear" (Isa 63:17). They are, however, not satisfied merely to have a sorrow of this nature, but they desire spiritual improvement from it, namely, that they may find themselves before the countenance of the Lord with their filthy garments (Zech 3:3). They desire to be filled with shame before the Lord's countenance, so that they do not dare to lift up their eyes, or draw near. Standing afar off with the publican in Luke 18:13, they confess what is expressed in Ezra 9:6, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." They wish to sink away, with the prodigal son, in their unworthiness before the countenance of the Lord (Luke 15:19). They desire an evangelical sorrow; that is, a melting away in tears of love, in a sorrow over sin which proceeds from this love. They desire to justify God, and thus to silently submit themselves to the chastising hand of the Lord, saying, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him" (Mic 7:9). They desire to mourn as a child rather than as a slave and to trust in His grace. They will not and cannot cease to mourn until they may perceive some hope of reconciliation with God and some peace of conscience in Christ.

Fifthly, true sorrow works repentance. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Cor 7:10). This does not mean that true believers are immediately victorious over sin, and will never fall into the same sin again, but by virtue of this sorrow there comes an ever-increasing hatred against sin. They make sincere resolutions against sin in the presence of God and continually resume the battle against it; they receive a holy disposition of soul.

If these matters are not truly found in you, be assured that your sorrow is not of the right kind. You have never experienced the birth pangs of regeneration. Do not view such false sorrow as evidence of your renewed state, but be assured that you are still in the state of nature. If these things are truly found in you, be careful not to deny or minimize this grace. Even if at the present time you do not possess the matters mentioned before to such a degree as

you may have in the past, or as others possess them, or as you wished you possessed them, you may have some assurance that God has granted life to you. Wherever this true sorrow is to be found, however, the two subsequent experienced marks of grace will also be found.

Temporal and True Believers Distinguished in the Exercise of Faith

The second mark of a true believer and partaker of the covenant of grace, in contrast to a temporal believer and presumptuous partaker of the covenant, is derived from faith itself. Faith is a sure mark of him who is a true partaker of the covenant and an heir of salvation. However, not all who think they have faith are possessors of true saving faith. In order to examine everyone in this regard, we must first describe the spiritual frame of a temporal believer, and then present the spiritual frame of a true believer.

I now address myself to those who feel assured within themselves that they are possessors of true faith, and not to those who are doubtful and concerned. I ask you: Is it in truth? Are you possibly deceiving yourself? Consider seriously in your heart that people can sadly deceive themselves in this matter, for not all that bears the name of faith is true faith. We read that Agrippa believed the prophets and was nevertheless a heathen (Acts 26:27). The devils themselves believe (James 2:19). Simon the sorcerer also believed, and yet he had neither part nor lot in the matter of salvation (Acts 8:13, 21, 23). Those which were sown upon stony ground are called believers; however, their faith was only for a time (Luke 8:13). Thus, we see how dangerous it is to pacify oneself with something which bears the name of faith. For this reason one must examine himself closely whether he possess a true faith or one that is false and presumptuous.

First, those who only have a presumptuous, historical, or temporal faith, have some measure of knowledge of God, Christ, Scripture, and spiritual matters. However, with this knowledge they contemplate these things in an outward manner, divorced from any heart-acquaintance. These matters have never become reality within their hearts, nor have they made an impression upon their hearts. The truth of Scripture is not true within their hearts. Their thoughts, concerns, desires, and activities are not governed by a desire to have those contemplated matters in their hearts. They have no desire to be changed into that image (2 Cor 3:18). They view these matters as some would view the extravagant palace and gardens of a prince. They forget themselves and delight themselves in the contemplation of it, meanwhile having no thoughts, concerns,

desires—nor expending any energy—to make it their possession. Whether it is their possession is neither their concern, nor the focus of their thinking at the moment.

Secondly, those who only have a presumptuous faith are assured—the one less and the other more—of the spiritual truths that there is a God, that Christ is the Savior, that salvation is to be obtained in Him, and that outside of Him condemnation must be expected. Being conscious of these truths, they believe them. There are those who are only somewhat assured of these and similar truths, who nevertheless speak boastfully and with much liberty. Others are so assured of the reality of these truths that they would die for them. By frequent contemplation upon and discussion of these things, they condition themselves to believe that they are partakers of them, since they are so firmly assured of these matters. However, they again bypass their heart. There are no earnest and straightforward transactions with God and with Christ to receive Him by faith, seek for His indwelling in the heart, and truly and unconditionally surrender oneself to Him. Their hearts remain hearts of stone (Matt 13:20). Since they believe these truths externally, however, as well as by reason of being assured of this, they conclude and imagine that these truths are an internal reality and that they are true believers.

Thirdly, a temporal believer is certainly conscious of a witness in his heart that he is a believer, and he does possess gladness and joy. However, it is his own spirit or an evil spirit which testifies to him that he believes. Either his joy is of his own making, or the excellency of the spiritual matter upon which he has meditated has made him joyful.

He rarely reflects upon himself, being concerned with the external. Due to his perception of and belief in the truth, even if he does reflect upon himself, he yet does not dare to be suspicious of himself and does not examine himself. He is of the opinion that he would sin if he were to doubt his spiritual state. He perceives in one moment that all is well with him; that is, that he is a true believer. He considers these matters and their preciousness, and believes them. Should not he desire to embrace them? Thus he reasons. He considers the promises, but fails to consider the qualifications of those to whom the promises are made. Thus, his own spirit witnesses that he is a child of God.

How deceitfully Satan operates at times, stimulating the imagination to such a degree that it appears to the temporal believer that he experiences the joy of heaven in his heart! Yet it is nothing but a sensory stimulation, void of substance and communion with

God. Humbleness of heart and love toward God are absent. At best there is some contemplation about spiritual mysteries and the riches of God's children, as was the case with the Queen of the South who nearly fainted when she observed the wisdom and riches of Solomon—riches of which she was not a partaker.

With courage the temporal believer journeys on; he has no strife or wrestlings to believe and remain steadfast. He is assured, although he does not wish to hear his conscience which occasionally confronts him with the truth, and therefore he silences it.

Thus, temporal believers possess a faith which is but a waking dream, an imagination, a gazing upon the truth and preciousness of spiritual matters, a rejoicing in promises which were not made to them. There is no searching of the heart; neither are there sincere and earnest transactions with God and Christ. Temporal faith is an intellectual whim, a figment of the imagination, superficial and presumptuous in nature, without uprightness of heart, and without these truths having taken root downward in the heart. This does not mean that everything which temporal believers see, think, and do, is hypocritical in nature and is done against better knowledge. In fact, they are of the opinion that it is truth within, and that their spiritual state is certainly well. They deceive themselves. They dream and are of the opinion that they are awake, but they are in a condition from which they cannot be aroused. Concerning this condition of temporal believers we read, "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself" (Matt 13:20-21). "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb 6:4-6).

Let us now compare to this the spiritual frame of the true believer for the purpose of fully identifying true as well as temporal believers—for the one in reference to the genuineness of saving grace, and for the other in reference to his imagined attainment. In true believers the following matters manifest themselves:

First, by faith true believers frequently receive the Lord Jesus with their heart. They receive Jesus by faith rather than indulging themselves in speculating about doctrinal issues and saving benefits. They go to the fountain itself and are engaged in transactions with God and Christ Himself. To Him they turn, Him they desire, for Him they long, Him they receive, upon Him they rely, to Him they surrender themselves, to Him they desire to be united—all

by faith. How they desire to be exercised in the acts of faith which we described in the previous chapter, and thus remain consciously united to Him! God and Christ are the focus of their spiritual activity, be it sometimes weaker and at other times stronger. Such is also the testimony of Holy Writ, "As many as received Him" (John 1:12); "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).

They receive the Lord Jesus with their heart. Their activity is neither external nor intellectual in nature, but proceeds from within. Their heart mourns, longs, believes, surrenders, and is conscious of what is lacking within. They examine the condition of their heart, and in such a frame of mind, they engage in seeking to have the Lord Jesus in their heart. All that does not proceed from the heart they consider of no value; it grieves them and they can find no delight in it. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom 10:10); "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph 3:17).

They frequently, if not a thousand times, receive the Lord Jesus by faith. They always believe that their reception of Him has not been as unreserved as it ought to have been and that it has not been with sufficient clarity and sincerity; it was not as wholehearted as it ought to have been. This receiving of Him is their daily food and very therefore they repeat it over and over, not so much with the objective to be included in the covenant of grace, but with the objective to be more and more intimately united with Christ. They are motivated by their daily failures to do so, as they perceive that without Him they cannot approach unto God. The desire for rest and inner peace continually drives them out to Him, who alone is their Peace. All this, however, is superseded by love, which also continually drives them out to Him. They are also subject to many periods of darkness, spiritual desertions, strife, and infirmities of faith. Since there is no restoration outside of Christ, they time and again return and cleave to Him, repeatedly renewing the exercise of faith. Since the believer's spiritual life is dependent upon continually receiving Christ (who is his life), and just as a person will succumb when he is not able to breathe, so the believer will succumb if by faith he is not able to bring Christ into his heart or his heart to Christ. This constant repetition of believing and receiving may be observed especially in the Psalms and in the Song of Solomon.

Behold, such is the clear distinction between a temporal and a true believer. The one functions outside the realm of his heart and does not move beyond speculating about these matters. He proceeds in an external fashion, having experienced only an imaginary change. The true believer engages himself with his heart; he

has dealings with Jesus and finds strength and life in the continual receiving of Him.

Secondly, true believers perceive and acknowledge Christ as being very precious to them. They perceive not only the excellency of the benefits which one receives through Christ—to be delivered from all evil and to become partakers of salvation in the fullest sense of the word—but also that which is precious in all daughters of Zion, as well as the blessed portion of all who are partakers of Jesus. They can say, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance” (Ps 33:12). Temporal believers are also capable of perceiving this, albeit with a different estimation than true believers. To the true believers Christ is precious, however, and they desire to enjoy Him experientially. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious” (1 Pet 2:7). It is an absolute necessity for them to have Him as their Surety and Mediator by personal application. They perceive so much of the wisdom, goodness, righteousness, and truth in the fact that God would save them in Christ, that they desire no other way, but embrace this way with their whole heart. Christ is to them so lofty, so glorious, so desirable, and to enjoy Him is so sweet and precious, that in comparison to Him all else is of no value. Even if they do not know whether they are partakers of Him, how precious He nevertheless is to them! How their soul would live if they would have Him and if He would be pleased to be their portion! The preciousness of Jesus draws eyes, heart, and hands to Him. Once they may enjoy Him, they know how precious a treasure they have found; their concern becomes that they may not lose Him, and thus they cling to Him and cannot let Him go. The magnificence and preciousness of Jesus is the subject of their discussions, and if they meet someone to whom Jesus also is precious, they treasure such a person with all their heart. Such persons are precious to them since they esteem Jesus to be so precious.

Thirdly, true believers wholeheartedly and unreservedly receive Jesus by faith, surrendering themselves unconditionally to Him, in order to be brought to God by Him in such a way as pleases Him.

Temporal believers, being strangers of genuine, heartfelt transactions with Jesus, do not desire a full and complete Jesus. They do desire to have Him as their High Priest to reconcile them with God, to pray for them, and to save them. However, they do not desire Him as their prophet—to be internally taught of Him, to be humbled by the uncovered filth of their heart, and to learn to despise all that is of the world and that which is desirable to the

eye. Even though they have an external desire for the knowledge of Scripture, and for knowledge itself, they do not desire to be taught by God in order that they might draw near to Him and that their soul might be transformed into the image of God. To them all knowledge is desirable in order that they may also be honored as enlightened and knowledgeable individuals. Temporal believers are filled with self-love and hence desire to seek self.

They also do not desire to have Him as their King, to be ruled by Him according to His will in their thoughts, motives, and actions. They intimate that such is the case, something which they even express in their prayers, but these consist of nothing but empty phrases. Their hearts remain untouched. They desire Him to be King over the multitude to which they join themselves. It is their desire to perceive that He dwells with them, protects and honors them, in order that they may in this manner appear to share in the glory of His church. And thus they do not surrender themselves to Him with the heart.

However, true believers wholeheartedly receive Him as their Prophet, Priest, and King. They cannot determine in which office they desire Him most. Even though at one time one office, and then again another, comes to the fore in their particular situation, they cannot separate these offices. They know that all three are necessary unto their salvation, and therefore one cannot be separated from the others. Their prayer is, "Teach me" (Ps 25:5); "Open Thou mine eyes" (Ps 119:18). They desire to "be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ" (Phil 3:9). It is their wish that the blood of Jesus Christ may cleanse them from all their sins (1 John 1:7), and that He would intercede for them (Rom 8:34). It is their desire that He be King over their heart, defeating and removing all that rebels against Him and bringing everything in subjection to Himself. They receive Him by faith, as He has been made unto them of God, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

True believers receive Christ alone as their only and all-sufficient portion, while willingly, joyously, and unconditionally relinquishing all that would oppose them in this; Christ must be all in all. They know that He alone is sufficient for them, even if presently they do not sensibly experience this. It grieves them to rely upon something else, and in order to be delivered from this they flee to Jesus. Concerning their sincere and heartfelt inclinations, they may say with Asaph, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Ps 73:25).

They also join Paul in Phil 3:8, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”

Without reservation they also surrender themselves to Jesus to endure with Him, for the sake of His cause, both sweet and bitter, sorrow and joy, light and darkness, so that He will lead, enable, and strengthen them. They fully surrender themselves to His leadership, not only to be brought to Mount Tabor, but also by Him to be brought to Golgotha. It is their wish that He might take away all that would cause them to find joy in the things of the world; that He would bring upon them all that is bitter, as long as He is not far from them; and that they may be near to Him in solitude and quietness. If, however, it would please Him to remove His sensible presence from them, and should such also be to His honor, then they will surrender themselves to this—albeit with tears in their eyes—even if He were to pass by them, yes, and through hell lead them to heaven. It is thus that a true believer receives Jesus, thereby fully surrendering himself to Him again.

Fourthly, true believers are not satisfied merely to have received the Lord Jesus by faith for such a purpose and in the aforesaid manner. Their hearts remain focused on Jesus, and they cannot experience any happiness until they may in actuality partake of and enjoy communion with God in Christ. Their joys and sorrows are proportionate to whether they are far from or near to Him.

A temporal believer concerns himself only with the doctrines themselves. As long as he is able to discern, speculate, and discuss them, so that he may be esteemed and cherished among the godly, and the fellowship to which he has joined himself prospers, the temporal believer is joyous. Then he has the preeminence and is especially esteemed. True believers, however, have their focus upon God. The Lord is their treasure, and therefore their hearts are also there. They soon learn to discern whether the Lord is near or at a distance. When the Lord hides His countenance, the soul is bereft of its joy; she mourns, languishes, is restless, troubled, and overwhelmed, as we can observe in the saints. “My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for Him” (Song 5:4); “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me” (Ps 42:6); “Will the Lord cast off forever? and will He be favorable no more? Is His mercy clean gone forever? doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies” (Ps 77:7-10); “Hide not Thy face from me. ... My heart

is smitten and withered like grass ... I am like a pelican of the wilderness ... I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping” (Ps 102:2, 4, 6-7, 9).

They are as Moses who, when the Lord indicated His presence would be withheld, could not be satisfied. When the Lord addressed him about this matter by saying, “My presence shall go with *thee*, and I will give *thee* rest,” Moses responded, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence” (Exod 33:14-15).

When the Lord is at a distance, true believers long for His presence. This separation causes them to be fainthearted and to languish. “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth” (Song 1:2); “My soul fainteth for Thy salvation: but I hope in Thy Word. Mine eyes fail for Thy Word, saying, When wilt Thou comfort me” (Ps 119:81-82).

When the Lord is distant, they nevertheless cannot fail to persevere. Even if at times they become discouraged, they will resume the struggle. They cannot cease to seek, even if they are only able to lift their eyes upward with Hezekiah, “Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me” (Isa 38:14). They concur with the prophet. “Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens” (Ps 123:1).

The bride did likewise. “By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not. I will rise now ... I will seek Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not” (Song 3:1-2).

When it pleases the Lord to permit Himself to be found of true believers, when the Lord causes the dark clouds to pass by, reveals His love to them, speaks kindly to their heart, calling them by their name, all sorrow is forgotten. But then they are troubled that they have been so unbelieving, so despondent, and so rebellious. They then delight themselves with the bride: “I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love” (Song 2:3-4).

Then they are satisfied and can rest in sweet quietness, confessing, “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him” (Lam 3:24); “But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works” (Ps 73:28). Then they are fully satisfied as to how the Lord may lead them in the future, and with quiet confidence they may surrender themselves to Him, saying, “Thou shalt guide me with

Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Ps 73:24). Thus, they may rejoice in the Lord, and the joy of the Lord is their strength (Neh 8:10). Even if they may not enter into sensible communion, their faith is strong; they may rejoice: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8).

This joy is very different from the faint glimmers experienced by temporal believers, whom we have previously identified. True joy is:

(1) in God and in the soul’s union with Him, being in the presence of the Lord as her reconciled God. “And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:47); “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4);

(2) humbleness of soul in the presence of the Lord. “He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden” (Luke 1:48). Mary stated this immediately after expressing her joy;

(3) in the uniting of the soul more intimately with God in love. When David confessed in his joy, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust,” he also stated, “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.” (Ps 18:2,1); “I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications” (Ps 116:1);

(4) in causing the soul to increase in holiness, drawing it away from all that is not God, making it willing and lively to do the will of God, “I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Ps 119:32).

This holiness we now wish to consider as a third mark of grace.

Temporal and True Believers Distinguished in Their Practice of Holiness

Faith cannot exist without holiness for faith purifies the heart, is active in love, and is lively in the performance of good works. Therefore, he who does not manifest holiness is not a true believer. It also follows that all men who are still in the state of nature, who live an ungodly life manifesting itself in haughtiness, pride, rioting, drunkenness, immorality, unrighteousness, lying and deception, hatred and envy, truly do not possess faith. They may object as much as they wish, but we declare to them, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die” (Rom 8:13). Listen to Paul as he addresses such individuals: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil 3:18-19). Such individuals we shall address no more.

Temporal believers, however, who refrain themselves from such excessive sins, deceive themselves in the realm of holiness. They consider themselves to be regenerated and sanctified, and from this they come to a conclusion concerning their spiritual state, even though their holiness is not genuine in nature. On the contrary, those truly sanctified, being conscious of their sins, are very concerned whether they are true believers and partakers of the covenant of grace, for they fear that they have not been sanctified.

In order to identify both, we shall first consider counterfeit holiness and then true holiness.

First, temporal believers can conduct themselves in such a fashion that they are beyond reproach. They can shun those who practice ungodliness in public, as well as the sins in which worldly people indulge themselves. Between them and the world there is a very clear and significant external difference, which would prompt one to say, "Such a person is not worldly." "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet 2:20). Yes, Abimelech the heathen remained standing where David fell (cf. Gen 20:3; 2 Sam 11:10).

Secondly, not only are they capable of refraining themselves from vice, but they stand out for the practice of various virtues, such as: diligence and devotion in the realm of religion; meticulous Sabbath observance; frequent discussion of spiritual matters with zeal and fervor; a prayer life accompanied with tears generated by the passion and weakness of their emotional constitution—this is especially the case when they pray in the company of saints. They join themselves to the godly as Ananias, Sapphira, and Judas did; they love powerful preachers as was the case with Herod and Simon the sorcerer. They are modest in dress and willing to be of service to others; they are patient in adversity, forbearing when treated unjustly, generous and helpful, moderate in food and drink, manifesting love toward men of virtue. In a word, they are capable of refraining from all sin from which the godly refrain themselves, and practicing all virtues which the godly practice. Such was the case with the Pharisees. "Concerning zeal ... which is in the law, blameless" (Phil 3:6) This is evident from the description of life among the heathen as well as among the Quakers.

Thirdly, temporal believers are not only capable of practicing holiness externally, but may also turn within and evaluate the thoughts and motions of the soul, being careful that they are not deviant, but virtuous and honest. Thus, their actions are not

motivated by hypocrisy, but proceed from the heart—a heart which internally is such that it is consistent with the manner in which they conduct themselves externally. Paul declares how from his forefathers (the time prior to his conversion) he served God with a pure conscience (2 Tim 1:3). The Quakers give evidence of this and the heathen bear witness to this in their writings. There was a heathen individual who, at the end of every day, would in solitude contemplate upon the day which had passed, and say, “What evil have you rectified today? Which sins have you resisted? To what extent are you now better than was previously the case?”

Another secular author states: “He who does not give heed to the motions of his own heart, shall not prosper.” Someone else states, “Did you know that a virtuous man does nothing for appearance only, but is motivated by that which is good? What advantage then does his activity yield to him? Can you think of a better advantage for a virtuous man than the virtue and honesty of the deeds themselves?” Someone else states, “God is near to you, with you and in you; therefore I say, ‘the Holy Spirit is within us, giving heed to our good and evil days; He treats us in accordance with the manner in which we treat Him.’ Live before man as if God sees you.”

All this temporal believers may do, motivated by love for virtue and a desire to do God service. An old rhyme states: *Oderunt peccare, etc.*; that is “The virtuous hate sin because they love virtue, but evil persons hate sin for fear of punishment.” In Acts 26:9 Paul said of himself, prior to his conversion, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” “Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2). Is not this the opinion of all idolaters in their religious activity?

From all this we may perceive that the natural man may make much progress in refraining from sin, as well as in the practice of virtue. Therefore, one may not assure himself from what has been stated before that he is a believer, a partaker of the covenant of grace, as well as regenerate.

We must realize, however, that although a person can proceed this far in the state of nature and by means of external illumination, very few have progressed to that degree. Even if there were only one example—yes, even if in the absence of an example the mere possibility existed—this provides no proof that one could consider himself converted. The temporal believer is generally motivated by a desire for his own honor, a desire to be seen of men, and other motives which are not pure. We are convinced of the opinion that temporal believers generally do not proceed this far.

God will send a judgment upon them because they disobey His truth with which they are acquainted. They are ambitious individuals who seek honor, esteem, love, and sympathy, which some will obtain by way of magnanimity, and others by humility, depending on where they view themselves as more proficient. At first their conscience warns them that their actions are not proper; however, they convince themselves that their intentions are correct. Possibly they have viewed their behavior so long from one perspective that they are of the opinion it is proper. Thus, they quiet their consciences, and without consideration of their initial motive and objective, they say, "See my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10:16). Temporal believers are also generally not comfortable with a close walk of life, and if they can accomplish their objective with a much more liberal approach, they will turn around and depart from the way of internal holiness, especially if it yields them more glory and honor as well as more pleasure and less anxiety. Yes, when godliness becomes a matter of shame, when the godly are despised and persecuted, temporal believers will part ways with them and will become oppressors as well—often of the severest sort. A Dutch proverb states, "Every apostate hates his prior association." The Lord testifies of this in Matt 13:21, "For when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended."

At this point the thought may perhaps arise for the reader: "If heathens, Quakers, and temporal believers can proceed so far and nevertheless be lost, who then can be saved? What more can you expect from an individual? What do true believers possess above and beyond all this?" My response to this is that if you were only to consider that which is of an external nature, the godly would be excelled by others in many things. There is something within the godly, however, which incomparably exceeds that which is most impressive in the temporal believer. If you ask, "What is this," I respond, "Spirit and life." Is not a living dog better than a dead lion? Is not a deformed but living person to be preferred over a beautiful person which consists of fine, molten gold, and is but a sculpture? Are not the most insignificant motions of life to be preferred to the noise and rattle of the internal workings of a clock? Obviously, the answer is "yes." Such is the case also here. Temporal believers are void of both Spirit and life; however, true believers possess both. This is the reason that all activity of the temporal believer misses the mark, whereas the activity of the believer does not. Spirit and life must be present, or else all is in vain. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye

shall live” (Rom 8:13); “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25).

The difference is as follows: temporal believers are motivated by reason, honesty, the desirability of religion, their character, upbringing, a fear of punishment, a desire to be seen of men—in order to openly or subtly obtain honor, love, esteem, admiration, and possessions. They are, however, neither motivated by the Spirit nor the principle of spiritual life. The godly, on the contrary, are motivated by the Spirit and the internal principle of spiritual life.

In order to understand this with clarity, let us consider the following matters:

First, the sanctification of true believers proceeds from faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb 11:6).

(1) Faith functions as follows: It receives Jesus unto justification and sanctification, whereby the soul is united to the Lord Jesus and becomes one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:17). Jesus dwells in the heart by faith (Eph 3:17). Jesus and the soul having thus been united, spiritual life now proceeds *from* the Head, Christ, *to* His members. By virtue of this union, and the influence of this life, the soul functions in harmony with the essence of this life, which is Christ. Paul testifies of this, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for Me” (Gal 2:20).

The soul does not always perceive this union and its influence; however, it will be the experience of the believer that as he goes about he will often lift his heart on high, longing for this influence and desiring to receive strength and spirituality from Him in his daily walk. This confirms that his activity proceeds from Christ who strengthens him. If, however, he does not discern such a spiritual frame either habitually or in actuality, he cannot be pleased with his walk even though it is satisfactory in every other respect.

(2) By faith, the true believer believes, enjoys, or hopes for reconciliation with God and the adoption as a child. He appropriates or seeks to appropriate God as a reconciled Father in Christ, and thus he walks, or seeks to walk, as a child and partaker of the covenant of grace. According to the measure in which he may walk with a childlike heart, he may rejoice in this, even though in other respects he perceives deficiencies in his walk. “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Eph 5:1); “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pet 1:14-15).

(3) The true believer believes and in so doing perceives in God and in communion with God such holiness, glory, and desirability that he considers all that is outside of God to be of no value. He views sin as foul, despicable, and hateful. And as he desires and hopes by this faith to obtain as well as live out of this salvation, he despises that which is despicable, hates that which is hateful, and thus overcomes the world by faith (1 John 5:4). In this way the heart is purified by faith (Acts 15:9b).

These three matters will manifest themselves in true believers, be it in various measures and at one time more than other times. This is the principle of spiritual life, and from this source proceeds the strength necessary to die to sin and to practice virtue. Examine yourself whether these spiritual frames are the foundation of your walk. If not—that is, if you cannot speak of such frames and if they are not to be found in you in truth—your entire walk misses the mark, even though you are esteemed to be a great saint. If, however, you truly perceive this frame in your walk, be it in refraining from and conquering a sin, or in the practice of virtue—even if it is in a small measure—then there is life; and your walk, however flawed and however great the power of corruption attending it may be, proceeds from this principle of life.

Secondly, the practice of true sanctification transpires in a heart which knows itself to be in the presence of God—not of God in a general sense, but as our God in Christ. This is true for those who consider themselves, believe, hope, or strive to be in such a relationship to God. In these activities of the soul they walk before God both in doing or refraining. God required this in Gen 17:1, “Walk before Me.” Enoch did so, as is recorded in Gen 5:24, “And Enoch walked with God.” Nehemiah was praying to God while he was speaking with the king (Neh 2:4-5). In Ps 16:8 it is recorded, “I have set the Lord always before me.”

Thirdly, true sanctification proceeds from love toward God. Although a true believer does not always—and some never—experience this love in a very sensible measure, this love is nevertheless to be found on the bottom of his heart and manifests itself in sorrow over the absence of and a desire for the presence of God. This love also manifests itself in seeking after God as well as in a high esteem for God, desiring that God Himself would be the objective of his walk. It manifests itself in joy when God is acknowledged, exalted, feared and served, as well as in the inclination also to glorify Him. Out of all this proceeds the motivation to refrain from sin, since sin exalts itself against God’s supremacy, majesty, etc. From this motive proceeds the practice of virtue. Please tell

me, can you be satisfied with your walk as such? Certainly not! Are you refreshed if in your walk your heart was not inclined toward God? Certainly not! Do you walk with a heart that desires and seeks to live unto God because He is worthy to be served by you? Do you seek to walk with a heart that is inclined toward God, with a heart that seeks sweet union with God, even though it might not be immediately experienced? Would such a frame cause you to rejoice in your walk? Behold, such is love, and with such a heart the godly seek to regulate their entire walk. “If a man love Me, he will keep My words” (John 14:23); “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3).

All activity which does not proceed from love misses the mark (1 Cor 13:1-2).

Fourthly, true sanctification proceeds from the fear of God. Since the true believer unites himself by faith to God in Christ, conducts himself as in the presence of God, and begins to love God, it follows that he also begins to revere the majesty and holiness of God. He dares not neglect what God commands him to do, and he dares not do what God forbids him to do. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, this childlike reverence will manifest itself within true believers, whether it be that the fear of God prevents them from doing what they otherwise would have done, or whether the fear of God motivates them to do what they otherwise would have neglected to do. When the fear of God is before their eyes as they engage in any given duty, it delights them when this true fear makes them careful in doing so. It saddens them, however, if they did not perceive the fear of God in their heart, even though they may have performed the duty well. Since the fear of God governs God’s children, they are described as God-fearing, “There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout [Dutch: God-fearing]” (Luke 2:25).

The fear of God prevented Joseph from sinning (Gen 39:9). When he wished to convince his brothers of his faithfulness, he said to them, “I fear God” (Gen 42:18). The fear of God moved Obadiah, the steward, to hide the prophets of the Lord (1 Kings 18:3-4). The fear of God was continually before Job’s eyes. “Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of His highness I could not endure” (Job 31:23).

Fifthly, true sanctification is practiced in obedience to God. For true believers God’s will is their law, as well as the inducement which motivates them toward action; God’s will is their desire. They either refrain from doing, or do something else because it is

the will of God. They view the majesty of God with delight, exalting Him above all. They place themselves beneath that majesty and acknowledge with delight their subjection as well as the obligation which rests upon them before God. In addition to this, there is the bond of love resulting from being in the covenant of grace, so that they do not consider God as a stranger, but as their God. Thus, they are motivated to do battle against sin and to practice virtue, as we may observe from Scripture: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart" (Ps 40:8); "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22).

Bringing these five concepts together, we must observe that they cannot be separated from each other. The last four are rooted in the first one; where the one is truly present, the others will manifest themselves as well. This establishes the essential difference between temporal believers and true believers, between true and counterfeit holiness.

Examine yourself by this, for if these spiritual frames, motions, and considerations are not to be found in your heart, and if the motives mentioned earlier do not stir you up to refrain from evil or perform that which is good, you have not been regenerated. Your sanctification is not in truth but is counterfeit. Oh, that God would grant you to be truly convinced of this; and that it would result in your conversion, so that you would no longer make the practice of virtue the basis for your assurance! If, however, you may perceive that these five matters are in you, be it in ever so small a measure; if your soul is pleased or displeased with your walk according as these matters manifest themselves in your walk; and if you have these matters in view, being exercised to maintain your walk on this basis, you may rejoice and you may make your calling and election sure on the basis of your good works. You will always find reason to be ashamed and humbled concerning your best works, and rightly so. However, do not therefore deny the grace of God which has been given to you, as this principle of spiritual life will grow and never die.

Thus, we have endeavored to describe for you, as clearly as the Lord has graciously enabled us to do, the disposition of a temporal as well as of a true believer. Even if this matter had, however, been presented as clearly as possible, without the special operation of the Holy Spirit, no one, neither temporal believers nor true believers would be inwardly convinced of this. This would be true for the first due to prejudice, blindness, and wickedness, and true for the latter due to spiritual indisposition, bondage, and fear. The Lord is mighty to apply it to the heart, however, convincing the one for

the purpose of awakening and conversion, and the other for the purpose of consolation and sanctification.

Encouragement for True Believers who Fear They Are Temporal Believers

An unregenerate person and a temporal believer may read about these marks of grace and approve of them; and in the absence of a cautious search of his heart, he may consider his condition to be in harmony with what has been written about a true believer. In reading about these marks of grace, another temporal believer may perhaps be convinced within that all his props are removed. This may cause him to be so perturbed that he casts away this book in anger and disgust. Another person, having his state of misery uncovered to him, may possibly by virtue of the singular grace of God become concerned and thus be brought to Christ. Oh, that it would please the Lord to do so!

A true believer, reading about these marks of grace, could become more disconcerted, not being able to find all these things within himself. It could be that he is not able to distinguish between grace itself and a greater measure of that grace which he believes to be requisite before he believes that he is a partaker of it. It is also possible that he is only comparing himself with a temporal believer, perceiving how much he yet has in common with him, as the disposition and activities of the old Adam still manifest themselves. This prevents him from considering whether he does not possess more than this, and thus have the disposition of a true believer. It may also be that he is in a condition marked by perplexity, unbelief, despair, despondency, or a disagreeable disposition. In such a state of mind he is not capable of examining himself; he should only concern himself with receiving Jesus by faith, waiting upon the Lord to grant more inner tranquility, light, and spirit in order to discern those things which the Lord has granted him. I hope, however, that others will be able to perceive their grace, be strengthened in their faith, rejoice in God's goodness, and be revived in the way of sanctification.

Perhaps there are others who may have some hope as they perceive that grace is to be found in them but who are not fully at liberty to determine their spiritual state, however, for fear that they will deceive themselves. They have several concerns pertaining to this:

First, "It is such a great matter to be a true believer; I dare not imagine such great things for myself. If I were to determine my spiritual state on the basis of those evidences which I dare not

deny, and it were not so, how dreadfully I would deceive myself.” My response is:

(1) It may be too great a matter for you to receive it, but it is not too great a matter for God to give it. For other believers it is also a matter too great and they have nevertheless received it. God desires to exhibit and reveal His infinite goodness; and therefore He seeks that which is lost and receives those who are despised.

(2) There is a most certain mark of grace by which one may perceive whether he deceives himself in self-examination. If a person, having determined his spiritual state after self-examination, remains focused upon himself and thereby has peace of mind and becomes careless; and while relying upon this imaginary grace, proceeds to live for the things of this world, this is evidence that he has deceived himself. However, if a person, having perceived his grace, determines his spiritual state, and consequently becomes more lively in the exercise of faith, in approaching God, in love, godly fear, and obedience; then such is an indication that he has not deceived himself, for this examination of his spiritual state engenders the manifestation of grace. This is the fruit of true hope. “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself” (1 John 3:3).

Let me address myself to your fear. Let us assume that you would have unjustly appropriated this grace to yourself, and by means of this were brought to true faith and repentance. Would you not have made a happy mistake? All counterfeit religion will keep us from coming to Christ for justification and sanctification. Now if therefore this hope makes you more lively in spiritual life, do not be disquieted by groundless fear.

Secondly, “I fear that I am only viewing these things intellectually, and that I consider them to be the truth by virtue of my acquaintance with spiritual matters and frames.” My response is:

(1) Man is a rational creature, and God works in him in a manner agreeable to his nature. God grants to man the motions of sorrow and joy by means of his intellect, and therefore it should not concern you if these matters were clearly distinguished in your mind; however, if they reside in your mind without affecting your will, you must fear.

(2) Take notice whether your will has not been affected. Do you mourn, do you weep, do you pray, do you long, do you yearn, do you exercise faith, do you surrender? Are you engaged in these exercises—first one and then the other? Then you must perceive that these matters are not merely lodged in your intellect, but are

touching your heart. If now you may have discerned that such exercises are in truth, this concern should not trouble you.

Thirdly, "I perceive such a lack of serious-mindedness. I am so half-hearted and my spiritual sorrow is too weak for me to perceive. My faith is as a lame hand which can be placed upon an object, while nevertheless being unable to pull the object to myself. My sanctification is so dull and without zeal. In addition to this I do not possess any assurance within myself, nor joy concerning that which I may experience." My response is:

(1) Some Christians cling too much to their emotional impulses and affections, which in themselves are desirable and should not be dismissed. They should know, however, that the weakness or strength of their spiritual life should not be measured by the weakness or strength of their affections. Some, by virtue of their natural disposition, are much less given to emotion and are temperate in their joy and sorrow. They are therefore not less active in mind and will, however, and generally they are likewise engaged in spiritual matters. If it pleases the Lord to lead someone in such a manner, he should not think that his spiritual life is of inferior quality, but with all his heart should proceed prudently in the strength of the Lord Jehovah. His error is in his judgment and not in the matter itself. If many were to consider and accept this, they would make much more progress.

(2) If you are truly in a listless and barren condition, however, I pity you and must say to you that you cannot expect many consolations as long as you remain thus.

(3) However, this ought not to prompt you to condemn yourself as far as your spiritual state is concerned, nor to be in doubt about it. You perceive spiritual life but complain about the measure of it. Faith can be present in the absence of assurance and comfort which are *fruits* of a strong faith, but do not belong to the essence of faith. Wrestle to be delivered from this condition. Be diligent and do not yield to laziness, which is why so many remain so listless. The Lord desires to be found by those who seek Him. Do not desire to be led in a way which is contrary to the Lord's will. Do not be resistant and rebellious, but be as pliable as clay in the hand of the Lord. Comfort others and exhort others in simplicity, with uprightness of heart. May the Spirit of the Lord revive you.

Fourthly, "I am very perplexed about my lack of sanctification. I perceive within me a body of sin; I fall into great sin and am very unstable. With all my heart I pray for strength, and while engaged in prayer, I appear to be much strengthened. No sooner do I turn around, however, and I again fall into sin, often without having an

opportunity to improve my walk. How can such a condition coexist with grace? I am often so fearful that it is not in truth with me.” My response is:

(1) There are children, young men, and men in Christ. There are times of gracious visitation and of spiritual desertion. One should therefore not judge by the measure of grace, but by the genuineness of the matter at hand.

(2) God generally brings special dispensations upon His children to keep them small and to teach them that they will be saved by grace through Christ, without merit—yes, contrary to that which they deserve. God permits some to wrestle more with sin because through them He wishes to magnify His grace in a special manner. It is therefore prudent to be content under such a dispensation, meanwhile maintaining a hatred toward sin and doing battle with it, while stimulating a desire for holiness.

(3) If it is truth within, your aversion to, displeasure in, and uncomfortable disposition toward sin, as well as your desire for godliness, will not always remain at the bottom of your heart, but will surface whenever you reflect upon your condition. You will then be motivated to bring these spiritual frames before the Lord, be encouraged to request that God in this matter would give you the desire of your heart and be assured that if it would please the Lord to do so, you would be delivered from sin, and there would be improvement in your spiritual life and in sanctification. You will then experience that your heartfelt resolutions against sin will be of a more composed and sincere nature, and that you will struggle not only against sinful deeds, but against your innermost thoughts. You will experience that the Lord will consistently, yes frequently, give you strength to prevail against sin, so that you will not always be defeated unless it be during a time of unusual spiritual desertion. From all this you will be able to discern the sincerity of your heart, even though you daily offend in many things. Thus, the imperfection of your sanctification ought not be a reason why you should be disturbed or deprived of the joy of heart concerning your happy condition; that is, if you may discern within yourself the spiritual frame relative to sanctification as described above.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Justification

Having discussed *calling*, *regeneration*, and *faith*, we shall now proceed to *justification*, which is the soul of Christianity and the fountainhead of all true comfort and sanctification. He who errs in this doctrine errs to his eternal destruction. The devil is therefore continually engaged in denying, perverting, and obscuring the truth expressed in this chapter and, if he does not accomplish this, to prevent exercise concerning this truth. When new errors appear on the horizon, even when they initially do not pertain to justification at all, they in time will eventually culminate in affecting this doctrine. One must therefore be all the more earnest to properly understand, defend, and meditate upon this doctrine.

In our consideration of this doctrine we shall first speak of the *term*, considering what is expressed by the words “righteousness,” “righteous,” and “justification.”²⁶ Then we shall present the *matter* itself by considering the description, nature, moving cause (that is, why justification either does or does not transpire), and mediate cause of justification, as well as the time when it occurs.

The Terms “Righteousness,” “Righteous,” and “Justification” Defined

Concerning the term it should first of all be noted that the word righteousness expresses conformity to the law. Since there are civil and divine laws, there is likewise civil righteousness (which is acceptable to man and not under discussion here), as well as divine righteousness.

²⁶ In the Dutch there is a harmonious, verbal relationship between all three words, for the Dutch word for “justification” is “rechtvaardigmaking,” which literally means “to make righteous.”

It is the latter which we shall discuss here; this can be either the righteousness of the law or the righteousness of the gospel.

The righteousness *of the law* pertains to man's perfect conformity to the divinely ordained law as far as his disposition, deeds, objectives, and manners are concerned. "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom 10:5).

The righteousness *of the gospel* pertains to perfect conformity to the law which becomes man's portion by righteous, divine imputation. The Surety Jesus Christ has merited this righteousness in the believer's stead by bearing the punishment and fulfilling the law. This righteousness, upon being offered in the gospel, is embraced by faith. This righteousness will be as valid in the righteous judgment of God as the righteousness of the law. "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom 3:21-22).

This righteousness is generally referred to as *the righteousness of faith*, it being a righteousness received in response to it being offered (cf. Rom 4:11; 10:6). Both law and gospel righteousness have in common that they fully conform to the law. They differ however, in that the first requires perfection from man himself, and the latter is merited by the Surety, becoming man's portion by imputation and acceptance. They are mentioned together in Phil 3:9, where we read, "... not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Secondly, a person who fully conforms to the law is considered *righteous*, this being true either in himself or in the Surety. After the fall no one can be righteous before God by the righteousness of the law. "... that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight ... for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:19-20, 23). Although no one can personally be righteous before God, one can nevertheless be innocent in a matter whereof he is accused by man, so that in this respect he can say, "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me" (Ps 7:8). Therefore in order for someone to be righteous before God, he must be righteous by way of the righteousness of the gospel; this is true for believers. "... that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21).

We shall next consider the words *to justify*, or "to make righteous."

The meaning of these words must be derived from the original text. In Hebrew we have $\theta\psi\delta\chi\eta$ (*hitsdiq*), in Greek $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (*dikaioun*), and in Latin *justificare*, all of which are translated into our language as *to justify* or “to make righteous.” The Latin and Dutch words could be interpreted to mean, “to change someone,” that is, to change him from a sinful to a virtuous person. This resembles the words *sanctificare*, that is, to sanctify or “to make holy,”²⁷ and *glorificare*, that is, to glorify or “to make glorious.”²⁸ However, the words in the original text never refer to the infusion of righteousness, that is, the transformation of someone from being ungodly to being virtuous. Instead, its meaning is of a legal nature, and it is therefore frequently translated as “to justify.”²⁹ It would have been good if it had been translated as such at every occurrence. It would better express the meaning of the original text and avoid all ambiguity.

The act of justification is at times attributed to man and at times to God. Man justifies:

(1) *God* when he knows and acknowledges Him for what He is, praising and glorifying Him accordingly. “... that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest” (Ps 51:4); “And all the people ... justified God” (Luke 7:29);

(2) *himself* when he considers and declares himself righteous. He wants to be esteemed and acknowledged as such, either without being compared to others, “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men” (Luke 16:15); or when someone, though he is ungodly, behaves himself in such a manner that when compared to others who excel him in ungodliness, he appears to be virtuous and is esteemed as such. “And the Lord said unto me, the backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah” (Jer 3:11);

(3) *other people*, when he is used as a means to bring other people to Christ, and to faith in Him, by which they are justified. “And they that be wise³⁰ shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

²⁷ This is the literal meaning of the Dutch word “heiligmaken.”

²⁸ The Dutch word is “heerlijkmaken.”

²⁹ à Brakel here uses the word “rechtvaardigen” which is the equivalent of the English word “to justify.”

³⁰ In the Statenbijbel the word “leeraars” is used. This word is frequently used to denote ministers in the Dutch Scriptures.

Justification: Not Infusion of Holiness, but a Divine, Judicial Act

The act of *justification* is attributed to God. As Judge, He either acquits or condemns man. This raises the following question:

Question: Does the word “to justify,” when being attributed to God, ever mean “to repent,” “to sanctify,” or “to infuse holiness?”

Answer: The *Papists* answer in the affirmative and we answer in the negative. They will admit that “to justify” occasionally means “to acquit” and is the antonym of “to condemn.” However, they deny that this applies to the doctrine of justification. They maintain that “to justify” refers to the act of transforming a man from being ungodly to being virtuous and thus refers to the infusion of righteousness. They make a distinction between a first and second justification. The first would occur at man’s translation from his fallen state in Adam to a regenerate state, and the second pertains to the progression in godliness, which is sanctification. We maintain, however, that nowhere in Scripture does the infinitive “to justify” have this meaning. Rather, it always pertains to the act of a judge and is the antonym of “to condemn.” It thus means “to acquit,” or “to declare righteous.”

This is first of all evident from the essential meaning of the word itself, which is “to acquit” and has as its antonym “to condemn.” This is to be observed, for instance, in the following texts: “If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deut 25:1); “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord” (Prov 17:15). Here it can be observed that it is irrefutably true that “to justify” and “to condemn” are antonyms, pertaining to the act of a judge and not referring to either transforming or making godly. This very contradistinction is used when the word “to justify” is used in reference to God, the Judge of heaven and earth. “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth” (Rom 8:33-34). Condemnation is associated with acquittal and not with sanctification. “To condemn” is the antonym of “to acquit” and not of “to transform.”

Secondly, consider furthermore Rom 3:19-28, and the entire fourth chapter. The apostle does not demonstrate here whether man, either by the law or by faith, is converted and has holiness infused into him; rather, he states how man will exist in the righteous judgment of God, how he will be acquitted, and how he will obtain a right to eternal life. He speaks of man as subject to guilt and condemnation (vs. 19), and of those who do not work,

but who believe (Rom 4:6). He shows that man cannot be delivered from condemnation by means of the law (Rom 3:20), but that this transpires by way of the redemption which is in Christ, received by faith (vss. 24-25, 28), and becomes man's portion by way of imputation, since Christ has fully accomplished this as Surety (Rom 4:6-8). One therefore neither receives forgiveness of sins nor a right to eternal life by way of sanctification, but by way of acquittal and imputation of righteousness whereby he is thus declared righteous. Therefore justification does not consist in being sanctified, but in being declared righteous, that is, in being acquitted.

Add to this the texts which speak of sins not being imputed and being covered (Ps 32:1-2), not being remembered (Isa 43:25), and being forgiven (Jer 31:34). This manner of speech which is so common in Scripture never refers to the infusion of holiness, but always conveys the removal of guilt and punishment.

Thirdly, this is also evident from all the texts in which a very clear distinction is made between justification and sanctification. Consider, for instance, 1 Cor 6:11, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." There is no room here for the distinction between first and second justification. For, aside from the fact that this distinction is fabricated and contrary to God's Word, the apostle mentions three matters: to be washed, to be justified, to be sanctified; and thus justification is something other than being washed and being sanctified. Add to this, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

Fourthly, consider also that if justification consisted in the infusion of holiness, every person would be perfect, which is contrary to Scripture.

Fifthly, if non-imputation of sin were the same as the infusion of righteousness, the imputation of sin would be the same as the infusion of sin. This is an absurdity, for our sins were also imputed to Christ.

Objection #1: Those who wish to prove that justification can also mean sanctification, the infusion of righteousness, quote Isa 53:11: "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." It is maintained that justification here refers to the infusion of holiness, for the knowledge of Christ is the means unto sanctification.

Answer: First, the knowledge of Christ is the means not only to sanctification but also to justification by faith (Rom 10:14-17). For this reason, knowledge and faith are conjoined: "... that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting

life” (John 6:40). Faith receives Jesus with which it is acquainted, and man is thus righteous in Him, being justified by coming to God in this way. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1). If one were to extract an illusory proof from this text, it might be determined that knowledge is only a means unto sanctification and not unto justification. Secondly, Christ is presented here as having made atonement by His suffering and death, which is not only confirmed by the entire chapter but also by the same verse. The prophet advances the reason that Christ justifies many by the knowledge of Him, for he states, “He shall bear their iniquities.” By bearing the iniquities of the elect, Christ delivers them from guilt and punishment, and in this manner is made unto them righteousness (1 Cor 1:30). Christ does not primarily come to the foreground here as judge (even though He is the Judge), but rather as the meriting cause of justification—as our righteousness by which we are justified. This is indicated by the original text which has been translated in the most common and natural manner of speech: “He shall justify many”; that is, He shall be the righteousness of many, applying righteousness to many—and thereby they are justified. All this makes it very evident that “to justify” here does not mean “to sanctify.”

Objection #2: “They that turn many to righteousness [shall shine] as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3). It is evident that ministers are not judges, nor are they authorized to acquit man. Rather, they are means unto the sanctification of men.

Answer (1) How then do the Papists explain the acquittals rendered by their priests?

(2) This text has no reference to the point of contention, for the question pertains to the word as used in reference to God as He deals with a sinner who is worthy of condemnation. This text speaks of the activity of one person in reference to another.

(3) The phrase “turn to righteousness” also does not refer to the infusion of holiness. Man is as incapable of this as he is to justify someone else. Since, however, he can be a means unto sanctification, he can also be a means unto justification by making man acquainted with Christ and by urging him to receive Christ by faith. Since one can be used as a means for the one as well as for the other, the objection is of necessity nullified. There should thus be a different proof; however, this is lacking. The text refers to being used as a means to bring someone to faith in Christ and who will thus be justified. The result is attributed to the secondary cause. In like fashion ministers are said to save others. “Take heed unto thyself, and

unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim 4:16).

Objection #3: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev 22:11). In this text “to be righteous” does not mean “to acquit,” but rather refers to the infusion of holiness, for a) justification occurs once and for all, and here it is stated as something which is repeated and increases. b) It is also proven by way of contrast, for it is contrasted with being unjust.

Answer: First, we deny that the word “righteous” conveys the infusion of holiness; this argument has no validity, for a) the act of justification occurs daily, as we shall subsequently demonstrate. b) It is contrasted with being unjust, that is, as being condemned by one’s self (α)δικω~ν [adikon] and δι/καιω [dikaios]). Also δικαιοθη_τω (dikaiotheto) and α)δικησα_τω (adikesato) are contrasted with each other, that is, if one admits that there is such a contrast here. This contrast pertains to the very same word, so that the same word can be used in the translation: “*He that is unrighteous, let him be unrighteous still, and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still.*” This means that whoever must condemn himself, and due to his ungodly deeds is condemned by others, ought to condemn himself all the more and should be condemned even more by others, for else he will become even more condemnable. He who himself is justified by faith manifests this by a holy walk, and is acknowledged and declared as such by others, let him endeavor to be justified in his conscience as well as by others with all the more clarity.

Secondly, the fact that the word “to be justified” does not refer here to the infusion of holiness, that is, to the act of becoming holy, is evident from that which is added: “and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” The fact that this is added makes it very evident that “to be justified” is something different from “to be sanctified,” and that “to justify” is not the equivalent of “to sanctify,” but expresses the act of acquittal from guilt and punishment, just as sanctification consists in transformation and the removal of pollution.

The Act of Justification Described and Clarified

Having dealt with the meaning of the word, we shall proceed to consider the matter itself. In order to perceive this, so to speak, in one glance, we shall in the first place give a brief description of this.

Justification is a gracious work of God whereby He, as righteous Judge, acquits the elect from guilt and punishment and declares them to be heirs

of eternal life because of the righteousness of Christ the Surety, imputed to them by God, and received by them through faith.

When we refer to this as a *work of grace*, we do so in reference to man. It is pure and sovereign grace alone that God has chosen His elect, has agreed to the mediation of a Surety, has Himself ordained and given a Surety, and then calls them to Jesus, gives them faith, and, without their merits, acquits them and renders them a right unto salvation. It is thus pure sovereign grace alone. However, as far as the act itself is concerned, it completely conforms to justice in the fullest sense of the word. God does not justify as a merciful Father by overlooking sin. Rather, as a righteous Judge, He, in the Surety who has paid and done everything for them, finds them to be free from all guilt and punishment, and as having a title to salvation. It is therefore righteous that God declares them to be thus.

The Components of Justification

In the second place we must consider what constitutes *the form*, that is, the very essence or the nature of justification. Justification does not only consist in the acquittal from guilt and punishment, but also in granting by an act of incorporation the right to eternal life. It consists in being declared free from guilt and punishment, and an heir of eternal felicity. Both aspects are included in the act of justification. Adam, having been created perfect, did not immediately have a right to eternal felicity, but was first obligated to fulfill the conditions of the covenant of works. In sinning man brought upon himself guilt and punishment and robbed himself of felicity. However, if he were only delivered from guilt and punishment, he would be in the same state as Adam was in the beginning. He was then without guilt, but did not as yet have a right to eternal life. The Lord Jesus has accomplished both matters. By His suffering He has paid the debt, and by placing Himself under the law He has merited the right to eternal life for them. We have previously shown that the law had to be fulfilled in order to acquire a right to eternal life. We have also proven that Christ, by His active obedience, has merited the right to eternal life for His own. It is thus very evident that justification includes both the acquittal as well as the bestowal of the right to eternal life, for all the merits of Christ are the basis and reason for justification.

This can also be ascertained from many texts of Scripture where both aspects are conjoined. "... that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified" (Acts 26:18); "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God"

(Rev 1:5-6); “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ... and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:1-2).

When we maintain that justification consists in acquittal from guilt and punishment, we join them inseparably together in order to oppose the errors of *Papists and others* who will admit to the removal of guilt and eternal punishment, but who maintain that we ourselves must make satisfaction by temporal punishment. They maintain that Christ has merited our ability to accomplish this by our own works, and that our merits are needful to have the forgiveness of sins applied which He has merited. This will be comprehensively refuted at the appropriate occasion.

The Cause of Justification

Thirdly, we shall consider the *cause* of justification. This is God Himself; that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each in their own role in the economy of the covenant. This is a work of God, for God is the only Lawgiver (James 4:12), the only Judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25), and the righteous Judge (Ps 7:11). He, being righteous, can by no means clear the guilty (Exod 34:7), His judgment is according to truth (Rom 2:5), and His judgment is a righteous judgment (Rom 2:5). Righteously He condemns the ungodly, and righteously He justifies believers. As I stated before, this is the work of God. “It is God that justifieth” (Rom 8:33); “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions” (Isa 43:25). It is attributed to the Father. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor 5:19). It is also attributed to the Son. “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins ...” (Matt 9:6). The Holy Spirit justifies when He makes known to the elect what God has granted them (2 Cor 2:12), when He “beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). It is therefore the abomination of all abominations that the pope claims to be authorized to forgive sins, erroneously hiding himself behind the fact that God has granted His servants ministerial authority to declare in His Name to repentant believers that God forgives them their sins (cf. Matt 16:19; Matt 18:18; John 20:23). Those poor people who have set themselves at ease upon his declaration of forgiveness will find themselves miserably deceived!

The Meriting Cause of Justification

Fourthly, we must consider the *foundation or basis*, that is, the *moving cause* of justification. Since God justifies as Judge, and since He is a righteous Judge, he who is to be justified by Him must have

a perfect righteousness. Man himself is sinful, and in the flesh of the best among men “dwelleth no good thing.” The best among them cannot say, “I have purified my heart, and I am free from transgression.” He daily offends in many things, and therefore he cannot answer upon a thousand questions. He therefore of necessity must pray, “And enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Ps 143:2). Therefore man’s own righteousness cannot be the basis for his justification, but in order for man to be justified he must be a partaker of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Christ, as Surety, has paid for the sins of His elect, and has merited eternal felicity for them by placing Himself under the law and being obedient to it. This righteousness God imputes to them by reason of His suretyship, and they partake of this righteousness by faith, upon it being offered in the gospel. Christ’s righteousness thus becomes their righteousness, and adorned with this righteousness they come unto God and are thus justified by a perfect righteousness. Paul said the same when he wrote, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:23-24).

Those who are estranged from the truth and from godliness deem this imputation to be nothing but imagination and fabrication. They cannot comprehend how the righteousness of another can remove the sins of someone else, and can thus be imputed to someone so that it is as if he in person had paid for all his sins and had fulfilled all the righteousness of the divine law.

In order to clearly understand this, we must note that something can be imputed in a twofold manner. It can either be done by something that one does himself, or by something that another has accomplished in his stead.

(1) When someone’s own deeds are imputed to himself, such imputation is a declaration that he has done either well or evil. Thus, the zealous act of Phinehas “was counted unto him for righteousness” (Ps 106:31). In spite of the fact that there could have been found some outward reason for rebuke, God nevertheless declared that he had exercised righteousness, that he was righteous, and that he had acted properly. The sins of the ungodly are likewise imputed to them, that is, God considers and declares them to be guilty. “... blood shall be imputed unto that man; he hath shed blood” (Lev 17:4). Therefore “not to impute” is to forgive, to hold for good, not to remember, and not to punish. “Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me ...” (2 Sam 19:19).

(2) When that which has been accomplished by another is

imputed to someone, it is thus acknowledged and declared that whatever has not been performed by the person himself is yet acknowledged as if he himself had performed it. This can be true, since he has done so by the agency of someone else. Even though the children of Ammon had in reality killed him, the death of Uriah was nevertheless imputed to David, since he had deceitfully exposed him to danger and thereby, as it were, surrendered him into their hands. This can also be due to someone becoming a surety for another person and by making payment as such. "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account ... I will repay it" (Philem 18-19).

Apply all this to the matter at hand. Note first of all, that it is consistent with divine justice for God to deal with a sinner by way of a Surety (cf. chapter 16, The Covenant of Grace). Secondly, Christ is Surety for the elect, and really and truly on their behalf has atoned for their sins by His suffering and death, and as Surety has fulfilled the law on their behalf (cf. chapter 22).

(3) This righteousness is imputed to the elect, and since Christ, as Surety, has accomplished this in their stead, God considers it as if they themselves had accomplished this; we have already stated the same above. We find the infinitive "to impute" used as such in Rom 4:6, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."

We therefore maintain that Christ's merits imputed to believers are the reason, the basis, and the cause that God acquits man and declares him to be an heir of eternal life.

This truth is first of all confirmed in express textual references, such as Rom 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Here Adam and Christ are placed in opposition to each other. It speaks of the disobedience of the one and the obedience of the other, and of the consequences and effects: "to be made sinners" and "to be made righteous." However, "to be made" does not refer to the deed of someone else, and the deed cannot be reckoned to someone else, except by imputation. The sinful deed of Adam is reckoned to the account of his descendants by way of imputation, for the actual deed of eating from the tree was not committed by his descendants in person. In like manner the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to the account of His elect. For it is in this way that they are made righteous, and this cannot be true from God's side except by way of imputation; this imputation occurs on the basis of pure righteousness, since Christ, with His Father's approbation, has accomplished everything in their stead.

Evasive Argument: Christ is the cause for many being made righteous, that is, for being converted and sanctified. As such, and to that extent, His obedience does indeed benefit believers, having merited these blessings—or also because His obedience is an example to be followed. He is not the formal and essential cause of justification, however, as if Christ’s righteousness would be reckoned to the account of believers by way of imputation and that thereby they are delivered from guilt and punishment, and are declared to be heirs of life.

Answer (1) This statement cannot be proven and is therefore refuted as quickly as it is made.

(2) No mention is made here of either infusion of holiness or being an example worthy of imitation. Rather the reference is to imputation, which is evident from the contradistinction. Adam’s deed becomes the deed of his descendants by way of imputation—as if they themselves had committed it. Likewise, the righteousness of Christ becomes the righteousness of His people by imputation, and thus as if they themselves had merited it. This entire chapter pertains to the righteousness of Christ as being imputed to His people. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Faith is the reception of Christ’s righteousness and the entrusting of our soul to Him to be justified by His righteousness. On account of Christ’s death the atonement becomes efficacious for His elect (vss. 10-11), which can occur in no other way than by imputation. By the transgression of one, others are made to be sinners and are subjected to condemnation, and by the righteousness of One, grace comes upon other men unto justification of life (vs. 11). Thus the righteousness of Christ becomes the righteousness of the elect by way of imputation, by which they are justified, have peace with God, are reconciled as enemies, and, while sinful in themselves, are made to be righteous in Christ.

This is also evident in 2 Cor 5:21, “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Believers are thus made righteous in Him, as He has in like manner been made sin for them. Here is a mutual transfer from the one to the other, that He who was made sin has made them righteous in Him. However, Christ did not become sin due to sin cleaving to Him, but rather by the imputation of the sins of the elect to Him as Surety. They also are likewise the righteousness of God, not due to inherent holiness, but by imputation. They are righteous, *not in themselves*, but in Him.

This is likewise true in Col 2:10, “And ye are complete in

Him.” However far one may advance in the way of sanctification, he is and remains imperfect, and daily offends in many things. He will not be able to say, “I have purified my heart and am free from transgression.” However, they are nevertheless perfect, *not in themselves, but in Him*. This perfection they cannot have except by imputation, whereby God, due to the efficacy of Christ’s accomplished mediatorial work, imputes His merits to their account. They in turn, due to the efficacy of the gospel offer and the promises, are made perfect upon embracing this mediatorial work by faith.

Consider now these three texts together, and you will observe that this conclusion irrefutably follows from this. If believers by reason of Christ’s obedience are made righteous, and they, due to Christ being made sin, are the righteousness of God in Him and are perfect in Him (which cannot occur except by imputation), then Christ’s righteousness is theirs. When they are therefore justified by the righteous Judge, they are not justified by their own righteousness, but by the righteousness of Christ.

This is also evident in the following passages: “This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6); “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). Mention is made here of righteousness which is neither found in, nor originates in man, but in Christ. This nevertheless belongs to believers themselves. It cannot become their own portion, however, except by imputation, and it is in this fashion that the apostle uses the word. “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works” (Rom 4:6). Christ’s righteousness is therefore the cause of man’s justification.

Proof #1: This is evident from such texts in which man, on account of the satisfaction of Christ, is said to be justified without works. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:28); “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28). The act of justifying neither consists in an infusion of, nor in an increase of, holiness. It rather consists in being declared righteous, in being acquitted from guilt and punishment, and in receiving the right to eternal life, all of which has been demonstrated comprehensively in the above. It is furthermore declared that man’s works are not the foundation or cause of their justification, but rather the redemption of Christ which is received by faith. To be justified on account of the righteousness of another cannot occur except by imputation.

Proof #2: This is also confirmed in the justification of Abraham. “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:115; cf. vss. 18-24). Abraham was justified; however, he was not justified by his works, for all his works were excluded. In his justification he was stripped of all honor and glory, and why is this so? He was justified by the righteousness of Another, which he received by faith, and which is therefore called the *righteousness of faith* (vss. 11, 13). God promised him that he would be a father of many nations, and that the Savior would be born from him through Isaac. Abraham believed this promise, even when he offered Isaac; he received the promise by faith. In doing so he not only received the word of the promise but the matter promised by the word, the promised Savior. “But as many as received Him ... even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). Having been united by means of faith to the matter itself, that is, to the Savior, God thus imputed to him this received righteousness of Christ the Surety. Faith, as the means whereby the righteousness of Christ is received, which unites itself to Christ, and by which one is translated into Christ, was counted unto him for righteousness; that is, not the act of faith, but the righteousness of Christ of which he became a partaker by faith. The infinitive “to impute,” which is used frequently in this chapter, implies the reckoning of someone’s righteousness, someone’s work, to the account of another, thereby justifying this individual. In this manner Abraham was justified, and in like manner all believers are justified (Rom 4:11).

Objections to Imputed Righteousness Refuted

Objection #1: God cannot justify anyone who is not righteous in himself; no one can be righteous on account of the righteousness of another. Thus the righteousness of Christ cannot be the cause or foundation upon which man is justified by God.

Answer (1) It is untrue to maintain that no one can be righteous on account of the righteousness of another.

(2) When a surety assumes the debt of another person, pays the debt, and meets all the requirements, the debtor is no longer a debtor, but goes free.

(3) We have proven above that man is made righteous on account of Christ’s obedience (that is, the righteousness of God in Christ), that he is perfect in Him, that Christ is the LORD OUR

RIGHTEOUSNESS, and that He is Surety. It is thus possible for a man to be righteous on account of the righteousness of Another (that is, of a Surety), which becomes his by way of imputation (Rom 4:3-11, 22).

(4) It is true that God as righteous Judge cannot justify anyone who is not righteous, and therefore man cannot be justified by his own righteousness, since he and all that he does are imperfect and sinful. However, he is justified in Christ.

Objection #2: Believers are righteous by reason of inherent righteousness. Consider for instance 1 John 3:7, “He that doeth righteousness is righteous.” One is therefore not righteous by reason of the imputed righteousness of Christ, and it thus follows that one is not justified before God by way of imputed righteousness.

Answer (1) Righteousness implies holiness, and it is true that he who does righteousness is holy; however, no one upon earth is perfectly holy and righteous. The same apostle says in 1 John 1:8, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Thus man cannot be justified by his own righteousness before God, but there must be another righteousness which can exist in God’s righteous judgment.

(2) The apostle does not speak here of justification (which is the point of contention), but rather of sanctification which is always conjoined to justification, and yet is not the same as justification. This text is therefore not applicable here.

Objection #3: In Christ man receives everything again which he has lost in Adam. Since we did not lose an imputed righteousness in Adam, we therefore also do not receive this again in Christ.

Answer (1) In Adam we lost perfect righteousness, and we receive perfect righteousness again in Christ. Incorporation and imputation merely refer to the manner in which we receive this, not to the matter itself. The imputation of Christ’s righteousness is not contrary to the law, but has the witness of the law and the prophets (Rom 3:21).

(2) We deny that it is true that in Christ we receive all that we have lost in Adam. In Christ we receive more than we have lost in Adam: the forgiveness of sins, an unchangeable state, and the privilege to glorify God in His grace and mercy.

Objection #4: If we, on account of the righteousness of Christ, are righteous, we are no less righteous than Christ Himself, for all of His holiness, including the holiness of His divine nature, is our holiness. This is an absurdity. Thus we cannot be justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Answer: We reject this argument, for the righteousness which is

imputed to man is the righteousness which Christ has merited as Surety and which is sufficient. The holiness of God is incommunicable, and cannot be imputed to man, nor can man be made a partaker of it; moreover, this is also not necessary.

Objection #5: We are justified by grace. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). We are thus not justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Answer (1) When we are said to be *freely* justified, all righteousness of man is excluded.

(2) When we are said to be justified *by grace*, this implies that God was not obligated to man, but that due to sovereign goodness and mercy He has been moved to give man a Surety to be justified by the imputation of His righteousness. Grace is thus not the *foundation* for justification, but the *fountain* from which our justification by the Surety issues forth. For this reason the word “grace” is followed by the words “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” as being the meriting cause. This, however, does not imply that Christ’s satisfaction was not sufficient, as if a gracious estimation and acceptance would need to be added, for Christ “by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). It also does not imply that grace and man’s works are conjoined by way of a gracious acceptance, for grace and works are placed in contrast to each other—the one excludes the other (Rom 11:6). Grace, however, is the manifestation of the goodness of God which moved Him to permit the possibility of a Surety, to give a Surety, and to save some individuals (in distinction from others) by means of this Surety. It thus remains certain that Christ’s righteousness alone is the meriting cause of our justification.

The Means unto Justification: Faith

Fifthly, we must consider *the means* whereby man is justified, namely faith. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28). God’s justice having been satisfied, and the requirements of the law having been met by Christ, the Lord our Righteousness, God was able, in a way of justice, to make the elect partakers of salvation. All work of man is entirely excluded. Since believers have everything in Christ and their faith does not contribute one penny to their justification, it could have pleased God, if His justice had permitted it, to save man without faith and repentance. It is nevertheless God’s wisdom and goodness to lead those, for whom Christ has accomplished everything, to the possession of the benefits which Christ has merited in no other way but the way of faith and repentance.

The nature of faith consists in entrusting oneself to Christ to be justified, sanctified, and glorified on the basis of the offer and the promises. The person who has received Jesus by faith, and who has entrusted himself to Him, continues to be active with the promises unto justification and sanctification.

In justification faith functions as follows: Faith *first of all* receives the righteousness of the Surety Jesus Christ. This occurs on the basis of it being offered by Christ to the sinner, together with many exhortations to receive it and to make use of it with boldness. The believer, having thus received perfect righteousness in Christ, having put Him on (Gal 3:26-27), and having been robed with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness (Isa 61:10), *in consequence of this* comes to God with the received and appropriated righteousness, displays this righteousness before Him, and desires to be judged and justified accordingly. Thus the believer, with a good conscience, asks God, on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 3:21) whether or not his sins are paid for by Christ's suffering, and whether he has a right to eternal life by virtue of His obedience. The believer then *immediately* turns to the promises made to those who have received Christ and His righteousness, namely, that such have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43); "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). These and similar promises the believer brings to God. Being thus exercised with them, and while pleading in this fashion, he deems these promises to be the voice of God speaking to him (for it is the Word of God); he appropriates these promises to himself as being made to him, which thus acquit him from guilt and punishment, and declare him to be an heir of eternal life. Since it is the Holy Spirit who at such a moment works faith (that is, while thus being active), He also applies these truths to the soul; the soul, believing them, hears herself being justified by God. At times the Holy Spirit also seals the soul and causes her to taste that she is not only justified, but also the felicity which is included in being justified, thus granting the soul peace and joy.

The Time when Justification Occurs

Sixthly, we must consider *the moment when* God justifies man. Concerning this we say God has eternally purposed to justify His elect through the merits of Christ. However, this is not the justification of which Scripture speaks. In time Christ has actually atoned for all sin and merited salvation for the elect and in

consequence of this he has been justified in the Spirit. God thus views His children in Him; and yet even this does not constitute justification. God justifies man by faith, and thus justification is God's judicial pronouncement toward man. This sentence is not only pronounced once upon the first act of faith, but is made as frequently and as often as man exercises faith in Christ unto justification. This is not an assurance that they are justified once and for all, but it constitutes an actual and daily act of forgiveness.

The Truth of Justification Defended

Having dealt with the first issue, the definition of the nature of justification, we shall now proceed to deal with the second issue: the defense of this truth against opposing parties. We shall do so by presenting and dealing with the points of contention.

It is here as it was with the foxes of Samson; their heads were separate, but they were bound together with their tails. As different as these opponents may be and as much as they may vary in their sentiments, they nevertheless conspire in a similar fashion to engage in battle against the doctrine of justification. In this, Herod and Pilate are united in their opposition toward Christ.

The *Socinians* deny the merits of Christ entirely, as well as man's justification on the basis of Christ's righteousness; they maintain that man is justified by his own righteousness. This is not due to the inherent righteousness of these works, as if these righteously merited to be justified. Rather, it is due to the gracious evaluation of these works, that is, by accepting a part as the equivalent of the whole. They maintain that man is not justified until his death, when he is delivered from all evil and receives eternal life. We have dealt comprehensively with this error in chapters 17 and 18.

The *Papists* in reality do not consider justification as such. They understand it to refer to the infusion of holiness and to progression in the way of sanctification, all of which we have refuted in the above. They nevertheless do speak of the forgiveness of sins as well as of merits in relation to works; by reason of these they are delivered from temporal punishments and become partakers of salvation.

Question: Can God, the righteous Judge, in executing His righteous judgment, justify man; that is, can man thus be acquitted from guilt and punishment and be declared to be an heir of eternal life by means of inherent righteousness, his suffering, and his good works?

Answer: The Papists answer in the affirmative and we in the negative. They define justification as consisting in the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of life.

(1) Concerning the forgiveness of sins they maintain that Christ

has made a *sufficient* satisfaction for all men, and that this is *efficacious* for all sins committed prior to baptism and the punishment of them (both temporal and eternal), all being fully removed by virtue of baptism. They also maintain that Christ has made an efficacious atonement pertaining to guilt and eternal punishment, but not the temporal, incurred by the actual sins of the penitent and those who persevere in this. However, they themselves must make satisfaction for the temporal punishments pertaining to sins committed subsequent to baptism. They must do so by way of brokenness of heart, oral confession, and the performance of works. If they come short in this life, they must make satisfaction after this life in purgatory. They must be assisted in this by the merits derived from the surplus good works of the saints. They must therefore make satisfaction for the temporal punishment themselves, merit heaven by their good works, and thus be justified by works.

(2) They also maintain that Christ has merited the renewal of life for all who cooperate as a result of their own power and free will, and repent. They pronounce an *anathema* upon those who maintain that man is only justified by the righteousness of Christ. As far as justification is concerned, they make a distinction between justification by the law and justification by the gospel. They denote their justification as evangelical, since they deem Christ to be the cause of the forgiveness of sin, the renewal of life, and of sanctification. They maintain that Christ has merited their ability to merit, and thus they add their own works to the merits of Christ as being the joint cause of justification.

We respond, first, that Christ did not make satisfaction for all men, but for the elect only. This satisfaction also does not merely pertain to sins committed prior to baptism, but also to all sins which are committed until the end of life. Furthermore, Christ has made satisfaction for both the guilt of sin and all punishment, temporal as well as eternal punishment. There thus remains no punishment if satisfaction has been made for the guilt of sin. We also maintain that man can merit nothing at all—neither by his suffering nor by his good works. Finally, there is neither a purgatory nor such a thing as surplus works, and the virtues of some men cannot be charged to the account of others.

Secondly, we maintain that whoever is justified is also sanctified. We do *not* say that one only needs to trust in the righteousness and merits of Christ, and then need not be concerned about sanctification, but can live as he wishes and will nevertheless be saved. This is not the doctrine of the Reformed Church. She despises such language and such a life, and declares that those who conduct

themselves in such a manner and persevere in this until the end will never be saved; their faith has never been the right faith, and they have never been partakers of the righteousness of Christ. “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men” (Titus 3:8).

Thirdly, we maintain, however, that good works, however needful and beneficial they may be to glorify God, to edify our neighbor, to be personally assured of the sincerity of one’s faith, to adorn the gospel, and as the way which leads to salvation, are nevertheless of no value in the matter of justification. Therefore, not good works—neither whole nor in part—but only the righteousness of Christ imputed by God to the elect and received by them in faith, is the meriting cause of their justification. The fact that man is not justified by works is evident for the following reasons:

Proof #1: All works of man are expressly excluded from justification. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:20, 28); “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works” (Rom 4:6); “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16); “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident” (Gal 3:11). The exclusion of works from justification cannot be stated in a more clear and absolute sense than the apostle does in these and in other texts.

Add to this all those texts where all boasting in man’s justification—as if man could contribute something to it by his works—is taken away. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Rom 3:27); “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God” (Rom 4:2).

Evasive Argument #1: In the quoted texts the reference is not to the moral law (so that works pertaining to this law are not excluded), but rather to the ceremonial law; thus only the works pertaining to this law are excluded.

Answer (1) The texts refer to all works without distinction. The apostle makes no such distinction, either here or elsewhere, and such a distinction is thus of necessity nullified.

(2) He refers to the moral law very expressly, however; for in Rom 3 he refers to this law when he states, “There is none righteous, no, not one: ... there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, ... Their throat is an open sepulchre; ... whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: ... there is no fear of God before their eyes ... that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:10-19). All these deeds have no reference to the ceremonial but rather to the moral law. The apostle thereby excludes all works of the moral law from justification. In the letter to the Galatians there are also express references to the moral law, for he refers to this law when he says, “The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal 3:12). This cannot be said in reference to the ceremonial law itself nor to its related deeds. The reference is rather to the moral law which is contrasted with the gospel and faith, as is clearly observed in the texts. The ceremonies do not stand in opposition to the gospel and faith, but belong to them. Christ was found in them and He was partaken of by faith. He speaks of this law in Gal 3:10, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The apostle here quotes .Deut 27:26, where mention is made of image worship, making light of father and mother, removing a neighbor’s landmark, causing the blind to wander out of the way, the perversion of justice, incest, secretly smiting one’s neighbor, and of taking rewards—all of which are sins against the moral law rather than the ceremonial law. The apostle thus excludes justification by all the works of the moral law.

Evasive Argument #2: In the quoted texts all works performed prior to baptism, conversion, and faith are excluded; however, this is not true for those works performed by faith in Christ.

Answer (1) This is mere speculation, for the apostle does not express himself in this manner.

(2) The apostle excludes all works by placing works and faith in opposition to each other.

(3) He addresses Jews who, even though they believed in Christ, wanted to be justified by works, be it by works alone or in conjunction with faith. They considered the ceremonial and the moral law as being one and the same, and wished to perform ceremonial deeds in the same manner as they performed moral deeds, seeking to be justified by works. These works the apostle excludes.

(4) Abraham, David, and Paul were converted and believed; their

works were nevertheless excluded from justification (cf. Rom 4:6 for Abraham; Rom 4:6 for David; 1 Cor 4:4 for Paul). Therefore works performed by faith are also excluded.

(5) On the contrary, the publican (Luke 18:13), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2), and the thief on the cross (Luke 23) were all justified without their works. Therefore our proof is upheld in spite of all efforts to pare it down. All works, whatever they may be, are excluded from justification, and man is thus not justified by works.

Proof #2: Justification occurs entirely and solely by the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed by God and received by man through faith without any additional works of man; this we shall demonstrate when we deal with the next question. Man is thus not justified by his own works—neither fully, for then there would be no need for Christ; nor partially, for then Christ’s righteousness would not be sufficient.

Proof #3: Man is justified freely by God’s grace, which is here placed in opposition to works. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). In verse 20 the apostle had excluded all works; in verses 21-22 he shows that there is a justification which differs from the righteousness of the law: the righteousness of Christ which is received by faith. In verse 23 he declares that man is condemnable by sin, and is not able to be justified by his own doings; he furthermore shows in verse 24 that justification occurs *freely* (in Greek: *as a gift*), so that merits are not the issue at all, for it is *by the grace of God*. *Grace* does not refer to something to be found in man or which is graciously put within man. “His grace” refers to the goodness of God whereby He is moved to give man a Surety, contrary to his merits, and to justify man on the basis of Christ’s merits, and thus to justify him “by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” The words “freely” and “by His grace” exclude all work and merit. “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom 11:6).

Proof #4: Man can absolutely not be justified by his works, for:

(1) man, even if regenerated, is entirely imperfect, and each day sins in many things—in thoughts, words, and deeds (cf. 1 Kings 8:46; Prov 20:9; James 3:2). He thus cannot be justified in and of himself, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). Therefore, “How should man be just with God? If he will contend with Him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand” (Job 9:2-3). Therefore everyone has need to pray,

“Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Ps 143:2).

(2) Every deed, even the very best, is deficient from every perspective, proceeding from an imperfect heart. It is deficient in faith, fear, love, and has a deficient objective, for “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6); such is man. God, on the contrary, is a righteous Judge whose judgment is according to truth, and who will by no means clear the guilty. Man can therefore not be justified by his works. Man battles against this with all his strength in order to make his good works meritorious, and to promote justification by the works of the law. In doing so the following objections are advanced:

James’s Justification by Works and Paul’s Justification by Faith

Objection #1: Scripture states clearly that Abraham was justified by his works, and thus one can be justified by works. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way” (James 2:14, 21-22, 24-25).

Answer: James states that Abraham was justified by works and Paul in Rom 4:2-5 states resolutely that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. It is the same Spirit of truth who has spoken both by Paul and by James. It is thus certain that they do not contradict each other, but rather, both say the same thing. It is, however, due to the ignorance of man that one cannot see the consistency between them.

(1) The Papists wish to bring both texts into harmony with their twofold justification, which is a distinction not according to God’s Word and has been refuted above. They consider the first justification to be an infusion of grace and a renewal of life, originating in God and occurring apart from works. They maintain that Paul speaks of this. The second justification they consider to be growth in grace and sanctification, insisting that James speaks of this. Since, however, as we have shown above, this distinction is but a human fabrication, such a relationship between these texts is of necessity rendered null and void.

(2) An effort to harmonize these texts by making a different distinction—suggesting that Paul speaks of the justification of the

ungodly and James of the justification of a regenerate person (which is on account of their good works and by which they receive a right unto eternal life)—is essentially no different from what the Papists endeavor to do. We shall refute this a bit further on.

(3) It is also dangerous to suggest that when James speaks of justification by works, he means to say that this is not meritorious, but issues forth out of God's veracity and justice by which He cannot but declare the virtues of the godly to be virtuous, the godly to be sincere and God-fearing, and His work in believers nothing but His work. It is also contrary to the language of the Bible, which never refers to this as justification; this would also not be consistent with the text, for it would not harmonize with James's objective. It is his objective to demonstrate that true faith manifests itself as being a living faith by good works, thus convincing those who live carelessly that their faith is not saving. When the work of Phinehas was counted to him as righteousness (Ps 106:30), this did not pertain to his personal justification, but was rather a justification of his deed, which from various perspectives could be misconstrued. It is also a declaration that this occurred by a special unction of the Spirit. (We shall deal with Matt 12:37 later on.) In 1 John 3:7 the apostle is not referring to justification. Rather, he states that whoever does these things is righteous and holy.

(4) We also consider it to be an injustice to the text if we say that Paul refers to justification before God, and James to justification before men; that is, a demonstration of works which verifies one's justification by faith.

(5) However, if one observes both texts correctly, the apostles express the same truth: Man is justified by faith; however, their opponents were different. Paul had to deal with Jews who, having been converted to Christianity, sought for justification by the law, either entirely or in conjunction with faith. Against such he maintained that justification is not by works at all, but only by faith, irrefutably understanding thereby a true faith by which the just live (Rom 1:17). James, however, had to deal with a group of people who were loose in their lifestyle, and agreed with the truth that man can only be justified by faith without works. They abused this truth by suggesting that it was not necessary to live a godly life and to perform good works. James therefore did not need to convince them that one can only be justified by faith without the works of the law, for in this they agreed. James states this very clearly in chapter 2:23, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness."

We observe that Paul and James use the very same words and they thus agree with each other.

However, since they had to deal with entirely different opponents, they placed a different emphasis upon the truth. Paul convinced his opponents that they had to look away from (*not* cease from) works as far as being justified by them, since man can only be justified by faith without works. James, however, urges the practice of good works which his opponents rejected as being unnecessary and neglected to perform, boasting in the fact that they had faith whereby they would be justified and saved. To them he showed that they neither had true faith, nor understood its essential nature, but that the faith of which they boasted was merely historical faith by which one does not become a partaker of the matter itself; their faith was a dead faith since it was without life and fruits. It resembled the faith of devils who tremble as a result of their faith. He proceeded to show to those persons that true faith is alive and works by love, obedience to God, and good works; and that nothing other than faith leads to eternal felicity. Thus one must judge his faith by his works, and consider whether or not one has true faith.

This he proves by using Abraham as an illustration, demonstrating that Abraham's faith did not only consist in assenting to the promise as being true and certain, and thus to consider matters settled. Rather, his faith manifested itself in obedience to God, even to the sacrificing of his son Isaac, from whom the Messiah had been promised to him. Therefore the apostle states, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect" (James 2:22). He does not state that his works functioned in conjunction with faith; this he would have said if any merit were to be attributed to his works, and if it had been his objective to prove that man must be justified by the merits of his own works. Rather, he says that faith wrought with his works. So strong was his faith that Christ would come forth from Isaac, that Abraham believed that Isaac would become alive again even though he would sacrifice him. That faith stimulated him to be obedient to God and that faith he exercised when he was engaged in sacrificing; and that faith has been εἰς τέλος (eteleiothe), that is, completed, executed, finished, brought to conclusion, and thus has been made perfect by way of the act of sacrifice.

From this it is evident that true faith manifests itself in godliness. Though it is only a means whereby man is justified, it nevertheless does not function singularly, but is accompanied by works, as a consequence thereof. This he states in James 2:24, "Ye

see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” Here the apostle conjoins faith and works and declares that man is justified by faith; however, *not* singularly but also by works which accompany faith. It is therefore as much as said, “*by an active faith.*” This conjoining of faith and works does not occur in a collateral manner, that is, *functioning side by side* as if executing the same task, as if each contributing its own part to justification and much less as if both and each individually were the cause of justification. For the latter is not even true for faith, which only functions as a means in justification whereby the righteousness of Christ is received. Previously we have confirmed by four proofs that works are not the cause of justification (cf. pp. 360-363). The apostle Paul resolutely refutes this also as far as the person of Abraham is concerned. This is also not the objective of the apostle James, who sought to convey that this faith by which man is justified is a living and active faith. Thus in verse 24 faith and works are conjoined as cause and effect, the objective being to demonstrate the true nature of the cause, namely, faith.

When James therefore states that Abraham, Rahab, and man are justified by works, he does not refer to works *singularly* and by itself, but rather as a consequence of being conjoined to faith as its cause. By attributing justification to faith in this conjunction (vs. 23), and works as the fruits of faith, establishing it to be the evidence of true faith, he refers to the consequence and thereby implicitly refers to the cause. It is as much as to say that one is justified by a living and fruit-bearing faith.

Refutation of Additional Objections Pertaining to the Relationship Between Justification and Good Works

Objection #2: “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt 12:37).

Answer (1) This text is contrary to the view of the opponents, for it is evident here that the act of justification is judicial in nature. Justification is the very opposite of condemnation, and thus signifies acquittal.

(2) This text does not refer to God’s work in reference to man, but to man’s activity in reference to others. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; words reveal what is in the heart. A good man brings forth good things out of the good treasure of his heart, and an evil man evil things. By this, one man judges the other and declares him to be either good or evil; he either justifies or condemns him. This text therefore does not support their sentiment.

Objection #3: “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb 13:16).

Answer: The word εὐαρεστέ=ται (euarsteitai) is rendered as *promereri*, (= to earn) in the common Latin translation. Therefore this text is used in support of the meritorious nature of good works. However, since their own linguists are now embarrassed about this, this being such an obvious error, an answer is not necessary. The word means *to find pleasure in*. We fully embrace the idea that good works are pleasing to God. We deny, however, that they are meritorious before God, and this text is therefore not a proof text for them.

Objection #4: Believers receive eternal life because they are worthy of it, and thus they are justified by works. “They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy” (Rev 3:4).

Answer: The worthiness of a person is one thing, and the worthiness of a deed is another. Their works are not worthy, for even the very best of them is imperfect as we have shown above; they are thus unprofitable servants. However, believers themselves are worthy to walk with Christ in white garments since they are righteous in Christ who has merited the right to eternal life for them. They shall walk in white robes which have been made “white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14); “For the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev 19:8). The reason for their righteousness is to be found here and not in their works.

Objection #5: The reward is according to works, and thus man is justified by works. “Then He shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt 16:27); “Who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom 2:6). (Cf. 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 2:23; Rev 20:12.)

Answer: These texts refer to the qualities of, and the distinction between, the persons who will be rewarded with either evil or good. There is no mention made, however, of the causes as to why it will be well with the one and evil with the other. Those who have done well and who have lived godly will be saved, but whoever has lived in an ungodly manner will be condemned. Therefore it does not say that every man will be rewarded *because* of his works, but *according* to his works, albeit that the works of the ungodly are the cause of their destruction.

Additional Objection: The ungodly are condemned due to their works and their works merit condemnation; therefore, it is likewise true that good works merit heaven.

Answer: This is not a logical deduction since the contradistinction is incomplete. The works of the ungodly are completely evil, whereas the works of the godly are imperfect. There is also a difference between punishment and reward. It does not necessarily follow

that when something merits death that contrariwise the opposite merits good. He who commits a murder is worthy of death, but he who does not commit a murder does not therefore of necessity deserve to remain alive. There is a proportionate relationship between ungodliness and condemnation; however, this is not so between good works and salvation. We therefore cannot make a logical deduction from the one to the other.

Objection #6: The reward is given in reference to good works; this is likewise true for justification. “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat” (Matt 25:34-35); “Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much” (Luke 7:47).

Answer: First, as far as Matt 25:34-35 is concerned:

(1) it is not stated here that man will inherit heaven due to good works as the meriting cause;

(2) this is not conveyed by the word “for,” for it can relate to an evidence, a token, a proof, as well as to a cause. This is confirmed in the following passages: “It will be fair weather: for the sky is red” (Matt 16:2); “But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (1 Cor 10:5);

(3) it is evident from the text that the word “for” is not causal, but rather relates to a proof or evidence for the antecedent. It is stated expressly here that heaven is not given as a merited reward, but rather as an inheritance, for it reads, “Inherit.” Heaven is given to the blessed ones, that is, to the elect (Eph 1:3) for whom it was laid away from eternity. This inheritance was prepared for them before they were born—yes, from before the foundations of the world. An inheritance given as a blessing to someone, and prepared thousands of years prior to one’s existence, excludes all merits. The Lord Jesus therefore shows in Matt 25:35 who those blessed ones, those heirs, are and how this is evident: It is given to those who have believed in Christ and whose faith, by reason of love to Christ, has been active in love toward believers (vs. 40).

Secondly, Luke 7:50 does not state that the woman received the forgiveness of sins because of her good works. The word “for” is here also evidential and not causal. The forgiveness of sins is not attributed here to love, but to faith. “Thy faith hath saved thee” (Luke 7:50). Love, here, is an evidence of faith, which has as its nature to be active by way of love (Gal 5:6). This is also evident when considering the objective of the Lord Jesus. His objective is to demonstrate who ought to love most, the person to whom many or to whom few sins have been forgiven. Simon answered, “He, to whom he forgave most” (Luke 7:43). The Lord Jesus approved of

this answer, which shows that the forgiveness of sins is presupposed and that love issued forth from it rather than preceding it as a cause. One may consequently conclude from the magnitude of love the forgiveness of many sins. The Lord Jesus applied this to the woman, for since she loved much, it therefore followed that many sins had been forgiven her. And thus the thought of the Pharisee who had invited Him had been answered: Christ was truly a prophet and Simon thus had no reason to be amazed that Jesus permitted this great sinner to touch Him, since all her many sins were forgiven her. Her touching therefore issued forth from spiritual love as an expression of gratitude.

Objection #7: Good works merit reward and this reward is according to the righteousness of God. Man is thus justified by his works. This is evident in the following passages: “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen 15:1); “Your work shall be rewarded” (2 Chron 15:7); “In keeping of them there is great reward” (Ps 19:11); “For great is your reward in heaven” (Matt 5:12); “If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward” (1 Cor 3:14).

Answer: It is a certainty that God rewards good works. The fact that we must have this reward in view, and must also be motivated by this to do good works, is not only evident from all those texts in which God promises such a reward, but also from the example of Christ, who for the joy which was set before Him has endured the cross (Heb 12:2), as well as of Moses who saw the recompense of the reward (Heb 11:26). We do deny, however, that we *merit* this reward upon doing good works, for this is nowhere to be found in God’s Word. This is contradicted by our being unprofitable after all we have done, the imperfection of our works, and the fact that it is a gift. The word “reward” does not imply *merits*, for there is not only a reward which relates to merits and debt, there is also a reward which is given out of grace and goodness. A reward refers to a singular gift without reference to any work (Ps 127:3). This is confirmed in Ezek 29:18-20 where God, upon the destruction of Tyre, promises Egypt as a reward to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. It is certain that an unbelieving and ungodly man like Nebuchadnezzar could not merit a reward with God for his ungodly deeds which he committed toward Tyre, for he did not do this to do God a service. The reward was given to him purely out of goodness. “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (Rom 4:4). There is thus also a gracious reward. “Give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first” (Matt 20:8). Those who had labored one hour received the

same wages as those who had labored the entire day. These wages were not given according to merit, which is something the others recognized, and they therefore murmured. It was given as a manifestation of favor, which is not only self-evident but is also confirmed in verse 15: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” All the presented texts refer to a gracious reward rather than a meritorious reward, for works are not meritorious.

Additional Objection: This reward is given in accordance with the righteousness of God, and it is thus a meritorious reward. Consider the following passages: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us” (2 Thess 1:6-7); “... which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Tim 4:8); “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love” (Heb 6:10).

Answer (1) Yes, they indeed receive the crown of salvation by the righteousness of God; however, not because of their work, but due to the Surety having merited this for them.

(2) It is also righteous for God to recompense His heirs, not *because of*, but *upon* their good works. This He had promised, and it is righteous to keep one’s promise.

Objection #8: “These things are good and profitable unto men” (Titus 3:8).

Answer: With one matter we can have several objectives in view as well as view it from various perspectives. Thus, good works are also profitable to the glory of God, the edification of our neighbor, for one’s own peace of conscience, and to the assurance of the veracity of one’s faith. It is thus subservient to entering heaven—to enter in this way ordained of God. From the profitableness of good works one can therefore neither conclude their meritoriousness, nor justification because of them.

Objection #9: Several times David desired to be judged according to his righteousness; one can therefore be justified by his works. “Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me” (Ps 7:8); “Hear the right” (Ps 17:1); “The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness” (Ps 18:20).

Answer (1) He does not say “for,” but rather “according to my righteousness.”

(2) There is a *personal* righteousness resulting from the perfection and holiness of one’s disposition and deeds. As such, no man living shall be justified in His sight (Ps 143:2). There is also a

righteousness which relates to a *cause*; in this respect someone can be completely innocent in a matter of which he is accused. These texts refer to the latter sort of righteousness, not to the former.

We have thus confirmed this cardinal point of Christian doctrine. Having refuted the objections, the truth is thus all the more evident.

Justification Not Twofold

Concerning this there is still another point of contention which appears to be somewhat different, but basically is almost the same. The question is as follows:

Question: Is it not possible to maintain a twofold justification, the one pertaining to the elect as being ungodly, and the other to the elect as being godly?

Answer: One then maintains that the justification of the ungodly consists in the forgiveness of sin by the suffering of Christ, of which man becomes a partaker by faith in Him. The justification of a godly person is then said to occur upon the performance of good works which are neither according to the law of nature nor according to the ceremonial law, but rather according to the law and the commandments of Christ. Thereby man acquires a right to eternal life and is declared to be an heir of it. We resolutely reject this proposition and will prove our refutation as follows:

First, we refer to the proofs against the Papists mentioned above and reaffirm that justification is not by works.

Secondly, Christ, in placing Himself under the law as Surety, and in perfectly fulfilling it, has fully merited the right to eternal life for His elect. This we have already proven. Man therefore does not acquire this right to eternal life by his works, for otherwise Christ would not be a perfect Savior. One would then be obligated to thank Him for the lesser: the removal of guilt and punishment, but not for salvation; for this one would then be grateful to one's self.

Evasive Argument: All glory must be to Christ and thus also as far as our salvation is concerned, for inherent righteousness and good works proceed from Christ and function by reason of Christ's power.

Answer (1) It is nothing else but the popish proposition that Christ has merited our ability to merit. It is true that Christ is worthy of all honor for the deliverance from guilt and punishment, the acquisition of the right to eternal life, as well as our sanctification. This does not imply, however, that someone is justified by way of inherent righteousness. This is neither God's objective in sanctifying us, nor the objective of the godly, nor the purpose of works which are stained by much sin.

(2) If one maintains that a right to eternal life is acquired by his

good works, and that this right is granted by way of justification by works, all would nevertheless be attributed to man, and therefore he that has performed these good works would then have to thank himself. This is contrary to Scripture and the confession of the Reformed church.

Thirdly, justification is a judicial act of God as righteous Judge and consists in the following two matters: acquittal from guilt and punishment, and the granting of a right to eternal life.

(1) If the foregoing proposition (in the question) were true, Christ's righteousness would not be the sole cause of man's justification, but Christ's suffering and man's works would be conjoined and justification would then be in consequence of both; thus Christ would not be a perfect Savior.

(2) It is impossible for man's works to play any role in justification, for in justification all must be according to righteousness and all must be perfect, and man's works are imperfect.

Evasive Argument #1: God accepts them as being sufficient.

Answer: This is neither the truth, nor does it meet the standard of righteousness. It is therefore utterly impossible for a righteous God to do so.

Evasive Argument #2: Christ covers the imperfections.

Answer: In what manner? Not by His suffering as that delivers from guilt and punishment. If it is by reason of His holiness, then Christ's active obedience must be added to this. In what manner does that occur? Does this occur partially, supplementing what is lacking in man? Then He would neither be a complete Savior nor the only cause of justification. Even then, whatever man adds will always remain imperfect in and of itself, will fall short in justification, and will never play any role in it.

Fourthly, justification only occurs by faith, it being the means whereby the sinner receives the *active and passive* righteousness of Christ as his own (Rom 3:20, 28). Faith excludes all works and stands in opposition to works (Rom 2:6; Phil 3:9).

Evasive Argument: Works which pertain to the moral and ceremonial law are excluded; this, however, is not true for evangelical works.

Answer: Scripture knows of no evangelical commandments. The perfect law of the ten commandments is the law of love, given to believers as a rule of life by which they must walk in union with Christ.

Whatever reasons could be advanced to support these erroneous sentiments have already been refuted above.

Objection #1: In Rom 3-4 the apostle speaks of the ceremonial law and not of the law of the ten commandments.

Answer: We have demonstrated the contrary to be true.

Objection #2: Consider James 2:14, 22, 25.

Answer: Refer to our earlier answer.

Objections #3 & 4: Consider Matt 12:37 and Ps 106:30-31.

Answer: Refer also to the above.

Having considered the meriting cause of justification, we shall now proceed to the means by which this occurs, namely, faith.

The Role of Faith in Justification

Question: What role does faith play in justification? Must it be viewed as a work and thus as a meriting cause? Must it be considered as the basis and reason upon which God justifies man; or is it a means whereby the righteousness of Christ is received?

Answer: Papists, Socinians, and Arminians (to whom the Anabaptists generally join themselves) hold to the first proposition. They all have an erroneous view of faith, not considering it as the reception of Christ's merits, but rather as consisting in love and obedience to the commandments. We have dealt comprehensively with this in chapter 32.

Papists maintain that faith consists in love and that it enables man to do that which is righteous, man initiating this faith which in turn is meritorious; and thus it is part and parcel of righteousness itself. In this manner man would then be justified by faith.

Socinians, who deny the entire atonement of Christ, maintain that the act of faith does not consist in the reception of the righteousness of Christ, but is a virtue and the cause of justification. Not that faith by virtue of inherent worthiness would be efficacious unto eternal life, but rather by way of gracious acceptance—acceptance of a part as the whole.

The *Arminians* maintain that Christ by His suffering and death has satisfied the justice of God for the entire human race, and that He has enabled God to deal with man according to His good pleasure as far as the acquisition of salvation is concerned. Therefore God, instead of requiring perfect obedience to the law, requires faith instead—but not as a means whereby one receives the righteousness of Christ. It is rather an act of obedience by which man is justified and receives eternal life. We deny all this, maintaining that faith does not function as a work in justification, but rather as a means by which it receives and appropriates the perfect *passive and active* righteousness of Christ. This is evident for the following reasons:

Proof #1: If man were justified by faith as a work:

(1) Then man would be justified by works; this, together with the exception that it is an evangelical work, we have thoroughly refuted.

(2) Then God's judgment would not be according to truth and righteousness, for faith is imperfect.

(3) The righteousness of Christ alone would not be the cause of man's justification, and therefore faith, as a work, cannot be considered as a cause.

(4) All boasting is not excluded. If, however, man is justified by faith, "where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith" (Rom 3:27). If man were to be justified by faith as being a work, which, as they claim, proceeds from their own free will and power, then all boasting would not be excluded. Man would then have something which would proceed from his own goodness; this is expressly excluded here, together with all works, irrespective of what the nature of these works may be.

(5) The stark contrast between works and faith would have no function if faith were here to be viewed as a work; then works would ultimately be contrasted with works. However, in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians, faith is continually contrasted with works. Faith is therefore not to be considered as a work in reference to justification.

(6) It could be said that man is justified because of faith. Scripture states nowhere, however, that man is justified because of his faith, but always *by and out of* faith. From all this it is very evident that in this matter, faith cannot be viewed as a work. Faith functions as a means and therefore is neither the meriting cause nor the foundation or reason for justification.

Proof #2: Scripture states clearly that faith functions as a means, and that man, in receiving the righteousness of Christ by faith, is justified. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:28); "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph 2:8); "... that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law" (Gal 2:16). There are but two ways whereby man could be justified: either by his own works, and thus by way of the covenant of works, or by faith, and thus by way of the covenant of grace. These two cannot harmonize, for the one demands perfect righteousness within one's self, and the other in a Surety who can only be received and appropriated by faith; the one excludes the other (Rom 10:5-6). It is irrefutable that Paul continually establishes a contrast between faith and the works of the law.

Evasive Argument: How about the works of the gospel?

Answer: There are no evangelical works. If they existed, there of necessity would also have to be an evangelical law. Even then faith and works would be contrasted with each other. In maintaining

this contrast, the apostle rejects justification by works and establishes justification by faith. Thus, faith cannot be considered as a work, but must rather be viewed as a means.

Proof #3: The nature of faith consists in the reception of Christ unto justification, in taking refuge, and in entrusting oneself to Him unto justification, sanctification, and glorification, as well as in trusting in and leaning upon Him. We have dealt extensively with this in chapter 32. Faith must thus be viewed as a means—and not as a work—whereby the believer receives the righteousness of Christ as his own righteousness.

Objection: The most significant argument against this can be found in Rom 4:3, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (cf. Gen 15:6; Gal 3:6; James 2:23). Thus faith itself is man’s righteousness, and therefore in justification faith functions as a work rather than as a means whereby the righteousness of Christ is received.

Answer (1) The text itself refutes this, for it excludes all boasting and thus all works.

(2) He says that Abraham was not justified by works, but rather by faith; faith can therefore not be denominated here as a work. Faith is indeed an activity as well as an active principle which brings forth holiness. This is, however, not the point of contention. Instead, the controversy is whether in justification faith functions as a virtue or as a work, and thus is the basis, foundation, and reason why man is justified. Scripture denies this in reference to Abraham as well as to all men.

(3) To impute is to credit something to someone’s account which he has not accomplished himself and which stands in opposition to all his own work. This is true for the righteousness of Christ which is received by faith. (Cf. Rom 4:4-6; Rom 5:19; 2 Cor 5:21.)

Additional Objection: The words are clear and simple: Faith itself is imputed to Abraham. One can therefore neither understand this to refer to the work and merits of another, nor deem faith to be the means whereby one receives the righteousness of another.

Answer: It is consistent with the style of God’s Word to mention the effect (that which has been wrought), and yet thereby imply the means. In this manner the gospel is called the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16), knowledge of eternal life (John 17:3), and “His commandment is life everlasting” (John 12:50). In like manner the means are also mentioned here, which must be understood as referring to that which he received: the righteousness of Christ. God promised the Savior to Abraham, that He would come forth from him through Isaac. Abraham believed this promise, not only

receiving these words as truth, but by that faith penetrated to the promised matter itself—the Savior. Being thus united by faith to the matter, that is to the Savior, God imputed this received righteousness to him. The act of faith cannot be understood any other way but as a being united with that which one receives, since the very nature of faith consists in receiving. When faith was therefore imputed to Abraham, it is considered as being in union with that which it had received: the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, from which proceeded the efficacy of justification.

Justification Is not from Eternity

After considering the means, we shall now proceed to consider when justification occurs. The following question relates to this: Does justification occur only once, that is, either from eternity, at the death of Christ, or when one first comes to the conclusion that Christ is his Savior? Before we answer this question we shall first clearly present our own sentiments by way of several propositions. Subsequent to this, we shall present the sentiments of the so-called *Hebrews*.

We maintain, first of all, that in the matter of justification God must be viewed as the Justifier and man as the one being justified. Justification is therefore *the pronouncement of a sentence, not only concerning man, but also addressed to man*. One can thus view the act of justification from God's perspective, that is, what He performs in this act, or from man's perspective, noting the manner whereby man receives this. When viewing this act from God's perspective it is referred to as *justification activa, active justification*. When viewed from man's perspective it is referred to as *justification passiva, passive justification*. These are one and the same act. The difference pertains only to the manner in which it is performed or how it is received. One therefore also cannot separate them. Wherever there is active justification there will also be passive justification, and vice versa, wherever there is passive justification there will also be active justification.

Secondly, prior to creation and the existence of the elect, God has eternally purposed to justify the elect in their lifetime on the basis of the merits of Christ which are received by faith. "Who hath saved us ... according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim 1:9); "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:5).

This purpose is not the equivalent of justification, for a purpose differs from its execution; we shall demonstrate shortly that this is so.

Thirdly, man having sinned, the Lord Jesus, because of the

covenant of redemption, gave Himself as a Surety who took all upon Himself. As such He took their personal guilt from them upon Himself in order to atone for this at the appointed time. Since He made full satisfaction for this guilt, He has merited the right to eternal life for them. Having fully accomplished this, He was therefore “justified in the Spirit” (1 Tim 3:16), that is, God declared that satisfaction had been made by Him and that He no longer had to suffer and be obedient for the satisfaction of His justice on behalf of the elect. Thus, their sins have been atoned for by reason of a transaction between the Father and the Surety, and the right to eternal life was merited. Christ having thus been justified, all His elect are justified in Him *virtualiter*, that is, *by its virtue* and efficacy, and are indeed reconciled. This, however, is not so *actualiter*, that is, actually, for they did not exist as yet. The first [justification *virtualiter*] is not the justification of which Scripture speaks, but rather the latter [justification *actualiter*]; this cannot occur unless man, having sinned, exists and believes in Christ.

Fourthly, when man does actually exist, is grievously troubled and perplexed about his sins, and by means of the gospel believes in Christ, thereby being united to Him and being a partaker of His righteousness, God then actually justifies him and pronounces the sentence of acquittal upon him from His Word, which is the voice of God. This is even so if the believer as yet is not aware of a peace in his conscience as a result of this declaration. This may be due to ignorance of the voice of God, to objections arising in his mind, or to doubts regarding the veracity of his faith. It may also be that upon hearing this pronouncement in the Word, he believes this by faith and finds peace. It may also be that this is sealed by the special operation of the Spirit, causing him to taste and perceive immediately what it means to have the forgiveness of sins, to be reconciled with God, to be an heir of eternal life, and to enjoy the fruits of all these.

Fifthly, justification is an actual, absolute, complete acquittal of guilt and punishment, and a granting of the right to eternal life. It is neither contingent upon any condition which could change the sentence, nor does it pertain to *some* sins (thus having no effect upon others), but it pertains to *all* the sins of the person as he presently is. It is identical for all believers, irrespective of time, location, or person; the one is not justified in a different or more complete manner than the other. They are all justified on the basis of the satisfaction of Christ, which is received by faith. “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom 3:30); “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him

shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Since justification is identical in all, it is likewise also perfect, and thus there can be no mention of a greater or lesser degree, as is true in sanctification. God justifies the person, forgives all sins, and gives him full access to all the benefits of the covenant; there is nothing lacking in this. However, since faith—the means—is either stronger or weaker, the assurance of justification is likewise variable; this, however, is not so for the justifying act of God. This act is perfect and complete. This is true in reference to the spiritual state of believers; that is, in being declared heirs of eternal life and reconciled children of God, as well as in reference to the sins which they repeatedly commit. The latter are repeatedly removed. Forgiven sins can never again be brought back to provoke the wrath of God and incur punishment. God nevertheless chastises His own concerning all forgiven sins. David’s sins were forgiven, but the sword would not depart from his house because of these sins; Job inherited the iniquity of his youth.

Sixthly, after the pronouncement of peace, believers do again return to foolishness, and daily they yet stumble in many things. These sins by their very nature are time and again worthy of temporal and eternal punishments. The Lord Jesus, however, as High Priest and Advocate, stands before the throne of grace and continually exhibits the efficacy of satisfaction for sins which are repeatedly committed. They are thus delivered from wrath by His life (Rom 3:9-10). Sins do not place them outside of the state of grace, as if their prior justification were thereby nullified; no, God is and remains reconciled with them in Christ. God views them as His children, favorites, and heirs. The justification which occurs upon the first act of faith, and which occurs time and again after that, each time includes the forgiveness of sins—sins to be committed subsequently *virtualiter*, that is, as far as virtue and efficacy are concerned; thus declaring that they would also each time be forgiven *ctualiter*, that is, actually. However, sins cannot be forgiven in actuality prior to being committed. We cannot speak of that which does not exist; whatever has not been committed cannot be forgiven. The godly also understand it to be thus when they perceive themselves to be justified by faith. They believe that God, in Christ, has forgiven them all their sins, has received them as children and heirs, and are assured that in the future they will remain reconciled and continue to be heirs. Therefore, when they fall, God will each time and repeatedly forgive them. We shall discuss this more comprehensively in answering the next question.

The Error of the “Hebrews” Refuted

In our days a sect begins to manifest itself which calls itself by the name of *Hebrews*. This is so because the one knows the Hebrew alphabet, others can read it, and maybe one or two begin to understand it. They consequently imagine that they know the language as well as the best of them, and they can personally discern and know how each word must be translated. They conduct themselves as if they were masters, even though they know no more than *D. Leusden* tells them in his dictionary and *D. Trommius* in his concordance. Some of them are disorderly people and have loose morals, who abuse the grace of God in order to commit fornication and ungodliness, and who abuse Christian liberty, using it as a pretext to indulge in the flesh. Women among them “have the floor,” and preach in their own way. They cannot do much harm to the church, since they draw the scum of the church (who should have been excommunicated long ago) away from her. They usher souls to hell with a false peace. They are unstable, for one time they say this and then again that. They seem to have peaked already and are now despised by all honest citizens. Their doctrine primarily consists of the following elements.

(1) They either hold to an unlimited election of all men who believe that Christ has died for them, or to an election limited to a certain number, who God from eternity views in Christ and thus from eternity justifies. Therefore, He has nothing against them from the very outset. At birth Adam’s sin is thus not imputed to them, and the corruption of their nature is no sin to them, since they already are justified.

(2) They either hold to an unlimited atonement by Christ for all who but believe that Christ is their Savior, or to a limited atonement for all the individual elect. They maintain that not only all their past, present, and future sins are paid for, but also that God has perfectly justified them from that very moment, and from the very first cannot view them in any other way but in Christ. Thus, nothing is sin to them anymore, in spite of the fact that they do all that is called sin.

(3) They maintain that faith consists in the determination that Christ is their Savior and has died for them, without this being evident by some tokens of sorrow over committed sins; rather, they laugh about them. They deem conversion to be nothing else but a believing that Christ has died for them. They consider sanctification to be the cleaving of Christ’s righteousness to them as their own personal righteousness. They thus consider that they must be viewed as having personally fulfilled the law—as one

upon whom the law no longer has a claim. It is therefore sufficient for them merely to believe that Christ has died for them, for then they are free from the entire law, and whatever they do is no sin for them. One thus may not have any sorrow for sin; there is no need to confess sin and seek Christ, fleeing to Him for reconciliation, and receive Him as his ransom. One need not pray for forgiveness, since doing so would be mocking with God, who has already forgiven them, either from eternity, at the death and resurrection of Christ, or from the moment when they believed that Christ died for them. One now need not do anything else but to give thanks. Their exhortation to believe is as follows: Would you be so ungrateful as not to believe that Christ has died for you? Therefore believe this and you will be delivered from everything.

(4) They maintain that one is not obligated to attend public worship, that there is no such thing as a divine commission for ministers, and that everyone should therefore be a minister. They make no avail of the sacraments, or if they do use them, they maintain that no one may use them who doubts his salvation.

Thus the basis for all their abominable and carnal propositions is a misconception and abuse of the doctrine of justification. They therefore answer the question presented above by stating that justification does not occur frequently and daily, but that it has occurred once and for all.

Having said this by way of preface, we shall now proceed to prove the following truth: Justification from eternity, at the time of Christ's death, or upon the first act of faith, did not take place so as to exclude daily justification in reference to committed sins.

First, we maintain that *justification did not occur from eternity*. God has, indeed, decreed from eternity to justify the elect; however, this decree and purpose is not justification itself. This is evident for the following reasons:

First, this purpose is never referred to as the act of justification. It is one thing to purpose and to decree, and another thing to execute that purpose and decree.

Secondly, the elect, prior to their regeneration "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3), and enemies of God (Rom 5:10). This they could neither be, nor could this be said of them if they already had actually been justified.

Thirdly, justification occurs after being called. "... whom He called, them He also justified" (Rom 8:30). It occurs by means of the act of faith. "Therefore being justified by faith ..." (Rom 5:1); "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the

law” (Rom 3:28). Since faith is exercised by a person who actually exists, it follows that justification did not transpire in eternity.

Fourthly, Scripture speaks of the forgiveness of sins in the future tense; God shall justify and God shall forgive. “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom 3:30); “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43); “... then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin” (2 Chron 7:14). Justification did therefore not occur from eternity.

Fifthly, God justifies believers when they actually exist and confess their sins. “I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Ps 32:5); “This man went down to his house justified “ (Luke 18:14); “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

From the foregoing it is therefore irrefutable that justification did not occur from eternity. Out of this most essential proof follows also the second proposition: *Man is not actually justified at the death and resurrection of Christ*, even though their sins have completely been paid for and God’s justice has been satisfied.

Justification: A Daily Occurrence

We shall now proceed to the second proposition which raises the following question:

Question: Does justification occur once and for all upon the first act of faith, or does it occur daily upon the renewed exercise of faith after falling into sin?

Answer: Since this controversy arises primarily from a misconception concerning the nature of the difference between the two, it is necessary to state several things by way of preface, and to add to what we have said relative to the previous question. Aside from the *Hebrews*, there are also some of Reformed persuasion who maintain that justification occurs only once and for all.

First, the act of justification is not man’s own doing. Man believes and receives Christ and His righteousness by faith as his own and thus comes into a righteous state, and can then be a subject for justification. However, irrespective of how effectively he may appropriate the righteousness of Christ, he nevertheless does not justify himself. Rather, it is God as Judge who justifies such a one who is righteous in Christ, having received the righteousness of Christ by faith.

Secondly, we must make a distinction between the *purpose* to justify

and the *act of justification*. God has purposed from eternity to justify the elect, but He does not actually justify them from eternity. To do so it is necessary that the elect actually exist and be in a state of righteousness before God as Judge as we have shown earlier.

Thirdly, one needs to make a distinction between *reconciliation* and *justification*. God's justice has been satisfied in Christ; the elect, as enemies, have been reconciled with God by the death of His Son. From God's side His justice had already been satisfied. God was already reconciled with the elect before they were born, and, having been born, prior to their conversion. God from His side remains reconciled, even when believers fall into the deepest possible state of backsliding. A renewed reconciliation and satisfaction are not necessary. It is an error of many unpretentious and simple believers that they, after having fallen into sin, view God as being unreconciled with them. It is one thing to be fearful of being no partaker of Christ and of reconciliation through Him, while it is another thing to view God repeatedly as being unreconciled with one's self. Reconciliation remains a reality both from God's side and from the side of the believer as far as their state is concerned. This is true even when they fall into sin, are in great darkness, have strife, are unbelieving, or are distressed. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, spiritual life, and the propensity of faith remains. God, however, does not justify the believer when he does not exist as yet or when he is still unconverted, for man, being yet without Christ, is then still incapable of being a suitable subject for justification. When a truly converted and believing person is engaged in the practice of sin, God does not exercise the act of justification toward those who are in such a condition. At that time they are also not suitable objects for this transaction, for they do not exercise faith whereby they are justified. As far as their spiritual state is concerned, their reconciliation is a reality and remains in force, as well from God's side as from the side of the believer; however, justification is the declaration of a sentence.

Fourthly, the act of justifying or not justifying *does not imply a change in God*. We must not be of the opinion that God, when not exercising the act of justification, is each time again in a dissatisfied and wrathful disposition, and that whenever He exercises the act of justification again He is of a loving and satisfied disposition. This is by no means the case, for with the Lord there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. The change is in the subject. Man, while not existing as yet, or if he exists but is not converted, or if he is in essence converted but is engaged in the practice of sin, is not a suitable

subject toward whom God exercises the act of justification. He becomes a suitable subject, however, when he exercises faith.

Fifthly, justification is not a purpose, but an actual deed; it is also not reconciliation, nor does it imply mutability in God. Instead, it is *a pronouncement of the sentence of acquittal concerning and toward a person, who by faith receives Christ and His righteousness*. I repeat, it is the pronouncement made toward the believer: “Your sins have been atoned for; My justice is satisfied; you are reconciled with Me; I forgive you your sins; I remit them; I do not charge them to your account; and you are an heir of eternal life.” God makes this pronouncement by means of His Word whenever a believer hears, reads, or reflects upon such sentences. This pronouncement is made by the Holy Spirit to the heart of a believer when He either impresses a special text upon him, addressing this to his heart, or when He holds before him the gospel in a general sense and applies it. Believers to whom this pronouncement is made are not all in the same condition. Some hear this pronouncement very clearly and distinctly, believe that they are justified, experience peace in their conscience, and have free access to the throne of grace, exclaiming, “Abba, Father!” Others do not hear this pronouncement as clearly, and therefore also do not enjoy the fruits of this with as much clarity. Again, others are so full of trouble and anxiety concerning their spiritual state and the forgiveness of their sins that they do not give heed to the pronouncement of the Word nor to their feelings, be they feelings of comfort and peace. He who is hard of hearing in the court of conscience is acquitted as well as the one whose hearing is exceptional; the one who is weak in faith is acquitted as well as the one who is strong in faith.

Sixthly, justification is not *actio permanens, sed transiens*, that is, *a permanent act*, which is effective from the very first moment of a believer’s regeneration until their death, but rather *a transitory act*, which ceases to render a pronouncement, and is therefore repeated each time again. The first pronouncement to them is past, and there is each time a new pronouncement which is not of a different nature, but is identical in nature. This is not to imply that the first act of justification is repeated, nor that God would direct a believer who prays for the forgiveness of sins to the first act of faith when He, at the outset of his conversion and faith, justified him—nor is it implied that the application of the first act of justification would be a daily occurrence. This initial act could have been either not so powerfully and sensibly experienced or could have been erased from one’s memory. Thus it is a daily and renewed pronouncement of the very same nature.

Seventhly, the point of contention is not merely a matter of reflection, but pertains to the practice of life itself. It is something which the believer daily encounters in his prayers. If the soul does not have a clear grasp of this matter, it will be confused, not knowing how it can pray with understanding and spiritual liberty. One therefore must know:

(1) he does not pray whether reconciliation would once again or daily occur, for this has occurred once and for all in the sacrifice of Christ;

(2) he ought not to pray that God's purpose concerning us would change, for this is immutable; the secret things are for the Lord, and in prayer he ought to be governed by the Word of God and his own state;

(3) he ought not to pray whether God would change His heart toward us, that instead of a heart of wrath He would be of a favorable disposition toward us; those who do this are ignorant, for God was already favorably disposed and loving toward the elect prior to their regeneration and before they believed;

(4) prayer as far as God is concerned pertains to the manifestation of His goodness, and as far as we are concerned to its application. Justification is nothing else but application in response to the first exercise of faith, as well as every exercise thereafter, when one, by renewal, becomes a suitable subject for justification. This is not the application of a comfortable feeling, but of a pronouncement made to us.

Eighthly, it is irrefutably true that an unconverted person must pray for justification as it takes place upon the first exercise of faith (even though we make no distinction between the first and the repeated exercises as far as the essence of the matter is concerned). It thus follows that all who are not assured of their regenerate state and of their faith, who fear they are not yet in this state, even though they may indeed be regenerated, must act according to their perception of their spiritual state. They must thus pray for forgiveness and justification as if this had never taken place yet; indeed, they cannot do otherwise. Since, however, the majority of the godly live without a clear knowledge and assurance of their spiritual state and repeatedly doubt what has previously taken place, this point of contention (see question on p. 381) would not pertain to the majority of the godly, but rather to the few who are currently assured.

Ninthly, one needs to make a distinction between *regeneration*, *the adoption of children*, and *justification*. Even though these benefits are bestowed simultaneously and immediately upon becoming a

suitable subject for justification, the one benefit is not the other; the soul comprehends the one differently from the other, distinguishing between them when she speaks about them. The soul who is assured of her spiritual state neither prays for regeneration, nor for the adoption of children; this she knows already, as well as that God has previously justified her as far as her previous sins are concerned. Rather, she prays for a new pronouncement of the acquittal concerning newly committed sins. She prays that the guilt and punishment she has incurred by her currently committed sins would be removed on the basis of the merits of Christ, and that God by renewal would be pleased to pronounce the sentence of acquittal toward and upon her.

Tenthly, a distinction needs to be made *between justification and being assured of this*, that is, the sense of comfort, peace, and joy. The latter are fruits of the first. The first, justification, can be present without assurance and without a sense of comfort, peace, and joy. In his prayer, the believer, be it in the first exercise of faith or subsequently, has more than the pronouncement of the sentence in view, that is justification; his activity does not terminate here. He also has in view a comforting sense of forgiveness, as well as peace and joy. Yes, he cannot be at peace without obtaining forgiveness. It does not follow, however, that someone is not justified nor has obtained the forgiveness of sins if he is without peace or joy, and that only those obtain the forgiveness of sins who acquire a sense of comfort. For even the weakest in faith must believe, on the basis of the Word, that God, upon his prayer and with his eye upon Christ, forgives him his sins since He has promised to do so. Therefore the essence of justification does not consist in a comforting and sensible application of the sentence, but in its pronouncement. This pronouncement is not only made upon the first exercise of faith, but still occurs daily, whether or not the believer enjoys its comforting fruits. Having stated this by way of preface, we shall now proceed with the proof.

Scriptural Proofs for Daily Justification

Proof #1: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). *To forgive sins* is to justify and to pronounce the sentence, “Your sins have been forgiven and My justice has been satisfied. I shall not punish you for the same; I grant you acquittal.” “To forgive” implies simultaneously that someone is declared to be an heir of eternal life, as well as to be acquitted. Forgiveness must have a suitable subject; that is, a believer who sensibly and with

shame *confesses his sins* having his eye upon Jesus. The apostle does not refer here to initial conversion, but to believers who have fallen into sin. This is evident from the pronoun “we,” from that which precedes, and from that which is written in chapter 2:1. From this it is clearly evident that God daily pronounces the justifying sentence upon believers; that is, He justifies daily.

Evasive Argument #1: To forgive is to give a comforting application as well as peace in the conscience.

Answer (1) This is merely conjecture, and I deny that forgiveness is a comforting application and the giving of peace in the conscience; let one proof be produced.

(2) It expressly contradicts this text, for if forgiveness signified a comforting application, all upright confessors of the truth would, on the basis of God’s faithfulness and justice, enjoy sensible comfort and peace of conscience. However, all upright confessors of the truth do not have this; experience bears abundant witness to this. Forgiveness is therefore not a comforting application.

(3) If forgiveness were synonymous with a comforting application, all who miss this comforting application would be bereft of the forgiveness of sins. It would be an offense against the generation of the children of God, grieving those whom the Lord has not grieved. It is thus evident that forgiveness is not a comforting application, but rather is the cause of peace in the conscience; it can therefore be genuine without such evident results.

(4) If forgiveness is a comforting application, it would have to be an application of the first act of justification upon the first exercise of faith, or else it is a new application of the merits of Christ for them. The first option cannot be true, for most believers have neither the knowledge nor the witness of their first justification, and they rarely or never think upon this when they experience a comfortable application. If the latter is true, it is a new act of justification or a new repetition of the same which occurs frequently; it is this to which we are referring. We do not deny that forgiveness is an application; that is true for the first as well as for the repeated act. They are equal or identical in this respect; however, it is not particularly a comforting application, for comfort is the consequence. The latter can be present in various measures, at various times, and to various degrees.

Evasive Argument #2: If no one receives forgiveness but those who confess their sins, one could never have forgiveness of those sins which he has not confessed, since there are many sins which are either not noticed or have been forgotten.

Answer (1) A distinction must be made between reconciliation

and forgiveness, that is, justification or the pronouncement of the sentence. Reconciliation with God is and always remains a reality, also in a condition of great backsliding. The pronouncement of forgiveness, however, occurs when there is a suitable subject, this being an upright confessor.

(2) When a believer, after falling in sin, makes confession, he includes therein all his sins. He even includes his sinful nature and whatever has proceeded from this (whether known or unknown), and he thus confesses them all.

(3) When God forgives, He thus forgives all sins which have been committed, and He justifies the person as he presently is.

Evasive Argument #3: When believers pray for forgiveness, they aim to be conscious of this, as well as for peace of conscience as a result of being sensible of the forgiveness of sins. Thus forgiveness is to be understood as consisting of consciousness and comfort.

Answer: It is true that believers desire and seek this; it is their obligation. However, in prayer they make a distinction between forgiveness and comfort. In the first place, they pray in an absolute sense of the word since God has promised this to them; in the second place, they pray conditionally—it being contingent upon the Lord’s pleasure—and submissively, since they have no absolute promise concerning this. Sometimes the Lord grants it and sometimes He does not.

Proof #2: We formulate this second proof from such texts in which believers pray daily for forgiveness, upon which God daily forgives. Consider the following from among many: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:14); “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matt 6:14); “Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba ... wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop ... Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God” (Ps 51:1-2, 7, 14); “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. ... The Lord also hath put away thy sin” (2 Sam 12:13); “I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Ps 32:5). It has now been shown that forgiveness is the pronouncement of the justifying sentence, rather than comfort and the comforting sense of forgiveness which occasionally follow it. This is also evident from the foregoing texts. In Matt 6:14 it is stated that God will forgive us if we forgive our debtors. However, our act of forgiveness does not consist in the comforting application to the conscience of our neighbor, but in a declaration that we acquit him, shall not avenge ourselves, and shall treat him as if he

had not committed this deed; this is likewise true when God forgives us. In 2 Sam 12:13 Nathan said to David that the Lord had taken his sins away, but he did not declare to him that God had given him comfort and peace of conscience. Believers pray daily for forgiveness and God daily forgives them. It is thus evident that justification does not occur once, but takes place frequently.

Proof #3: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Add to this the texts which speak of Christ’s intercession as High Priest. (Cf. Heb 8:1; Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34.) If justification were to occur once and for all upon the first exercise of faith, the second high-priestly ministry for believers would no longer be necessary; then they would have no need for an Advocate or Intercessor. However, one does need Him again each time he has sinned. Thus intercession has reference to sins which are repeatedly committed, praying that they be forgiven. Forgiveness therefore does not occur once and for all, but daily.

Evasive Argument: Christ’s intercession pertains to application, that is, to this comforting sense.

Answer: We have already responded to this. This daily application is the daily justification, that is, the daily pronouncement of the justifying sentence, or daily forgiveness. The first act of justification, as well as those subsequent thereto, is applicatory in nature. The same act of justification is frequently repeated and the sentence is frequently pronounced. This does not imply that the latter nullifies the first, but that the spiritual condition of believers repeatedly requires a new declaration or repetition of it. God accommodates Himself to man’s nature and state, and deals with him accordingly. Man in this respect must also act as man, and thus not in a manner as God functions in reference to Himself, but rather in a manner which is suitable to man. One would have to prove that the daily application consisted of nothing else than the comforting of the soul. This will never occur, however, and thus this argument is futile.

Proof #4: This proof we formulate on the basis of such texts in which it is declared that justification follows the exercise of faith. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1); “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28). Faith must not be exercised once and for all, but it is the duty and task of believers to exercise faith daily, and to receive Jesus daily as the ransom for their sins, unto their justification. Would faith only be efficacious

when first exercised and not subsequently? No, faith is always of the same efficacy. Since justification is the fruit of faith when first exercised, justification is also the fruit when faith is exercised by renewal. This we observe for example in Abraham. Abraham was already a believer and had long before been justified prior to the promise in Gen 15 being given to him, namely, “So shall thy seed be” (Gen 15:5). It is nevertheless stated in Gen 15:6, “And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.” Paul had this in mind in Rom 4. It was the apostle’s objective to prove that man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith. This he proves by quoting Gen 15:6, where he uses Abraham as an example, demonstrating that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. “For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:3). Abraham was already justified prior to this; nevertheless, when subsequently he believed again, he was again justified. Paul uses this justification as a proof that man is justified by faith rather than the law. Therefore, as often as a believer exercises faith, so frequently is he justified.

Proof #5: “He that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev 22:11). Since a justified person must not remain focused upon the first justifying act, but rather must endeavor to be continually justified, it follows that justification does not occur once, but frequently.

Evasive Argument #1: “To be righteous still” refers to an increased manifestation of one’s justification by his fruits.

Answer: The words “to justify” and “to be justified” never have this meaning. This is also not the case in James 2:21. Consider also our commentary upon the foregoing texts. If somewhere it were to mean this (which we nevertheless do not admit), this cannot be the meaning here, for being justified is joined to being sanctified, and sanctification manifests itself in the practice of virtue.

Evasive Argument #2: The reference here is to *passive* justification rather than *active* justification. *Active* justification is a work of God toward man whereby He acquits him; however, *passive* justification is the assurance of being justified and the comforting sense of it.

Answer: This is a fabricated distinction which is not founded upon the Word of God. Wherever there is *passive* justification, there is also *active* justification. Neither can someone receive anything, nor can anything be done toward anyone, or there must be the work of another who either gives or does something toward the other. If one wishes to make this distinction, then it pertains to the same deed. It is *active* as far as the performer of the deed is concerned,

and *passive* as far as the subject is concerned, who is the recipient of the operation of the other. We absolutely deny, however, that *passive* justification would mean the assurance of one's justification and the comforting sense of it; there is no proof for this in the entire Scriptures. Many of the godly die without ever having had this comforting sense; they then would not have been justified.

Proof #6: We derive this proof from the absurdities which are the logical consequence of the view that justification occurs once and for all: (1) God would forgive believers sins which they have not committed, since forgiveness cannot occur unless there is a committed crime. Just as someone neither can nor will be punished for sins which as yet are to be committed, so one can likewise not be justified concerning sins which are as yet to be committed. Christ, as Surety, was punished for sins which the godly would as yet commit. This, however, is an entirely different situation, since He, being God, dealt with God for whom everything is in the present; also as Surety He could only suffer once since this atonement was a perfect atonement.

(2) One could then also never pray for justification or forgiveness, since God sees this sin but once according to their view, forgiving all sins simultaneously.

(3) One would then have a comforting sense concerning sins which are as yet to be committed. Instead, one ought to mourn over the commission of sins and be grievously sorrowful.

We have therefore demonstrated very clearly that justification occurs daily.

Objection: Justification is perfect; God justifies the person and this includes the forgiveness of all sins—past, present, and future sins—and is as such distinguished from sanctification which occurs by degrees. If justification would occur daily, the believer would repeatedly be in an unreconciled state upon sinning, since he repeatedly would be in need of new forgiveness.

Answer: First, we admit that justification is perfect; God does not forgive a sin partially and therefore consider part of it to be unforgiven (such as occurs in sanctification). God does not forgive some sins of believers and deem other sins to be unforgiven, but He perfectly forgives all sins and justifies the person as he is at that present moment. The efficacy of this justification includes in it *virtualiter* that God will also thereafter forgive subsequent sins committed in the future; sins can therefore not rob them of their salvation. However, it is an invalid conclusion to deduce from the perfection of justification that God, upon the first exercise of faith, also in actuality includes all future sins which they would subsequently

commit. Such a conclusion we deny. It would be valid if the believing sinner were justified once and for all; however, since God frequently justifies, and since each time this justification is perfect in reference to the person as he is at that moment, the logical conclusion is therefore not correct.

Secondly, the argument that future sins are not included in the first act of justification, and that therefore believers when sinning time and again come into an unreconciled state, and thus become subject to wrath and condemnation, is as invalid as the conclusion itself. In doing so one mixes reconciliation and the meriting of salvation with justification as if they were identical, and as if man is reconciled with God through justification; this is obviously erroneous. Reconciliation occurs on account of the merits of Christ; this is and always remains in force and has occurred once and for all. A believing and converted person is and also always remains in a reconciled state; sins committed in the meantime can never undo this reconciliation. Since the Lord Jesus has made a perfect atonement, the believer can never come into an unreconciled state nor can he ever be subject to wrath and condemnation (even though his sins when considered in their essence make him guilty and worthy of punishment). Justification presupposes reconciliation; in order for someone to be justified he must first be righteous in Christ. When he is thus, he will then be justified, that is, God pronounces the sentence of acquittal upon him. By making a distinction between these two matters, this argument will be rendered null and void. It thus remains true that justification is perfect, even though it is frequently repeated.

We thus consider this objection to be answered, and the doctrine itself has been further reinforced.

Justification and its Result: Assurance

Having considered the time when justification occurs, we shall now proceed to consider the secondary aspect or result of justification, *assurance*.

Question: Can a believer be assured of his justification, and consequently of his salvation?

Answer: The Papists and Arminians answer negatively, whereas we answer in the affirmative.

The Papists oppose this with all their might, for they perceive that this will topple their entire ecclesiastical structure. No one will then ask any longer for the merits of the saints, concern themselves with their selling of indulgences, their masses for souls, absolution, nor their fabricated purgatory. Once the truth of

assurance as being the result of justification has been established, their treasuries will be empty and their kitchens will smoke. They keep people in a continual state of fright and fear, so that with handfuls of money they will take refuge to them. The Papists maintain that man cannot know whether he is truly regenerated, possesses true faith, is truly sanctified, nor does he know whether he will persevere or become an apostate. Consequently, he cannot be absolutely assured of his salvation, nor must he strive for this assurance. They will admit that one can and may make conjectures concerning this, and that God can reveal and indeed has revealed this to some in an extraordinary manner. Apart from this, however, assurance is but conjecture or imagination.

The Arminians neither understand the nature of grace nor of those who possess it—they who as a result of assurance are that much more strongly motivated to sanctification. (Cf. 2 Cor 7:1; Rom 12:1; 1 John 3:3.) Therefore, they wish to stir up people to good works by means of fright and fear, being of the opinion that assurance engenders careless people. On the other hand, they also believe in the apostasy of saints, and they thus deny assurance.

We observe in God's Word the unbreakable chain of election, calling, faith, justification, and glorification, and we also know from God's Word and experience that assurance does not engender careless people. Rather, it engenders love in man and strongly motivates him to true godliness. We therefore maintain that man can be assured of his justification and consequently also of his salvation; he must therefore continually strive for assurance. We state at the same time, however, that all believers do not come to this full assurance. He who is currently assured, can subsequently come into a condition of doubt, fear, and anxiety as a result of darkness, sin, and strife due to the weakness of faith.

That man can be assured is evident for the following reasons:

First, this is evident from all those texts in which man is commanded to examine himself whether he is in the faith and whether Christ dwells in him. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor 11:28); "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates" (2 Cor 13:5). Being obligated to examine oneself, one must then of necessity be able to know whether or not he possesses faith. One can thus acquire the assurance that he is in the faith and that Christ dwells in him. One can therefore also be assured of his justification and furthermore, of his salvation. Man is created in such a fashion that he not only

knows what he is doing, but also that he consciously knows this. If this is true in the natural realm, it is much more true in the spiritual realm, since man's nature has been improved upon, illuminated, and sanctified. He knows that he chooses and desires to have God as his reconciled Father, his portion, his delight, and his resting place. He knows that his soul can only find delight upon possessing all this, and that he grieves if he misses all this. He knows that he longs to have the Lord Jesus as His Surety, that he desires Him, and therefore frequently prays tearfully to Him. Such a person offers and surrenders himself to Him. He knows that sins grieve and sadden Him, and being enamored with sanctification, he prays for sanctification and therefore runs to Christ. A believer knows that all these things are to be found in him, and he is conscious of this knowledge. If he, however, would know with certainty that whatever he knows to be within him is true grace and are the motions of the Holy Spirit (such as regeneration, faith, and sanctification) he would be able to make a conclusion which would result in assurance. However, it is here that the believer falls short and therefore he dares not assure himself. Since, however, he knows that this frame and these motions are to be found within him, he also ought to learn the other from the Holy Scriptures by the operation of the Holy Spirit. If he were to be clearly conscious of both, he could not but be assured. If he must examine himself whether or not he has faith, he can also come to the assurance of this possession. This knowledge is to be observed in the following texts: "And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ" (John 6:69); "... for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded ..." (2 Tim 1:12); "And hereby we do know that we know Him ..." (1 John 2:3).

Secondly, one must pray for the fruits of assurance, and thus also for assurance itself, without which one cannot enjoy the fruits. "Make me to hear joy and gladness; ... restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation ..." (Ps 51:8, 12); "... say unto my soul, I am thy salvation" (Ps 35:2-3).

Thirdly, it is evident from texts in which it is expressly stated that believers are indeed assured. "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, ... in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27); "And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom 4:21); "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom 8:38-39); "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded ..." (2 Tim 1:12). Add to this also the following texts: "The

Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs” (Rom 8:16-17); “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14); “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

Evasive Argument: Job, David, and Paul had their assurance by way of a special revelation of the Holy Spirit, and therefore one cannot draw a conclusion from their assurance in reference to others.

Answer (1) This is a statement that cannot be proven.

(2) All believers have the same Spirit for the purpose of knowing “the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor 2:12).

(3) In Rom 8, Paul speaks not of himself to the exclusion of others, but he includes all who have the Spirit of Christ (vs. 9), who are led by the Spirit of God (vs. 14), who by the Spirit of adoption of children cry out, Abba, Father (vs. 15). He states concerning those, including himself (vs. 16), that the Spirit testifies with their spirit that they are the children of God and thus also heirs. This argument is therefore futile.

(4) In the quoted texts, John also does not speak concerning himself, but of believers to whom he wrote, declaring that they knew they were regenerated, that they were in God, and that God would remain in them. It thus remains a certainty that believers are indeed assured.

Fourthly, this is also evident from such texts where it is declared that believers have the fruits of assurance, and thus assurance itself. Without this they cannot be partakers of the fruits, which are:

(1) Peace: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1).

(2) A rejoicing “in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2). To have hope is to have a certain expectation of a promised matter to be received in the future. To rejoice in this, and thereby to endure all tribulation with joy, implies that there is assurance of being a partaker of this matter.

(3) Joy and happiness in consequence of being justified. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10).

(4) Addressing God with the name “Father.” “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15).

(5) Gratitude for being partakers of salvation and having been translated into Christ. “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated

us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:12-14).

Who would be able, or dare, to think that such who are in this state or who perceive such motions within them do not have a true and strong assurance of their justification and salvation? There is therefore no room for the evasive argument that they are merely guessing or imagining this to be so.

Fifthly, this is also evident from the operation of the Holy Spirit in the elect, it being His objective to assure them. “Now we have received, ... the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor 2:12). The Holy Spirit is for them *an evidence* that they remain in God and God in them (1 John 4:13). He is an *earnest* which serves no other purpose than to assure them of the certain possession of this matter. “Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14). The Holy Spirit seals them: “... in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13); “... whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). The purpose of a seal is to confirm and assure someone that he is a partaker of the sealed matter. Furthermore, God has sworn an oath in order that His elect would be all the more assured. “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation” (Heb 6:17-18). It is thus a certainty that one can be assured.

Evasive Argument: One can, however, not know whether this assurance is the operation of the Holy Spirit or whether this is brought about by our own spirit. One can deceive himself in this matter, so that one cannot derive a certain assurance from this.

Answer (1) If the Holy Spirit is operative for the very purpose of assuring someone, this person can most certainly be assured in this manner. Otherwise the operation of the Holy Spirit would be unprofitable to that end, as He would not be able to accomplish His objective. Such a view would expressly contradict God Himself.

(2) Because an unconverted person, being a worm of the dust, is blind and cannot comprehend spiritual things, which instead are foolishness to him (1 Cor 2:14), and whereas he neither knows nor sees the Spirit (John 14:17), he therefore cannot judge concerning the operation of the Holy Spirit. He also cannot judge how one may know whether something is the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit, or whether it proceeds from our own corrupt nature. It would

be advisable for such fools to be silent in order that their foolishness be not made manifest. The godly, however, are acquainted with this, and their concern is neither whether it is of the Holy Spirit nor whether it proceeds from their corrupt nature, but at times whether it proceeds from the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit or whether this occurs as a result of their spiritual, regenerate, and renewed nature. A believer, however, does not need to concern himself with this, for whether it immediately proceeds from the Holy Spirit or is due to spiritual light and life, they nevertheless both proceed from the Spirit. As fire and light manifest themselves, however, the Holy Spirit likewise can manifest Himself so clearly that they know indeed that it is the Holy Spirit who assures and seals them. This is similar to a man who knows the voice of his intimate friend.

(3) The Holy Spirit operates in harmony with the Word, the infallible rule for believers. There they observe that the Holy Spirit gives assurance after mourning, praying, and wrestling in faith. This brings the soul near to God, and in the enjoyment of communion with God she receives assurance. They find that assurance does not only engender peace with God in the soul, but also love, obedience, and sanctification. It renders the earth and all its glories as insignificant, and it becomes all their desire and joy to live in the realm of the invisible. If a believer, in the enjoyment of assurance, finds himself to be thus, he may know that he is not deceiving himself, but that it is the Holy Spirit who assures and seals him.

Refutation of Objections to the Truth that Justification Engenders Assurance

Several arguments are advanced to overturn this truth.

Objection #1: The promises pertaining to forgiveness are uncertain and doubtful, and are presented in the Word of God within the context of the word “perhaps.” One thus cannot be absolutely assured of this. “... if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity” (Dan 4:27); “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22).

Answer (1) The promise of the forgiveness of sins upon faith and repentance is made absolutely and with certainty. One can therefore assure himself of this if he finds repentance and faith within himself. “For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen” (2 Cor 1:20).

(2) When in addition to these two villains (that is, uncertainty and doubt), the words “if there could be” and “perhaps” are used,

it does not refer to the uncertainty of forgiveness upon faith and repentance, but rather upon the uncertainty of their repentance, and consequently of forgiveness. “For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee” (Rom 11:21).

Objection #2: One is called to fear and tremble, and thus cannot be assured of his justification and salvation. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12); “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb 4:1).

Answer: Fear and trembling are not always a being fearful and frightened that one will not be saved. Very frequently fear and trembling refer to respect and humble submission to God. “... and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple” (Ps 5:7). It can also refer to a painstaking care not to sin. “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death” (Prov 14:27). There is a slavish fear, to which we are urged not to succumb. “Fear not” (Exod 20:20); “And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered, ... Fear not ye” (Matt 28:4-5). There is also a filial fear which consists in respect and painstaking carefulness. Blessed is the man who fears continually. The one fears punishment, and the other fears out of love for God. In the quoted texts the reference is to filial fear, rather than to slavish fear or fear engendered by doubt.

Objection #3: All assurance must be obtained from man’s own heart, which is deceitful. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it” (Jer 17:9). One can therefore not know whether he is truly converted and believes. Consequently, one can neither know whether he is justified nor whether he will be saved.

Answer (1) By such an argument man would not be conscious of his actions in any matter and would have to be in doubt about everything; man, however, is conscious of his actions and objectives. Since man knows for a certainty that he lives, speaks, and believes this or that with his heart and in truth, we conclude that a true believer also knows for a certainty that he is spiritually alive, believes, prays, etc.

(2) The text refers to the functioning of the heart of an ungodly person in deceiving other persons; it does not say that the heart is unconscious of its own functioning and objective.

(3) Assurance does indeed issue forth from the heart, as it judges its spiritual disposition and deeds. The heart does this, however, not according to its own standard, but according to the infallible rule of God’s Word accompanied by the operation of the

Holy Spirit who bears witness with our spirit (Rom 8:16). A believer can therefore know in truth what is within him, and in this manner assure himself of his justification and salvation, for the Word of God promises this to those who are of such a disposition and conduct themselves accordingly.

Objection #4: Since, according to this view, assurance rests upon the infallible promises of God, a believer should neither have the least doubt, nor the least concern, but should always be absolutely and infallibly assured. However, since according to this view, it is also true that believers are not always so infallibly assured and without fear and concern, the promises are not made in such an absolute sense of the word, and man can never be absolutely assured.

Answer: A believer has both a reason and a foundation for always being infallibly assured, and he also ought to be thus, since the infallible promises of God are applicable to him. It is due to his weakness, however, that he is not always thus—not because he doubts the veracity of the promises of God. It is because he is frequently in darkness as far as recognizing the grace he possesses. Due to trials, inner corruption, and other evidence against him, he fears that he does not have the disposition of such a person to whom the promises have been made. Thus, his doubt is no proof that the promises are not absolute, nor that one cannot be assured, but a proof of his darkness and weakness.

Objection #5: Even if one could presently be assured, one can nevertheless not be assured as far as the future is concerned, and thus also not of his salvation. A person does not know whether he will persevere or become an apostate.

Answer: The Spirit abides eternally in the person to whom He was once given (John 14:16). There He abides as an earnest until the promised felicity has been bestowed (Eph 1:14). “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). Christ gives His sheep eternal life and they will not perish unto all eternity (John 10:28), and “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Pet 1:5). Therefore the fear for apostasy is unfounded and cannot prevent them from being assured. (For a comprehensive treatment of the perseverance of the saints, see volume 3, chapter 50).

We have thus explained and confirmed the truth of this weighty doctrine of our Christian religion, namely, justification, and defended it against opposing parties. The purpose of this is not merely to know the truth, but rather that we would practice it, that is, that we would endeavor to be justified, to remain in a justified state, to be exercised in this state with justification, to rejoice in it, to magnify

God concerning this, and thereby to be motivated unto sanctification. Since people are so careless in this respect, and even believers so frequently are not in earnest to exercise themselves continually in this matter and to make use of it at all occasions, it will be necessary for us to stir people up to be thus exercised.

Exhortations to Strive for Justification

Questions: Is not justification a work of God outside of man, so that man does nothing at all and is merely a subject of it? Does not this take place purely without any merit, and without reference to man's goodness, will, or activity? Does not God justify man because of the righteousness of Christ which He Himself imputes to him? Has not God eternally decreed whom He will justify and whom not, this being a decree which cannot be changed by man? Is it not therefore best to be quiet and await the outworking of this decree, that is, whether or not God will justify me? Are not all exhortations to strive for justification then in vain?

Answer: Justification is a work of God which does not only *pertain* to man but which is also *directed* toward man, for God pronounces the sentence of acquittal to the soul. The eternal purpose and the imputation of Christ's righteousness in and of themselves cannot render comfort to man, nor engender either gratitude or sanctification, as long as the person is neither justified in his conscience nor hears the pronouncement of the sentence toward him. We do not need to belabor ourselves to motivate God either to establish a decree or to change His purpose; rather, we must labor to become conscious of His purpose and the imputation of Christ's righteousness by way of the actual pronouncement. One must not strive and labor to be justified by his works, but he must strive to receive the righteousness of Christ by faith and thus be in a condition to be justified. He must strive to receive by faith the promises made to believers and with them approach unto God in order to hear the actual justifying pronouncement of God, both out of His Word as well as by His Spirit. This is the life, joy, and comfort of the soul. This will render a person ready to manifest gratitude, to glorify God, and to live a sanctified life. It is the objective of the ensuing exhortations to bring this about; you who either read or hear this read, permit yourself to be persuaded to practice this, and with a quiet and impressionable soul, consider the following reasons:

First, God, in this life, justifies those who will live forever. One can be assured in this life of having been justified, of the forgiveness of his sins, and of having been appointed to be an heir of

eternal life. All of this has been demonstrated above. No one therefore needs to despair, no matter how great and prolonged his sinnership may be; he may and must seek this great benefit, since God commands this and offers this to him. While thus seeking, he will certainly attain to this, since God has promised it to those who seek it. Failure to seek this will either be due to:

(1) *pure wickedness* and a *despising* of God, of His grace, and of one's own salvation;

(2) *foolish world-conformity*. One will then, bewitched by and out of love to visible things, not avail himself of the grace of God. This is so that he may be all the more at ease in yielding to the lusts of the flesh and thus choose the creature above the Creator;

(3) or *abominable laziness*, not being willing to make any effort in this respect.

One does indeed perceive the desirability and bliss of being justified, but he looks up against the work itself; it is not worth all this trouble. If it could easily and effortlessly be obtained, one would indeed be willing. However, to thus pray and wrestle, and to overcome so many temptations requires too much effort and thus one refrains from this. Tell me therefore, you despisers of grace, you who are conformed to the world and are lazy, is your condemnation not just? Will you not have to say upon your deathbed and in the day of judgment, "I was not willing; it is thus my own fault; therefore, woe, woe is unto me that I have been so foolish and that due to my own neglect I now have to go lost forever and be condemned!"

Therefore, since so great a grace, such comfort, and such joy are available to you, and you can and may avail yourself of this, let nothing hinder you; but be resolved in your endeavor to be justified, and be assured that you may live happily here and be eternally in the state of felicity hereafter.

The Lamentable Condition of Those Who are Not Justified

Secondly, meditate for a moment upon the lamentable condition of the man who is not justified, and of yourself if you are still in such a condition. You are still in your sins, and the eternal, unbearable wrath of God hangs above your head. If you are not justified in this life, you will die in your sins and be eternally condemned. You will die and I hereby pronounce your death sentence upon you. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27); "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live" (Isa 38:1). I cannot designate a specific moment; maybe it will be today. "This night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20). It may be that you will either die

suddenly, or suddenly lose your mind; or maybe you will be much troubled by bodily pains and anxieties. The terrors of conscience may be so severe in view of eternal condemnation that you will not be able, with composure, to be sensible concerning sin, and you will neither be able to take refuge to the Lord Jesus to receive His righteousness, nor be able to turn to the promises. It could also be that the time of grace already has passed by beforehand and you are given over to the hardness of your imagination, traveling thus toward eternity. He who is not justified in this life will also not be justified in the life hereafter. How will you then fare? How frightful will be such a death! What will there then be to comfort you? Where will you then go? You will go nowhere but to your eternal damnation. Will not the terror of the Lord then persuade you to believe and to be justified before you die?

If a person may be justified, however, and in this life may have the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins and of his eternal inheritance, how joyfully will such a person be able to die! How cheerfully one will be able to depart from this life and say with Paul, "For I am persuaded, that neither death ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39); "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness!" (2 Tim 4:7-8). This caused David to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me" (Ps 23:4). Then death is no longer a terror; one can long for it and say with Simeon, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation" (Luke 2:29-30). Observe therefore how different death and eternity will be. What would a person not do to have a day of death and to enter into eternal felicity! Since, however, there is nothing which can comfort the soul in life and in death, except for justification, how you ought to strive to be to be justified!

Thirdly, if you still live in an unreconciled state:

(1) You cannot but spend your days with much terror. Aside from the fact that the worm of your conscience continually gnaws, and at times dreadful thoughts and terrors arise in your soul (be it in dreams during your sleep, in darkness while being awake, or in distant solitude), even the rustling of a leaf or an unusual noise will terrify you, and the hairs of your head will stand up straight for terror when you hear of or observe a remarkable judgment upon others. You will continually be in fear that the wrath of God will be manifested toward you. If you suddenly have an unusual pain or a

dizzy spell, or if you are in danger of drowning, or if the sword is extended toward you, or if one is in danger of death in any other way, then with Belshazzar all the members of your body will tremble due to the terror of your heart. Eliphaz speaks of this in Job 15:20-24, where we read, “The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days, and the number of years is hidden to the oppressor. A dreadful sound is in his ears: in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him. He believeth not that he will return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword. He wandereth abroad for bread, saying, Where is it? he knoweth that the day of darkness is ready at his hand. Trouble and anguish shall make him afraid; they shall prevail against him.” In this manner an unreconciled person spends his days. The conscience may be somewhat asleep for a time, and one may find some diversion in that which is visible. Nevertheless, even when he laughs, he shall have sorrow. Sin, however, which as a sleeping dog lies at the door, will then attack all the more vehemently, and the king of terrors will take hold of him and will at last send him to his eternal woe where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(2) Furthermore, you cannot find delight in that which, due to God’s longsuffering, you receive for the body. The heart is not pacified by this, and all this is as a snare, as sin, causing God’s wrath to rest all the heavier upon you. As long as you are unreconciled, the curse is concealed in the best of that which you may enjoy; it all groans as it were against you (Rom 8:22). Everything is transformed into a curse. “I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart” (Mal 2:2); “Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out” (Deut 28:16-17, 19). This curse is in your food and drink; in your gambling, dancing, and the vain company you keep; in your clothing, crowns, and jewels; in a word, you are cursed in everything. You are cursed in your vision, hearing, speaking, walking, profession, and business. Such is the condition of those who are not reconciled, even if they bathe themselves in wealth. “There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt” (Eccles 5:13); “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them” (Prov 1:32). You who are unreconciled, consider yourself to be thus; all that you have and do must be viewed from this perspective. If this cannot move you to seek reconciliation and justification, I no longer know what to advise you.

Compare this for a moment with how the righteous may enjoy

the things which pertain to the body. All that they have proceeds from fatherly love and the merits of Christ; yes, temporal blessings, whether great or small, are even proofs of God's love to them. All that they receive, all that they eat or drink, that with which they dress themselves, and that upon which they place their feet, belong to them. The sun rises and the moon and stars shine for their sake. For their sake the appearance of heaven is so beautiful during quiet nights, and the earth brings forth a variety of verdant growth, trees, herbs, and flowers. Whatever people plant in delightful gardens, as well as walkways which are covered with foliage of neatly arranged trees, it all exists for the purpose of delighting them by way of vision, hearing, smell, or taste. "For all things are yours" (1 Cor 3:21). "The righteous shall inherit the land" (Ps 37:29). Oh, how refreshing is even a piece of dry bread if one may perceive it as having been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, and consequently, as having a right to it! It can cause tears to flow out of their eyes for love and joy. When there are miseries, plagues, and wars (and whatever else could terrify), their heart nevertheless remains steadfast, trusting in the Lord; they will trust even in the midst of death. A justified person can therefore run his course with joy. The fact that they do not do this more frequently is due neither to not having a right to it nor to there being no reason for it, but because they are not more frequently exercised with their justification.

When considering the dissimilarity between the lives of the unrighteous and the righteous, contrasting the one with the other and observing how the one issues forth from a state of being unjustified and the other from a state of being justified, this ought to be sufficient to persuade everyone to earnestly endeavor to be justified.

The Spiritual Sweetness and Delight Found in Justification

Fourthly, consider also justification by itself. Note what sweetness, delight, and glory is to be found in this for the soul.

(1) In justification there is *forgiveness of all sins and all punishment*; this is so perfect that it is as if one had never committed sin. "... and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7); "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev 1:5). They only who have felt sin as a heavy burden and have tasted its bitterness, know what this entails. This forgiveness is an *everlasting forgiveness*; God never brings sins back in order to exercise His wrath toward them again. They who have once been justified, will never revert to being unworthy and despicable again,

but their sins will eternally remain forgiven. “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34).

(2) They are not only cleansed from all their pollution, but they are furthermore *adorned in an extraordinary measure* with the perfect righteousness of Christ. “And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God” (Ezek 16:14); “And ye are complete in Him” (Col 2:10); “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair” (Song 4:1). When the righteous may thus view their beauty due to the righteousness of Christ, they will rejoice in this. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isa 61:10).

(3) In justification they furthermore obtain the *adoption as children of God*, and are appointed as heirs of eternal life. God views them and meets them with light, comfort, love, and care as His dear children; and they view Him as their merciful Father. Therefore time and again they turn to Him and cry out, “Abba, Father!” They thus tell Him of all their needs, and request from Him whatever they desire; they delight themselves in Him, and turn away from everything else, for it is only good to be with Him.

(4) This engenders in them a *sweet peace*, and a glorious and inexpressible joy; they dwell together in sweet, mutual love. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1); “... Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it” (Isa 38:17); “My beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song 2:16).

Now consider all this simultaneously: A justified person is eternally delivered from all sin, all wrath, all curse, and all punishment without any retraction. A justified person, due to the imputed righteousness of Christ, is perfect in his beauty before God, before the angels, before believers, and to himself. A justified person is a child of God and an heir of eternal life; he has an inheritance which he cannot lose, but which is kept in heaven for him. There is sweet quietude, peace, joy, and delight in God to be found in the soul of a justified person, more than a natural man can understand, and more than a justified person can express. If this cannot motivate a soul to endeavor to attain to justification, nothing will be able to do it. Nevertheless, it remains God’s work.

The Fruits of Justification

(1) Justification makes the heart joyful. “Thou hast in love to my

soul delivered it ... for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back” (Isa 38:17).

(2) Upon falling into sin, it motivates the believer not to remain there, but to arise again and cheerfully to persevere. “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (Isa 33:24).

(3) It always affords free access to the throne of grace. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb 10:22).

(4) It fills heart and mouth with the praises of God. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities” (Ps 103:2-3).

(5) Justification is the fountain of sanctification. Sanctification is exceedingly precious to believers, for it consists in humbly walking with God, honoring Him with holy reverence, loving Him, fearing Him, and pleasing Him in our walk. They thus have the image of God and manifest this to His honor, as an ornament to the church, to the conviction of the unconverted, and as a stimulus to the converted. The righteous are enamored with such a life, and they seek this with all their heart. This is not only true because it is a means to remain near to God and a practice upon which God bestows much blessing, but because it is their life and the beginning of felicity. A believer is mournful over his deficiency, and due to an inordinate desire for sanctification he at times becomes discouraged, thinking, “I will never attain to such a state during my entire lifetime. Oh, that my ways were directed keep the Lord’s statutes! What must I do? What way shall I turn to attain this?” I answer that justification is the means to this. Since justification is the fountain, it therefore defines the proper manifestation of sanctification and its true essence. One must, therefore, with all his might endeavor to attain to justification and to being assured of this.

He who endeavors to attain to sanctification upon another foundation has gone astray, will never attain to it, and will never make progress in it. First to require self-denial and pure love for God (He being worthy of this) is to err and could lead very well to one’s perdition. There are those who first wish to bring justification to a conclusion and leave it rest as a finished matter. They then wish to yield to sin for a time, and only strive for sanctification subsequent to this. They are as much in error in the opposite direction, and indicate that they have never been acquainted with the nature of either justification or sanctification. They are sought simultaneously, and the matter as to what is sought first or last is not a matter of time but rather of order. In the continual exercise

of justification the soul is sanctified. “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared” (Ps 130:4); “... purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9); “How much more shall the blood of Christ, ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14); “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4); “And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself” (1 John 3:3). As justification is the fountain of sanctification, giving it its true essence, so sanctification is likewise a necessity, for without holiness no man shall see God (Heb 12:14). Therefore, he who wishes to be saved, must first be sanctified; and if he is to be sanctified, such sanctification must necessarily proceed from justification. Therefore you must consider both the desirability and necessity of sanctification; both ought to motivate you to be exercised relative to justification and to be assured of it.

Guidance in Seeking for Justification and Marks for Self-Examination

It now remains for us to guide those who desire justification in seeking after this. We shall do so by proposing the means which serve to the attainment of this end. We shall propose them in such a manner that they simultaneously serve as proofs and marks which reveal that a person is justified.

First, a person who desires to be justified in his conscience ought to endeavor to have a view of his sinful heart—and of the sinful manifestation of this heart in thoughts, words, deeds, and activities, along with the manner of this manifestation. He must also seek to have a view of his condemnable condition, adding to this a sorrow over his sins and his state of condemnation. When I mention sorrow, I am not suggesting that there must first be a certain degree of contrition, terror, or despair. Many who are ignorant in the way of the Lord first wish to have this before they dare to think that they are justified. Since they do not have it in the measure they imagine it ought to be, they reject everything and live in a continual state of unsteadiness and restlessness. Instead this sorrow also consists in loathing one’s self, in being absolutely destitute, in indignation toward sin, in the perception of one’s emptiness, in sinking away in one’s condemnable condition, in heartache, in languishing, in perceiving with understanding that one is in such a condition, and in the confirmation, “Yes, I am thus.” One also needs to make a distinction between an unconverted person who presently begins to seek, and a converted person who already believes in Christ (irrespective of whether he knows or doubts

this). In the beginning, many have much more of the spirit of bondage again to fear and more slavish fear and terror, and thereby are driven to Christ. They are more engaged in a legalistic sense, albeit not all in the same manner and measure. The converted, however, have shame, loathe themselves, are humbled, and are filled with indignation and revenge toward themselves in a more evangelical fashion; however, this also varies greatly. It is certain, however, that only rarely does someone come joyfully to Christ as Zacchaeus did; and only few come to the knowledge of being the property of Christ by means of knowing and approving of the truth. Rather, the common way is one of perplexity, sorrow, and fear. This is not to suggest that one must first have these things as a condition before one can come, but it is a quality without which one shall not be willing to come. Therefore all who are desirous for justification must first seek to receive a view and be sensible of their misery. Observe this in those who believed on the day of Pentecost. "They were pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37); the jailor came trembling (Acts 16:29); "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). He who has never had some knowledge of the frames mentioned above, who has never had them in a heartfelt and conscious manner until coming to faith in Christ and being justified, and who nevertheless considers himself justified, deceives himself. He who does not seek justification in this way will never attain to it. Yes, even those who in an evangelical manner or by way of knowledge and acknowledgement of the truth have attained to faith and justification, have nevertheless had this frame, albeit that they were soon swallowed up by love and the truth. However, this will afterwards become manifest to them in a sensible manner. Therefore if you wish to attain to justification, make a beginning and learn to become perplexed within yourself; and being sensibly destitute, sinful and condemnable, come to be justified without price by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

The second means unto justification is faith in Christ. Man, being convicted in the manner just stated, sees that he cannot but be condemned by the righteous Judge. He therefore seeks for a Surety who satisfies the justice of God in his behalf, and thus finds Jesus Christ. He acknowledges that His suffering and death fully satisfy the justice of God, and that His holiness is unto the attainment of salvation. He observes and acknowledges the offer of righteousness to himself, however sinful he may be. He, now being desirous, takes refuge to Him, receives Him unto his righteousness,

and comes with this received righteousness to God. He presents himself to the Lord as miserable and condemnable within himself. He displays to the Lord the righteousness of Christ, and that he has received and appropriated this righteousness upon it having been offered to him. He holds before the Lord His promises made to such persons. While thus praying, wrestling, believing, and urgently making use of the promises, a Scripture passage or the gospel promises in general will be applied to his heart in such a way that he perceives himself to be justified. At times this will be accompanied by the sealing power of the Holy Spirit, so that he may have peace and joy. He who imagines himself to be justified, and who nevertheless is without these exercises of faith, deceives himself, and he who does not seek justification by way of the exercise of faith will never find it. Therefore, if you desire justification, seek it by faith. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28).

Thirdly, he who desires justification must, while seeking, also desire sanctification; these two can neither be separated in their possession nor in the seeking after them. He who desires justification and has no desire after holiness, gives evidence that his heart is not upright before the Lord. If he imagines himself to be justified, but is as yet without sanctification, he deceives himself. If he seeks the first without the latter, he will never attain to it. It is true that the desires are sometimes more vehement and directed toward the one, and at other times to the other; however, the one is always intertwined with the other. Many believers doubt their justification since they do not perceive that they are being sanctified. However, they lack the light to know what sanctification is. They require of themselves a certain measure of holiness, and if they do not attain to this measure, they reject the matter itself which is nevertheless to be found in all believers. Such persons need to know that sanctification manifests itself as follows:

(1) The more a believer may live close to God and be assured of his justification, the more his desires for a pure frame of heart, for the manifestation of the image of God, for humility, wisdom, kindheartedness, and a tender walk will become stronger and lively. He neither knows nor desires any holiness except that which flows out of a reconciled relationship with God—holiness proceeding from love for and the fear of God.

(2) It manifests itself in a hatred for and a being repulsed by a sinful heart, apprehension and fear concerning the commission of sin, sorrow upon having sinned, and having a restless heart until one by renewal is cleansed in the blood of Christ.

(3) It manifests itself in repeated restoration and in the intention to refrain from sin. One will pray for strength and thus endeavor to be dependent upon the leading of the Holy Ghost.

(4) It manifests itself in being repulsed by worldly company; one cannot unite his heart with such company. Rather, the desires of the heart are toward the godly whom he highly esteems, considers to be glorious, and loves.

(5) It manifests itself in a general sense. Such a person does not give himself more leeway in the one sin than in the other. Sin is sin for him, irrespective of whether a sin is great or small; he does not minimize the nature of sin. All sins are in essence the same; that is, they are contrary to the will of God, albeit that one will fall into one sin more than into another.

(6) It manifests itself in a strong desire for more holiness; such a person cannot be satisfied with the little hunger and thirst for righteousness he has.

(7) It manifests itself in the actual victory over many sins in which one previously lived, even to the extent that one can reject them as soon as they surface; yes, he is no longer unsettled by many of them. He will not peacefully give way to those sins which are stronger, but will do battle against them; and upon having fallen into the same sin, one will arise again (be it more readily or more slowly) and resume the battle. All this will enable a little one in grace to perceive that he, though not attaining to the measure of sanctification he demands of himself, need not reject his justification. Since in his desires, seeking, and actions, he conjoins justification and sanctification (albeit that he derives the latter from the first), he can be conscious of his uprightness in this. However, others who do seek justification without sanctification, or sanctification without justification, are not upon the right way, and those who thus proceed will receive neither.

Fourthly, he who seeks after justification, desiring to be assured thereof, must let God's Word be the judge. Many who are truly justified do not attain to assurance, or readily lose it, since they wish to be their own judge and establish their feelings as the foundation of their assurance. It would be a blessing if someone could always have this; however, it is not God's normal way always to seal His children and to give them the sense of this assurance. The Lord has established another foundation which is more steadfast, durable, and consistent: His Word. It is a good thing if one is suspicious of his own heart, being desirous not to be deceived in such a weighty matter. However, how will one attain to such a certain and steadfast assurance? He must bring himself often

before the Lord, and do as David did, saying, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps 139:23-24). Let him then also turn to the Word of God to observe what promises are made there, and to whom they are made. Let him, while lifting up his soul, ascertain the certainty of these promises as being pronounced by a God who is true. The issue therefore is whether these promises are made to him. This he can know if he has the qualities of those to whom the promises have been made. Let him then first of all examine the Word of God and consider characteristic after characteristic while laying his heart bare before an omniscient God. Let him examine his own heart (in which he ought not to be easy on himself), and make a righteous judgment concerning himself. He ought not to attribute to himself that which his conscience testifies he does not have. He also ought not to deny that which his conscience testifies he does possess. Herein he must acknowledge that it did not come forth from his nature, but that it was wrought in him by the Spirit of God. If he then finds such matters within him in truth and if his heart agrees with the qualities mentioned in Scripture while God and his conscience also bear witness of the veracity of this, he must draw the conclusion that these promises have been made to him, and consequently, that God justifies him. Let him receive this Word as the voice of God—which it truly is—and let him thus hear the divine acquittal. Even if one has a greater or lesser degree of light, feeling, joy, or peace, the matter does not change, for truth is and remains truth. The qualifications are reality and the pronouncement of God the Judge is reality. One must then give God glory for His truth, verify his justification, rejoice in it, thank God for it, and thus cheerfully and in love, with godly fear and obedience, proceed in the way of the Lord, until one obtains the end of faith—the salvation of his soul.

I stated that the presentation of the means unto justification would simultaneously serve the purpose of determining whether someone is justified. Whoever therefore perceives that he has attained to justification in the way of sorrow over sin, faith in Christ, and a desiring and seeking of both justification and sanctification by appointing the Word as judge, may perceive the genuineness of his graces and the veracity of the promises of God made to him. He who has not entered upon this way, however, and nevertheless imagines himself to be justified, his sins to have been forgiven, and himself to be an heir of eternal felicity, deceives himself most dreadfully—and to his eternal destruction, if he does not repent.

First, let him therefore who has not been justified by God not justify himself, as the Pharisees did who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9).

(1) Self-justification has no validity before God; not man himself, but God is Judge over him. Therefore man’s entire salvation is dependent upon God’s pronouncement, and not his own. “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth” (2 Cor 10:18). Poor man! How will you profit from your own acquittal if God condemns you?

(2) One will be prevented from seeking true justification when one justifies himself without reason upon a false foundation, or upon presumptuously laying claim to good grounds; this will cause him to go peacefully to hell, for Christ did “not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt 9:13). Therefore, do not deceive yourself in this matter, for in doing so you will deceive yourself to your eternal destruction. It will not help then to say, “We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets” (Luke 13:26); “Have we not prophesied in Thy Name? and in Thy Name have cast out devils? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works” (Matt 7:23). For then will He “profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me” (Matt 7:23).

A Final Exhortation to Justified Souls

Secondly, do not condemn yourself if God justifies you. It is abhorrent to God to justify the ungodly and to condemn the righteous (Prov 17:15). The unconverted are guilty of the first when they justify themselves, and the righteous would make themselves guilty of the second if they were to condemn themselves. It is not our desire that someone would force himself to consider himself justified. It is our desire, however, that someone who, in the presence of God—the Holy Spirit also bearing witness—is convinced to be a partaker of the frames and exercises mentioned above, would by faith acknowledge himself to be righteous. Let him not condemn himself if, perhaps, he does not find within himself a certain measure of light; that is, such a measure which would enable him to answer all objections, one for one, as well as a certain measure of feeling, peace, and sanctification. He ought not to do so since he, in the meantime, does and is able to see the truth of his justification.

(1) To do so would be to deny the work of the Holy Ghost, contradicting Him to His face.

(2) This would be a despising of the merits of Christ. Would He

have suffered so much for you and should you not acknowledge this—yes, should you deny it?

(3) To do this would be to bring anguish upon yourself, since the Lord does not cause you grief. You yourself are the cause by giving in to your unbelief, so that your life is consumed by sorrow and by many years of sighing. The Lord speaks peace, but you do not want to receive it unless the Lord first makes you to be such and such. However, “who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered” (Job 9:4). Why are you a tyrant to yourself and cause yourself grief and sorrow? Believe the Word of God, acknowledge the work of grace in you, and you will thus be established and run your course with joy.

Thirdly, a justified soul may not yield to sin by reason of Christ already having made satisfaction for him.

(1) This is contrary to the nature of a justified soul, and of justification (cf. Ps 130:4; 1 John 3:3).

(2) This is an abomination, for to do so is “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4).

(3) It would give opportunity for slander and to encourage the enemies to slanderously state that our doctrine makes men careless and ungodly, as if we were saying, “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom 3:8).

(4) It is contrary to the Word of God which conjoins justification and sanctification inseparably (1 Cor 6:11). Therefore, those who believe in God must be careful to promote good works; these are the things which are good and profitable for men (Titus 3:8).

Fourthly, a justified soul, every day anew ought to endeavor to be justified. This is not to suggest that he could fall away from his justified state, but because the voice of divine acquittal in God’s Word, and by His Spirit to the heart, is so sweet; and sins, which time and again come in between, also necessitate justification. A justified soul must always acknowledge sin as sin. Sin remains sin committed against God and makes the sinner subject to guilt and eternal condemnation. Even though Christ has made satisfaction for him and as Advocate presents this satisfaction directly to God, and even though the Word justifies the believer who time and again falls and arises, I maintain nevertheless that sin retains its nature. A justified soul must see and feel his sin also as such, and thus acknowledge himself to be condemnable as far as he himself is concerned. He must thereupon confess his sins, by faith receive the merits of Christ unto justification, and thus be justified in reference to a given sin. This is the practice of the saints, this we are commanded to do, and upon this the promise of forgiveness is

made, all of which has been shown above. Therefore take heed to your actions, be on guard against defiling that which is good, and beware of the sinfulness of evil. This will humble the soul, exalt grace all the more, make Jesus' merits all the more precious, and cause him to walk all the more circumspectly. Such a soul who continually desires to be justified, will live in a more abiding peace with God; whereas another who ignores this will be more disturbed and troubled, be further from God, and be more negligent in his walk of life. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" (Ps 107:43); "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein" (Hos 14:9); "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity" (Prov 10:29).

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

The Adoption of Children [Eph 1:5]

In the previous chapter we have shown that justification does not only consist in acquittal from guilt and punishment, but also in the bestowal of the right unto eternal life and in God's child being declared an heir of eternal salvation. To this end Christ was placed under the law, "... made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal 4:4-5). The apostle speaks of this in Rom 8:15-17, where we read, "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Thus, justification includes spiritual sonship, and this we shall presently discuss.

Justification Includes Spiritual Sonship

First, many are referred to as children of God, and this from a variety of perspectives.

(1) It is true of Christ according to His divine nature by eternal generation. "... Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee" (Ps 2:7).

(2) It is true of the angels and Adam, and, in him (by reason of creation), for the entire human race. "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7); "... Adam ... the son of God" (Luke 3:38); "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us" (Mal 2:10).

(3) It is true of governments, since God has appointed them to

reflect His dominion. “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High” (Ps 82:6).

(4) It is true of believers by reason of adoption (cf. Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:4-5). “And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters” (2 Cor 6:18). It is of them we shall presently speak.

The manner in which believers are children of God is by way of *adoption as children*. Occasionally this is understood to refer to the glory of the revelation of the children of God after this life. “... waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). John has this in view in 1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.” The word “now” does not imply a contrast with the Old Testament, for believers were children of God then as well as in the New Testament. Rather, the word “now” is a reference to the future glory of which they will become partakers when Christ will be revealed in the day of judgment. We are here not referring to this adoption, but to adoption as children in this life. This is true as well in the Old Testament. “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption” (Rom 9:4). This adoption was not by reason of an external covenant, for this did not exist. Rather, this was by reason of the covenant of grace which had been made with Abraham and his seed. Many of them, however, were unfaithful to this covenant—just as many in the New Testament are likewise unfaithful, each being personally responsible for this.

This is also true in the New Testament. The Gentiles are now partakers of the adoption of children. “... that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:5). We are the Gentiles, and it is the objective of the apostle to show the advantage which the Gentiles have received due to the coming and declaration of Christ: They who previously were strangers of this, did not know God, and served idols, became partakers of the adoption of children as well as the Jews. The latter, under the loving custody, direction, and guidance of the ceremonies were directed to Him—ceremonies which in the clearest possible way proclaimed the coming Savior (who was only promised at that time) in all His suffering, as well as the efficacy of this suffering. Thus, the Gentiles also became partakers of the adoption of children, as well as they who then believed in the Savior. They were God’s children, addressed Him lovingly with the name of Father, and did not need to stand from afar but had access to the throne of grace. They were not merely satisfied to have Canaan as if that were the earnest and type of heaven, but rejoiced in salvation itself as their inheritance.

Regarding this sonship we shall consider three matters: 1) its excellency, 2) who the partakers of it are, and 3) what their obligations are.

The Excellency of the Origin of Spiritual Sonship

The *excellency* of the children of God is so great that it exceeds all comprehension. This may be known in some measure by considering 1) their origin and state, 2) the manner in which they became children of God, and 3) the privileges they have.

First, *the origin and state of a child of God is more excellent than anything imaginable*. To be the child of a king is a great thing in this world. Many boast of the fact that they consider themselves among the descendants of kings and of great men of the world; some pagans boasted of being descendants of the gods. What then must it be to be a child of God Himself who has all glory within Himself, is above all praise, and has made everything? Everything belongs to Him; all creatures and all kings of the earth must be at His service and His beck, and must obey Him to the minutest detail; He accomplishes all that He wills, is nothing but love and goodness; and all that He is, He is for His children. They are of divine descent. Let kings and princes boast of their descent; let nobility, by way of a long succession of noble ancestors, ascend to generations of higher origin; and let families who are now poor and of low estate be encouraged by the fact that their ancestors at one time were noble—all this is at best but an earthly honor. Oh children of God, you must, however, consider your descent to be from God Himself, not only as Creator (which you have in common with everyone else, and which can only cause us to be ashamed, considering that we have fallen away from this majestic God, have thus become His enemies who are worthy to be punished by Him), but that you have been adopted as children by Him and appointed to be the objects of His fatherly goodness!

Furthermore, to be children of God means that their nature is exalted and glorious—yes, they partake of the divine nature. Children of noble parents frequently degenerate and then boast in vain of the courageous deeds and titles of their parents. However, God's children remain what they are: "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Something is to be found in them which is exalted above the realm of the world, its riches, honor, and status, and whatever else may be in the world. They have a more excellent, *princely*, and free spirit (Ps 51:12). There is something heavenly and divine in them, so that they consider earthly things to be too insignificant to esteem, give attention to, desire, or revere. They have

in view that which is high, exalted, and heavenly; of this they speak, this they seek, and they govern their activities with heavenly wisdom. The fact that worldly-minded people consider this to be nothing but imagination and daydreaming, instead considering that which is of the world to be only and really true, essential, and glorious, they only demonstrate thereby that they are children of this world whose portion is in this life. The children of God acknowledge them to be such, and view them as but foolish and contemptible. They know that visible things are but temporary and do not give satisfaction, that in and of themselves they are to be esteemed as nothing; whereas that which is invisible is essential, satisfying, and endures eternally. For this reason they are called, “the saints that are in the earth, and the excellent” (Ps 16:3), and “the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7:18).

Secondly, the excellency of their state is also evident from the contrast between them and others. If all men were partakers of the excellent state of the children of God, it would appear that, due to such generality, the adoration and joy of such a state would be somewhat diminished; however, God does not translate all men into this state. The entire multitude of men remain in their sinful, polluted, and despicable condition, and there are but few who are exalted to this glorious state. For this reason they excel all the more, and in glory they exceed all glorious, rich, and prominent princes and kings. A godly beggar is a thousand times more exalted and glorious than the greatest monarch who has ever been in the world. The greatest men in the world have respect for the most insignificant but godly servant, since they are acquainted with his nature and perceive that he towers above them. They cannot commit evil deeds against them unless they first do battle against themselves and banish the esteem they have for them in their hearts. And only then will they oppose them because they cannot tolerate that such an insignificant person towers and has dominion over them. “The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour” (Prov 12:26).

Thirdly, by comparing what they once were to what they are now, their excellency stands out even more. Formerly they were the same as others: “of your father the devil” (John 8:44), “a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters” (Isa 1:4), “children of disobedience ... the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:2-3), and “cursed children” (2 Pet 2:14). If the latter were annihilated, so that they would be delivered from eternal pain; if such, in separation from God, were yet to enjoy some quietude and have some diversion, as one would cast a piece of bread to a dog, this would be great happiness for them. To become the children of God,

however, is something which exceeds all comprehension. In comparison with his low estate, it was an exaltation for David to become the son-in-law of a king. “Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king’s son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed” (1 Sam 18:23). The more base the condition of God’s child was by nature, the loftier it is to be in the state of being a child of God, and the more glorious it is to be delivered from this misery and to be exalted to such glory. From being a child of the devil to becoming a child of God, from being a child of wrath to becoming the object of God’s favor, from a child of condemnation to becoming an heir of all the promises and a possessor of all blessings, and to be exalted from the greatest misery to the highest felicity—this is something which exceeds all comprehension and all adoration.

The Excellency of the Manner in Which Sinners are Translated into Spiritual Sonship

Secondly, the excellency of God’s children is evident from the manner in which they have been translated into this state. They neither became recipients of this by natural birth, nor by reason of wisdom and courage; they neither purchased it with their money, nor did they obtain it with their good will and virtuousness, but they have been translated into this state of sonship as follows:

(1) God has regenerated them by His Holy Spirit. In the human realm a person is a child of someone from whom he originates—from whom he has his life by way of procreation. In like manner a believer is a child of God since his spiritual life originates from God. “Of His own will begat He us” (James 1:18); “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God ... which were born, not of blood ... but of God” (John 1:12-13). Since therefore their spiritual being and life originates from God, they are the children of God by regeneration.

(2) They are children by reason of *adoption*. God decreed from eternity that in time He would adopt them from the human race to be His children and heirs of eternal life. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph 1:5). According to that decree He actually adopts the elect—each at his own time. “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15), “that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:5). They lay in their blood, cast away due to the abominableness of their soul, and no eye had pity upon them. God, however, viewing them in pity, said to them while lying in their blood, “Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou

wast in thy blood, Live” (Ezek 16:6). Behold, this is grace only—free and inexpressible grace.

(3) God has betrothed them to His Son by way of a spiritual marriage, by which they are united to Him in one Spirit. Concerning this betrothal we read: “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” (Hos 2:19). In the Song of Solomon the Lord Jesus therefore frequently calls them His bride: “My sister, My spouse” (Song 4:9-12); and they call Him their Beloved: “This is my beloved, and this is my friend” (Song 5:16). By reason of this marriage they mutually belong to each other. “My beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song 2:16). As two become one flesh in marriage, they likewise become one with Christ. “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). As the father of the bridegroom also becomes the father of the bride by reason of marriage, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ likewise becomes the Father of believers. “Hearken, O daughter! ... the King’s daughter is all glorious within” (Ps 45:10, 13). He is also her brother, for He generally refers to her as *sister* in the Song of Solomon. And she in turn says, “O that Thou wert as my brother” (Song 8:1). They therefore have but one Father, and thus the Lord Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, “Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17).

(4) They are children by reason of being united to the Son of God as members of one body (Eph 1:23). Since the Head is the Son of God, this is likewise true for the members, who, together with the Head, constitute one body.

Consider these four matters simultaneously, and upon proper reflection, it will cause a believer, with adoration, to be in ecstasy and to say: “I, who like other men lay in my sins; who was subject to the wrath of God; who was hateful, abominable, and intolerable—I have been known of God from eternity, have been ordained in His decree to be His child, and in time have been snatched from hell, and have been adopted as a child, as a child of that great God! I, who am but despised and maimed, have been betrothed to the Son of God—and this with the approbation of His Father and by reason of the incomprehensible love of the Son! I, who was dead in sins and trespasses, have been quickened by the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit! I have been born of God! This is incomprehensible and transcends all adoration. However, even though it is marvelous in my eyes, it nevertheless is the Lord’s

doing. Therefore I ought to rejoice over all this honor and glory, over such love and benevolence. I shall therefore love Him in return and magnify His Name to all eternity.”

The Excellency of the Privileges of Spiritual Sonship

Thirdly, the excellency of being a child of God is evident from the privileges they have. They are so manifold, that they cannot be enumerated, and each one is so glorious and so delightful that it cannot be expressed. Let us but consider a few of these privileges.

(1) God *cherishes* them as His children with a fatherly love. Oh wondrous love! God, who is love, sets His infinite love in motion to cherish with love such persons who in themselves are hateful, despicable, and condemnable. This love is not generated by the desirability of the object, but it originates within Himself, being desirous to love and to love specific individuals. Observe the following concerning this love: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3); “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us” (Eph 2:4). This love is so great, vehement, and incomprehensible that the Lord Jesus Himself exclaimed in amazement, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Love was the origin of eternal election; love sent Jesus into the world to be their Surety; love drew them out of the world to Him, translating them into the kingdom of His love; love radiates continually upon them; love preserves them; love brings them to glory; and love engenders a perfect union with, and love for, Him. This would not be credible if God Himself had not said this. Since God does say this, however, we now wish to believe and acknowledge this, rejoice in this, and be engaged in adoration. We wish to give Him glory, and being ignited by His love, to love Him in return. “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

(2) God has His eye upon them as a Father, to keep them so that no evil will befall them. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore” (Ps 121:3-8). How safely may such a child rest and trust under the shadow of His wings! He need neither fear nor be anxious, for the Lord cares for him (1 Pet 5:7). “I the Lord do

keep it [the vineyard]; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day” (Isa 27:3); “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt 10:30). He who touches one of them touches the apple of His eyes—yes, He even rebukes kings for their sake. Oh, how blessed is he who is a child of God, who due to fatherly love, is the object of the Lord’s protection!

(3) Since He preserves them, He cares for them in all that they need according to body and soul, so that they need not be concerned as to what they shall eat and drink and wherewithal they shall be clothed, for their heavenly Father knows what they stand in need of. He who feeds the fowls of the air and clothes the lilies of the field with more glory than even a Solomon, will He not provide food and clothing for His dear children? The Lord Jesus impresses this upon us in this convincing manner in Matt 6:25. The apostle does likewise: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). He will feed them with their appointed portion of meat, even if the ravens would have to bring it to them. They thus need not be distrustful nor fearful, but may freely say with David, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (Ps 23:1, 5-6).

(4) God has compassion and pity with them in all their bodily and spiritual ailments. It pleases the Lord to lead His children to heaven through many adversities and tribulations, in order that they may thus learn to know and feel their sins, be kept humble, be weaned from the world, be stirred up to prayer, be motivated to trust in Him, attentively acknowledge His help and His preceding grace, give all things into His hands and be satisfied with His government. “Thou hast seen it: for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto Thee; Thou art the helper of the fatherless” (Ps 10:14). As the Lord remembered Noah when he floated in the ark upon the waters of the flood (Gen 8:1), and as the Lord attentively observed the oppression of His people in Egypt (Exod 3:7), in like manner He looks in compassion upon His children in all the trials which oppress them. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him” (Ps 103:13); “Is Ephraim My dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord” (Jer 31:20). For this reason He

refers to Himself as “the Lord that hath mercy on thee” (Isa 54:10). The heartfelt compassion of someone may refresh a destitute person, albeit that he cannot help him; it is, however, as if he carries part of his cross. It refreshes His children to a far greater degree when they may believe and see that God has mercy upon them in truth, doing so out of love to them, and with a zeal to help them as only He is able to do. Unless it would serve their best interest to be exercised somewhat in a cross, He would also be able to either preserve them from tribulations or to deliver them immediately from it. Even if He does not immediately help them, He nevertheless governs matters in such a manner that it will be subservient to their best interest and to their salvation. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28).

(5) Since they are children, God hears and answers them as their loving Father. As children they take refuge to their Father in perplexity and by reason of this relationship they call Him, “Abba, Father!” In an intimate manner they bring their needs before Him, and with tearful eyes they tell Him what their sorrow is. They cry out, “My Father, the cross is so heavy and so very painful for me; it is of such long duration and I do not see my way through. Thou art able to help me, however, for Thou hast promised it and Thou dost indeed have compassion with me. Therefore, my Father, help, support, and deliver me!” The Lord looks upon such children in love, and is pleased with their childlike complaints and their taking refuge to Him. He will most certainly answer them and deliver them at His time and in His manner. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him” (Luke 11:13); “How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him” (Matt 7:11).

(6) Since they are children, they are free. “Then are the children free” (Matt 17:26); “But Jerusalem which is above is free” (Gal 4:31); “So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free” (Gal 4:31).

[1] They are free from the covenant of works. “If the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband” (Rom 7:6). Likewise, the believer is also free from the first husband, the law. “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held” (Rom 7:6).

[2] They are also free from the old ceremonial administration. “Ye have been called unto liberty” (Gal 5:13).

[3] They are free from the power of Satan, who will neither have

power nor dominion over them as he did prior to their conversion (2 Tim 2:26).

[4] They are free from the dominion of sin. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. But now being made free from sin ...” (Rom 6:14, 22).

[5] They are free from eternal condemnation. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1).

The truth has made them free (John 8:36), and *the Son* has made them free. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). The Holy Spirit gives them a free disposition of heart, so that they find themselves to be free from everything, and, being free, walk in this liberty. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor 3:17); “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal 5:13); “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh” (Gal 5:13). They who have tasted the bitterness of slavery will know best what a glorious privilege this is. The apostle demonstrates this glorious reality. “Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

(7) Since they are children, they are also heirs of God; that is, of all the temporal, spiritual, and eternal benefits of the covenant of grace. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). What an unspeakable inheritance this is! They may indeed exclaim, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage” (Ps 16:5-6); “Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!” (Ps 31:19).

They are heirs of the earth. When God created our first father Adam, He appointed him to be lord over everything. “Replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). Man, having sinned, has been deprived of this dominion; God, however, having restored His elect again in Christ, by renewal makes them partakers of all things. “How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things” (Rom 8:32); “... all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours” (1 Cor 3:21-22).

Objection: The godly generally have the smallest portion in this

world. How can all things then be theirs? And in what manner do they have dominion over everything?

Answer: A king owns his kitchen utensils, even though he neither uses nor controls them. The son of the king is proprietor by reason of his claim upon the crown, even though he does not as yet possess the kingdom. A landlord owns his rented land, even though he does not use it; such is also the case here.

(1) God's children are proprietors of all things; all things are theirs. They do not trespass upon the property of another man; they eat their own food, and neither do they have borrowed clothes nor live in the homes of other people, nor do they use the animals of others. They neither see a foreign sun, nor do they live by foreign air; it is all theirs. They have a claim to it all, and their Father has given it to them. Even though the world considers this proprietorship to be but imaginary, it is nevertheless the truth. Others may have much and extensive property; however, they have it as slaves who carry the goods of their master for his children, and as soldiers to protect their paymasters. The ungodly ought to thank the godly for being alive and that they may have a crumb for all their activity, for if there were no longer godly persons, they would all be in hell; they live from the goods of the godly. God permits them to use these in His common goodness, and the godly have no less for it.

(2) All that the godly may own and use, they may have in their Father's favor. Whatever exists unwillingly serves the ungodly; it all groans against them (Rom 8:20, 22). All that is used by the godly, however, will serve the purpose for which it was made.

(3) Whatever exists, exists in subservience to them. The sun, moon, and stars are there to illuminate them and to cause them to rejoice; the earth with her fullness is there to provide food, clothing and enjoyment for them. The bird in the air, the animal upon the land, and the fish in the water exist for them. The devil in hell must serve them, even if it were to sanctify them (2 Cor 12:7), albeit that this is not His objective. All the activities and labors of the ungodly are in the end subservient to the godly for soul and body. The angels themselves (oh, wondrous goodness!) "are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:14). Behold, God's children are thus frequently "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor 6:10). The Lord Jesus through His poverty has made them rich (2 Cor 8:9).

Therefore, children of God, consider yourselves as having such an exalted position and as being so rich; however, you must know

that this is but an added gift, and is nothing compared to the spiritual goods which you possess and anticipate.

(1) Since you are master over all things, with what princely spirit you ought to consider everything as being subject to you. You ought not to permit anything—money, food, men, honor, or whatever it may be—to bring you under its power, have dominion over you, divert your affections, and thus bring you in subjection to it.

(2) Since you are master and possessor of the world, why are you so filled with care and anxiety, fearing that some day you will yet be in want? Why are you so busy in gathering money and goods, since they are all yours—all that has or has not been gathered by you?

(3) Since you are master over all things, use all things as proprietor. Make use of heaven and earth in this way; view all in this way, and delight yourself in that which you see, hear, smell, and taste. See to it, however, that you conduct yourself as a good-natured master and refrain from tyranny, utilizing and governing in this manner whatever the Lord gives you for your use—be it your animals, your servants, and all who are under you or labor for you.

(4) Since you are master over everything, take special care that you do not use unlawful means to acquire your possessions, but receive everything from the hand of your Father, however much or little He may be pleased to give you for your use; it will be sufficient for you as you use the means which He has prescribed for you. An only child is heir of all the goods that are in the house of his parents. If, however, he removes something from this inheritance contrary to the will of his parents, he will anger them; such is also the case here. You may freely eat from all the trees in the garden of this world; however, be on guard for that one tree called *sin*. Be satisfied with that which your Father bestows upon you. In all things He will give you that which suffices; if it be not according to your foolish desire, it will be to the benefit of your health. Therefore you may say with liberty and in faith, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps 23:1).

(5) Since you are master over all things, do not forget your humble origin, so that the following proverb be not applicable to you: *When nothing becomes something, something no longer knows itself.*³¹ Know that you are a sinner, not worthy of receiving anything. Know that the Lord has granted you all only out of pure goodness and has richly given you all things to enjoy (1 Tim 6:17). Since you have received everything, do not boast as if you did not *receive* it, but had all this *from yourself*. This is an added benefit.

³¹ The Dutch proverb reads: “Als niet komt tot iet, dan kent iet zich zelve niet.”

Secondly, they are heirs of a possession which is far more excellent than heaven and earth with all its creatures. They are heirs of all the benefits of the covenant of grace enumerated in chapter 16. Concerning this the apostle says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor 2:9). This inheritance consists in sound wisdom (Prov 2:7), durable riches and righteousness (Prov 8:18), and a kingdom which the Lord Jesus has appointed unto them (Luke 22:29). It is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:4), a glorious inheritance which is "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph 1:18). It is an eternal inheritance; "that ... they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15). God Himself is their inheritance: "The Lord is my portion" (Lam 3:24). It is incomprehensible and inexpressible what this is. No one can comprehend this unless he has enjoyed in some measure what it will be when the soul, with full satisfaction, will enjoy God in an immediate sense. Of this we can say nothing else but, *Oh, how great this is!*

Consider all this together and on the one hand cast your eyes upon your own abominable, hateful, and condemnable condition, and on the other hand upon your sonship. Focus upon its excellency as having its origin in God, the King of kings, and as being a partaker of the divine nature, which is the portion of so few. Consider and attentively reflect upon the fact that you have become a child by adoption, by betrothal to Christ, by regeneration. Consider the glorious privileges which are therefore yours: to be loved by God, to be preserved by God, to be cared for in all things, to have the compassion of God in all tribulations, to be heard of God in prayer, and to be an heir of God. Our understanding is too small to perceive the magnitude of all this; it is impossible to fathom this; in adoration one must exclaim, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance" (Ps 33:12); "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord" (Deut 33:29).

The Marks of Sonship

A believer will very readily approve of this, even if he is weak or just at the beginning; it will cause his heart to yearn for these matters with desire. However, it will also oppress him somewhat because he fears he is not, and perhaps will never be, a partaker of the adoption of children. It will therefore be necessary that we

present to you the nature of a child of God in its essence, beginning disposition, and affections or motions. In doing so, an unconverted person who readily imagines himself to be a child of God, will be able to see that he is not a child of God; and one whose faith is feeble and who is fearful that he is not a child of God, may be able to see that he is a child indeed.

In the previous chapter we have shown that one can be assured of his justification, that is, both of forgiveness and of his right to this blessed inheritance. We have shown that he must endeavor to be assured of this, and that, being delivered from fear, he should as a child serve and honor God with love and gladness. To that end compare yourself with these marks, and by way of comparison determine what your state is.

First, one obtains the adoption of children by faith. “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12); “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). Therefore, do you perceive that upon a sensible view of your sinful and condemnable condition, you have taken refuge to, and with many prayers and supplications continue to take refuge to Jesus Christ? Have you taken refuge to Him out of a heartfelt desire to be reconciled to God and to be in this state of sonship; to live in communion with God, in peace of conscience, in love to God, and in fear before Him; to attain to the disposition and exercise of sanctification; to battle continually against sin; to be preserved in your faith; and to enjoy eternal felicity? Have you thus taken refuge to Jesus Christ, knowing Him to be a complete Surety who is fully qualified to save, as One who in His goodness calls and invites you by means of the gospel, as One who offers Himself so that He may communicate this fullness to you, and as One who is true and Almighty? I repeat, have you taken refuge to Him, received Him, surrendered yourself to Him, and are you conscious of all these motions (of which you can be conscious if you but take notice of them)? You may then conclude as follows: I believe, and since my faith also pertains to sonship, since faith unites one with Jesus, the Son of God, and causes one also to be betrothed to Him, and since there is the promise that believers receive power to be the sons of God, I thus perceive that I am a child of God by faith. He who draws this conclusion from the Word of God and perceives this to be in harmony with his heart, (determining what its desires are by means of the Word), acts wisely, even though he does not taste as yet the glory and sweetness of such a state, or be it that he also does not yet perceive the sealing operation of the Holy Spirit, thoroughly removing all

doubts and fear. Even he who is strong in faith—and thus he who possesses and perceives the truth of these matters—must put aside and disregard many things which as yet come forth from his heart.

Secondly, spiritual sonship may be recognized by the bearing of God's image. A father generates a son according to his image; a human being brings forth a human being, and a child has the same human nature as the parents. The Lord likewise regenerates His children according to His image (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). He makes them partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), and "followers of God, as dear children" (Eph 5:1). If a believer experiences that he, who at one time was darkness, may now be light in the Lord, has enlightened eyes of understanding, and knows the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit (even though this light, to his shame, reveals to him the sinfulness of his heart)—if he perceives the loveliness of spiritual life with God (whereby the soul is stimulated in its desires), despises the vanity and despicableness of all that the natural man deems to be glorious and desirable—if his heart is united with the will of God and it is his delight and desire only to do this will in thoughts, words, and deeds, doing so in love, fear, and obedience—if the desires of the heart go out toward God in order to have fellowship with Him continually, to be pleased with, rejoice, and delight oneself in the Lord, and there is a desire to be delivered from sin—if a believer perceives this within himself in truth, he most certainly bears the image of God, as Scripture states that the image of God consists in this. As long as we are on this side of eternity, however, the image of God will be imperfect in man; the best among God's children has but a small beginning, and still has much of the old man. This engenders the battle between the Spirit and the flesh and its lusts (Gal 5:17), and a praying against sin, and for sanctification. Thus this strife yields proof that a person bears the image of God, for if all were flesh, there would be no opposition and therefore no strife. Instead, there would be peace in the enjoyment of one's earthly pleasures. If you therefore perceive the principle of God's image to be found in you in truth, you may and must proceed with the conclusion that you are a child of God and an heir of eternal life. I am speaking here of the veracity rather than the degree of this matter.

The third mark qualifying one as a child of God consists in the inner motions which only belong to a child of God. In order to show to you what they are, we shall compare a child of God with a child of nature, particularly in respect to love for parents, brothers, and sisters.

As God loves them with an infinite, eternal, and immutable

love, this love also ignites in God's children, who are now radiated with divine love, reciprocal love. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This love is a veritable and infallible mark of sonship. "But if any man love God, the same is known of Him" (1 Cor 8:3). This love manifested itself continually in David throughout the Psalms. "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength" (Ps 18:1); "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice" (Ps 116:1). Paul was strongly motivated by the love of God. "For the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor 5:14). Yes, anyone who has faith will manifest this love. "... faith which worketh by love" (Gal 5:6).

The Analogy Between Natural and Spiritual Sonship

Between parents and children there is a love which the Greek called *στοργή* (& (storgé); this is a word which we can only translate properly by way of description. It is an innate love, an inner inclination, which spontaneously issues forth from the heart; it can only exist between parents and children, and cannot go forth toward others. A stepmother can love her stepchildren very much; however, says she, "I cannot give them a motherly heart (that is this *storgee*)." This love unites them as parents as is manifested in this relationship by a sense of belonging, much friendliness, care, and benevolence.

Natural children delight to be with their parents. A small child, when seeing the mother leave, will cry after her. If he misses the mother, he will look around and seek for her; if he does not find her, he will cry and be sorrowful. When he sees the mother again, he will run to her and fall upon her lap with laughter and happiness. If something occurs by which he is frightened, he will run to the mother, entrust himself to her lap, and be without fear. He is not concerned about food or clothing, but expects this from the parents. Even if the child has a meager portion at home, he would rather have dry bread at home than to enjoy all sorts of delicacies with strangers in the absence of the mother. He rejoices when the mother commands him to get something, and will execute her order with joy; he will be delighted if he perceives that the mother is pleased with this. He has a filial fear for the parents and does not wish to anger them. If he has been naughty and the parents maintain somewhat of a distance, the child will not be able to bear this. He will not cease to run to them, plead with them, and supplicate them until he perceives by renewal the former familiarity. If the children are older, they cannot bear to hear someone speak a dishonoring word about their parents; it grieves them at their heart and they will defend them with all their might. The love of a child is also manifested toward the brothers and sisters; he is

one with them, finds joy in being with them, whereas he very easily separates himself from strangers. Everyone knows that all of this is true for children.

Consider all that has been said and apply it to the spiritual. You will perceive that God's children have the same nature. If someone does not perceive this within himself, let him rest assured that he is not a child of God. If, however, someone truthfully perceives this nature within himself in a spiritual sense, he has reason to conclude that he is a child of God. Apply this disposition of a child to God's children, and you will then observe that Scripture states the very same about God's children.

(1) A child of God, aside from desiring the tender love of God, *desires the continual presence of God*. "But it is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps 73:28). If the Lord hides Himself from the soul, she will be troubled. "My Beloved had withdrawn Himself, and was gone: my soul failed when He spake" (Song 5:6); "Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled" (Ps 30:7). If the Lord departs, she will cry after Him. "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord" (1 Sam 7:2). The soul runs after Him and cleaves unto Him. "My soul followeth hard after Thee" (Ps 63:8). And if she must miss His presence, she will sit alone and mourn "as a sparrow alone upon the house top" (Ps 102:7). "For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me" (Lam 1:16). During such desertion she thinks upon the days of old, and this softens her heart, arousing within her a strong desire for the former fellowship. "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle; when the Almighty was yet with me" (Job 29:2-5); "Lord, where are Thy former lovingkindnesses" (Ps 89:49). Then the soul will cry out with David, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God" (Ps 42:2). If the Lord by renewal appears to her, she will cry out for joy and say, "O Lord, I will praise Thee: though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation" (Isa 12:1-2). And even if it pleases the Lord not to favor her with sweetness and comfort, she nevertheless wishes to remain near to Him, even if she would die of hunger while yearning for, waiting for, and crying after Him. In spite of all this she does not wish to

depart from Him and entertain herself with the delicacies of the world. Even then the soul will say, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Ps 73:25-26).

(2) Like a child, the soul is *humble* before the countenance of her Father and perceives herself as a worm and as one not worthy of notice. In this frame she bows before Him and submits to Him as a weaned child. “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child” (Ps 131:1-2).

(3) The soul of a child of God is *willing* to do the Lord’s will; that is her joy and delight. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness” (Ps 110:3); “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22); “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him” (2 Cor 5:9). If she is overcome by sin, it will grieve her in the innermost recesses of her soul, and she cannot be satisfied until she, by renewal, has been cleansed by the blood of Christ and once more has peace with God. “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid” (Ps 32:3-5); “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me” (Ps 51:2-3). And if the Lord receives her again after her fall into sin, and causes her to experience His grace and comfort, her love toward God will be ignited all the more vehemently. “I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice” (Ps 116:1).

(4) All these texts confirm the love of God’s child toward God; and as they love God, *they likewise love the children of God*. “Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). This is an evidence of being a child of God, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). The godly know the difference between a child of God and a child of the world. The latter are despised in their eyes; however, they honor the first (Ps 15:4). God’s children do not love each other because they have such a pleasant character, are of such a humble disposition, or are faithful; it is also not because one need not fear to be deceived by them,

or because they are civil and religious. Instead, they recognize that God's children love Jesus and that Jesus loves them. It is for this reason that their heart goes out after them and unites itself with them, in order that together they may bear witness to Jesus and His cause. Their desire is "to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight" (Ps 16:3); "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts" (Ps 119:63). Together with them, they desire to be both exalted as well as humbled, and with them wish to endure one and the same circumstances. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb 11:25-26).

The Need to Examine One's Self Whether He Is a Child of God

We have thus briefly presented to you the nature of a child of God, in order that it would provide both converted and unconverted with a suitable mirror by which they can perceive what their spiritual state is. Consider now the three marks mentioned earlier together, and if it is your desire to know whether or not you are a child of God, bring yourself into the presence of an omniscient God, and compare yourself with these marks. Then listen to what your conscience has to say.

If a person has been convinced that he possesses neither faith nor the image of God, and has not the nature of a child of God, but has been convinced of the contrary, let him be persuaded that he is not a child of God. Let him dwell for some time upon this realization and furthermore reflect upon the fact that God is then not His Father, nor is the Lord Jesus his Savior; and that he is neither a partaker of the promises which are written in the Bible, nor of eternal salvation. Oh, that the Lord would impress this condition upon his heart! Let him furthermore reflect upon the fact that he is a child of the devil (how dreadful!), and a child of wrath, that is, the object of God's wrath. He should consider that all the threats and curses which are recorded in the Word of God are applicable to him, and that if he were to die that way, he has nothing else to expect than eternal condemnation. If there were any historical faith, if any attention were given to the natural conscience, this condition, along with the conviction of being in this condition, ought to bring on distress and cause him to frighten and tremble and to inquire whether there is still a means by which to be delivered. If you are sincere in this, there is still hope that from a child of the devil you may become a child of God—from an

heir of condemnation, an heir of eternal salvation. This hope lies in taking refuge to the Lord Jesus and in receiving Him by faith, for those will be given the power to become the sons of God (John 1:12). They have the promises that they will be saved (Acts 16:31).

On the other hand, if someone has been convinced by the marks mentioned earlier that his heart is and functions as has been stated, he may not neglect to conclude that he is a child of God. He may not neglect to impress this conclusion upon his heart: “Now are we the sons of God “ (1 John 3:2). He may not neglect to rejoice in this his blessed state. If he does not do so, he sins against the Lord, not acknowledging the great love of God. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). Such a person also does not acknowledge the inexpressible privileges of which he is a partaker. Can there be anything more glorious and blessed for a person than to have been eternally predestinated to be a child of God, to have been adopted in time, to have been betrothed to Christ, to have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, to be loved by God the Father, to be kept by Him as a Father, to be cared for by Him in all things, to be the object of His pity and compassion, to be always heard in all things which one desires in Christ’s Name, and to be an heir of God, the world, and eternal felicity—all of this being true for one who is so sinful and miserable in himself? And consider then that he belongs to the few who are partakers of it. Could one think upon or desire anything more lofty than this? If not, why then does your heart not rejoice in all these blessed realities? “Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds” (Ps 149:5). This is gratitude and is pleasing to God; to such He will continue to reveal Himself. “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Ps 37:4).

(1) See to it that you do not ascribe to your nature the dispositions and the motions of the heart—outlined in the marks mentioned above—which you perceive to be within yourself, as if your nature could bring forth such a disposition and such motions by way of external illumination. That would be a manifestation of pride and would rob God of His work which He alone has wrought by an almighty power within you.

(2) See to it that you are not kept from determining what your state is by reason of the magnitude of the matter and your unworthiness—particularly when you perceive the root of the matter to be in you. That is a manifestation of pride, for it would be as if you do not want to receive anything unless you would be worthy of it, and as if the gift would have to be commensurate with your worthiness.

Know that God gives His children everything above and beyond, and contrary to, what they deserve; the best of them is as unworthy as the least among them, and it is all “to the praise of the glory of His grace “ (Eph 1:6). Therefore, if God has and will bestow this upon you, then receive it all, doing so with much humility, and yet with gladness.

(3) See to it that your remaining corruptions do not cause you to deny the truth, for we know that God gives His children all things here only in part; in the best of them He allows many corruptions to remain. We thus need not discern whether or not there are corruptions and how many there are, but whether truth, spirit, and life are to be found within. If such is the case, then, with Paul, make a distinction between your spiritual self and your carnal self and be assured that this feeble new man will certainly remain alive, and the old Adam will never put it to death. You may never draw a conclusion based upon your measure of sinfulness or spirituality, but your conclusion must be based on the truth. Therefore step over all obstacles, lift up your head out of all your failures, observe your bliss, and rejoice in it. “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil 4:4).

The Obligations of Spiritual Sonship

Those who are now convinced that they are the children of God are under obligation to conduct themselves as children of God. I am not putting a burden upon you which, due to its weight, would diminish your happiness; no, “It is joy to the just to do judgment” (Prov 21:15). The nature of a child of God spontaneously generates all that a child is obligated to do; it is his desire, his delight, and his life, and nothing grieves him, except that he does not serve his heavenly Father in a more pure and spiritual manner. Therefore since you are children, conduct yourself as children.

First, entrust everything pertaining to body and soul to your heavenly Father without fear and anxiety. “Therefore take no thought ... for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matt 6:31-32). Fear and anxiety are indicative of either doubting that one is a child of God (even when the heart is convinced of this and he is able to see the veracity of this in comparing himself with the Word of God), or it is a distrusting of God’s power, His watchful care for you, or His goodness. How obviously this is contrary to God’s Word! It can also be due to an inordinate desire and failure to deny one’s own desires; that is, a desire to receive something in a given measure and at a given time. Such a sin ought not to be found with a child who ought to be

subject to the will and wisdom of the Father. Therefore do battle against this, give it over into the hand of the Lord, and entrust it to Him. “Thou hast seen it: for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto Thee; Thou art the helper of the fatherless” (Ps 10:14). Therefore you must let go and allow the Lord to care for it. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass” (Ps 37:5); “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you” (1 Pet 5:7). Glorify Him thus in His omnipotence, faithfulness, wisdom, and goodness, and you will experience that all will be well, and that the end will be peace.

Secondly, honor and fear your heavenly Father with a childlike heart. This most intimate and sweet relationship between God and His children may definitely not diminish their esteem for God. Rather, one ought to delight himself by continually reflecting upon and acknowledging the great glory of divine majesty. You must always know yourself in order to remain humble, have a holy reverence and respect for God, and display this before Him. “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is My fear” (Mal 1:6); “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet 1:17).

As a child of your Father, request from the Lord all those things which are the focus of your good desires. This is the reason why the Lord does not fill His children to overflowing in this life, but permits much emptiness to be in them, so that they would make their childlike desires known to Him and beg of Him for fulfillment. Make all your needs known to your Father, that is, whatever presses you down, threatens you, and you long to have; do this as intimately as a child would ask his father. Do not then tremblingly stand from afar, but rather, as a child, use the boldness which you have received and cry out, “Abba, Father.” Pray for the fulfillment of your desires with sweet childlike supplications; that will be pleasing unto the Lord. He says: “Let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely” (Song 2:14); “Call upon Me in the day of trouble” (Ps 50:15); “Open thy mouth wide” (Ps 81:10); “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:19, 22). In your approach, maintain the disposition of a child, and as you thus call, believe that He, as a Father, will answer you and grant you that which is needful and beneficial for you.

Reflect much upon Luke 11:11-13, “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit (good gifts in Matt 7:11) to them that ask Him?”

Fourthly, submit yourself as a child to the chastisement of the Lord as being the chastisement of a Father. The Lord deals with His children in a human fashion; when they misbehave, desecrate the Lord’s institutions, and do not keep His commandments, He will visit their transgressions with the rod, their unrighteousness with plagues, and their body and soul with numerous afflictions. To flare up against this, to be grieved, to murmur, and immediately to say, “I am not a child of God, God is not my Father, God deals harshly with me; if He were my Father, He would have compassion on me; He would then deliver me from this grievous and especially this sinful cross”—to speak thus does not befit the nature of an upright child. It is fitting for a child to be quiet, to humbly submit, and to say, “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him” (Mic 7:9); “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it” (Ps 39:9). It behooves you to humble yourself under the rod, to permit yourself to be chastised, and as a child to fall under the rod. It behooves you to beg for grace, doing so not as a stranger, but as a child, clinging by faith to the fact that you are a child. Hope thus upon grace and deliverance according to the exhortation, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet 5:6). Therefore whatever you do, do not conduct yourself as a stranger during the heat of oppression—which comes upon you as a trial—as if something strange befell you (1 Pet 4:12). Know that this is the common way in which the Lord leads His children. Observe this in Heb 12:6-9, “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons ... shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”

Fifthly, obey God as your Father and endeavor to be like Him. Here we have the distinction between true and natural holiness, for the exhortation is as follows: “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but

as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pet 1:14-15); “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Eph 5:1). Let the light and the new man within you, as well as your conformity to the divine nature, show themselves forth. Show forth that the goods of this world are not your portion, and that you have a better and more satisfying portion. Show forth your humility, meekness, moderation and your love, fear, and obedience toward God, as well as your patient submission to His chastising hand—so that men, seeing your light, may glorify God. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples” (John 15:8). Thus, with heart, words, and deeds, strive zealously for the honor of your Father, and He will manifest that this is pleasing to Him, and will permit you to experience more of His fatherly favor. “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15).

Sixthly, live as children in mutual love and peace, so that men may see that the Spirit dwelling in you differs from the one dwelling in them.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Spiritual Peace

Justification, that is, the forgiveness of sins, as well as the bestowal of the right to eternal life, engenders peace with God. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

The Use of the Word “Peace” in Scripture

The word “peace” is used in a great variety of ways in the Word of God. *In general* it refers to every sort of felicity and prosperity; *in a special sense* it refers to either civil or spiritual peace. *Civil peace* refers to the tranquil coexistence of authorities, cities, families, and individuals. Believers are obligated from their side to do everything in their power to prevent disturbance and to promote whatever is subservient to peace. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom 12:18). However, light and darkness, fire and water, life and death, Christ and the devil, and faithful children of God and unbelieving children of the devil, cannot agree to all eternity. Therefore the godly ought not to imagine that they will have much external peace in the world, for the world hates them (John 15:18). The world therefore does whatever it can to arouse hatred against the godly, so that the godly should be prepared to endure tribulation. The Lord Jesus says concerning this, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34). We shall here not discuss this peace, but *spiritual* peace. This in turn pertains either to believers in their mutual relationship or to God and the conscience. It is the latter we shall discuss here.

Spiritual Peace Defined

Peace between God and the conscience refers to man’s former,

present, and future state. In reference to his former state, it pertains to a ceasing from and a laying aside of former enmity. Due to sin there was enmity between God and man (Rom 5:10). Sin made a separation between them both, causing God to hide His countenance from man (Isa 59:2). God hates the sinner and abhors him (Ps 5:5-6); the face of the Lord is against him (Ps 34:16), and His wrath is ready to destroy him (Rom 2:5-6,9). Conversely, man from his side has no desire after God (Job 21:14), does not delight in Him (Job 34:9), and hates God (Rom 1:30). “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), and “he runneth upon Him, even on His neck, upon the thick bosses of His bucklers” (Job 15:26).

In this peace the former enmity is taken away; God desists from this, now being reconciled by the blood of His Son, and believers desist from this, now having received another heart by the Holy Spirit. The apostle speaks of this: “For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled” (Col 1:19-21).

In reference to both the present and future state, peace consists in fellowship between the believing soul and God, this being characterized by oneness of heart, intimacy, friendliness, and love. There is unity: “... that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21); “My beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song 2:16). There is intimate fellowship: “Nevertheless I am continually with Thee” (Ps 73:23); “... what doth the Lord require of thee ... but to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic 6:8). There is a delightful friendship: “... I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15); “... he (Abraham) was called the friend of God” (James 2:23). There is fellowship, in a mutual manifestation of love: “And I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God” (Hos 2:23).

The Father loves them: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). Believers love God in return: “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength” (Ps 18:1). The Lord has loving encounters with them: “... Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it” (Isa 38:17). The believer in turn cleaves to the Lord Jesus: “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” (Song 8:5).

A Triune God: the Cause of this Peace

God is the cause of this peace. Man would have never applied to God for peace, and furthermore, due to sin, it was impossible that he would obtain peace. However, oh wonder of wonders, God Himself begins from His side!

(1) From eternity God has had thoughts of peace toward sinners, and in *the Counsel of Peace* has ordained the Son to be a Surety to accomplish this peace by Him. He has a peaceful heart and delights in peace; for this reason He is frequently called the God of peace. “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20).

(2) The Son’s entry into the world was accompanied by the holy angels who jubilated, “On earth peace” (Luke 2:14). He reconciles the elect with God by His death. “The chastisement of our peace was upon Him” (Isa 53:5). For this reason He bears the name “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6), “Melchizedek, king of Salem,” that is, peace (Heb 7:1-2), and He is called “our peace” (Eph 2:14).

(3) The Holy Spirit brings this peace into the heart of believers: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17).

In order to make believers partakers of this peace, the Lord uses the gospel as the external means and faith as the internal means. The Lord makes the elect partakers of this peace by bringing them into covenant with Him, which is called a covenant of peace. “... neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed” (Isa 54:10). By means of the gospel He calls and invites men to enter into this covenant, which therefore is called the “gospel of peace.” “... your feet shod with the preparation of peace” (Eph 6:15). The Lord uses men to make this gospel known. He sends them forth as His messengers, putting the word of reconciliation in their mouths (2 Cor 5:19-20). They are called the “messengers of peace”: “... the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly” (Isa 33:7); “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace” (Isa 52:7); “O Zion, that bringest good tidings” (Isa 40:9). By these means, the Lord brings man to faith, and faith, being in exercise, generates peace in the conscience. “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom 15:13).

This peace is the portion of believers only. The unconverted and ungodly frequently have a dead and insensitive conscience. They, not being smitten by their conscience, imagine within themselves that all is well before God and that they have peace with God. How rudely they will be awakened, however, and come to the realization

that they are children of wrath and never have had peace with God! “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa 57:20-21). This peace is a hidden treasure which is kept for the elect only, which the Lord permits His children to taste as often as He deems best. “I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near,” (Isa 57:18-19). “And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it” (Luke 10:6).

All believers are equally partakers of this peace, that is, as far as their state and the veracity of this matter are concerned. The application of this peace, however, varies greatly as far as its sensible enjoyment is concerned. Some enjoy it in a greater measure and others in a lesser measure. Some remain in this peaceful condition for a long period, and so to speak live in it; others experience this peace rarely and it rapidly dissipates.

We shall discuss this peace in its specific manifestations to convince weak believers that the Lord has spoken peace to their souls; to discover to the unconverted that they have no peace; to make everyone delighted with this peace by presenting the desirability of being in such a state; and to stimulate everyone to strive for this condition.

The Various Ways in Which this Peace Manifests Itself

A believer is often as Samuel who as yet did not know the voice of God. The Lord frequently speaks peace to the soul; however, if this peace does not engender a disposition which in his opinion it ought to bring forth, he does not acknowledge it as such. He must therefore know in what manner and in which steps the soul enjoys peace.

First, sometimes this peace will reveal itself in a *hope* that one will as yet attain to it. The soul in her mourning, praying, and looking unto Christ, sometimes does not receive a certain assurance that she is at peace with God, but is nevertheless encouraged that God who has begun a good work in her will further deal with her, and this hope sustains her as an anchor sustains a ship in a storm (Heb 6:19).

Secondly, it manifests itself sometimes in *quietness* within the soul, even though the soul neither dares nor is able to determine that she is a partaker of Christ, and although she cannot yet be assured by way of the reflex act of faith, the grounds of which she does indeed behold. In this manner a calm and sweet quietness comes within the soul (she knows not how); even if this is not experienced by having communion with God, it is nevertheless so

in the exercise of the soul toward God. Fear is gone, terror has disappeared and, due to promises which she secretly believes, the soul is quiet. “Truly my soul waiteth upon God:³² from Him cometh my salvation” (Ps 62:1).

Thirdly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in *being delighted and satisfied*. This is the request of an absolute and unconditional surrender into the hand of the Lord of herself, her salvation, and the way in which it will please the Lord to lead her. This is accompanied with a secret confidence in His power, goodness, veracity, and faithfulness, trusting that He will make all things well, saying, “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me” (Ps 138:8). The soul dares to place its trust in this.

Fourthly, sometimes this peace manifests itself in *being assured* of the forgiveness of sins and of being in the state of grace—this being true, however, in the absence of joy and many sweet inner motions. She knows in whom she has believed, entrusts herself to Him, believes that she will be saved, and upon that truth stands firm even though she does not have the taste of the blessedness of her state which would enable her to find sweet delight in it. “... but I obtained mercy” (1 Tim 1:13); “... I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12); “Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Ps 73:24).

Fifthly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in *having free access* to the throne of grace. The soul approaches as an adopted child, acknowledges God as her Father, and in this disposition comes to God through Christ with approbation, delight, confidence and in the lifting up of her heart, exclaiming, “Abba, Father!” (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

Sixthly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in *a delightful joy* that the Lord has been reconciled with her, her sins forgiven her, that the Lord has made her one of His favored ones, and the recipient of salvation. Her soul rejoices in this and leaps for joy. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10).

Seventhly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in its *essential form and excellency*. God, who is peace, fills the soul with His peace and fully encompasses her with peace; and the soul is thus irradiated with peace from all sides. The passions are too limited, the

³² The Statenvertaling reads: “Immers is mijn ziel stil tot God,” that is, “Truly, my soul is quiet before God.”

understanding falls short, and words fail to express what it means to have peace with God. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7).

Behold, believers, these are the many different ways in which this peace manifests itself. Who of the godly—if he has given heed to the mercies of the Lord, and if he has some remembrance of his former experiences—would dare to deny that he has ever enjoyed something of this peace? And if he has experienced something of this, let him be assured that, even though the feeling vanishes, this peace between God and his soul will never be broken. “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27).

The Sweetness of This Peace

From the foregoing it can already be deduced to some degree what the excellent sweetness of this peace is; this will be all the more evident from what follows.

First, this peace does not only consist in a cessation of enmity between God and the person (which enmity could not but instill terror to the highest degree), but it includes a free and familiar relationship with God. Such is the testimony concerning Enoch: “And Enoch walked with God” (Gen 5:24), and such was the privilege of Abraham: “... walk before Me” (Gen 17:1). Such a soul who may thus be at peace and walk with God, lives in separation from all that is visible and above all that is of the earth, and is irradiated by the perfections of God, all of which fill her. She humbly interacts with God as her Father; at one time she is silent and reverently bows before God while worshiping Him, and then again will be communing with Him. God speaks to the heart; He comforts, gladdens, strengthens, and encourages; the soul expresses her needs, tells of her sorrow, and pours out her desires before Him; she lets herself be irradiated by His love and is ignited with love in return. Then she views the perfections of God, so that in adoration she stands still and exclaims in amazement, “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable” (Ps 145:3). She rests under His shadow; then the heart yearns for the future and beholds her perfect felicity from afar; the soul gives thanks for the wondrous benefits, and thus the soul which is at peace becomes radiant due to her fellowship with God.

Secondly, as sinful as the soul may be—daily offending in many ways—her conscience time and again finds peace in the blood of Christ. It is as if she had not committed sin (Heb 9:14). Even if all

in the world would acquit, comfort, and offer assistance, it would all be in vain if the conscience within were to condemn her, be in bondage, and be restless. If the conscience may be at peace with God, however, whatever be in hell and upon earth that may set itself in array against her, the conscience is quiet and at peace. “When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” (Job 34:29).

Thirdly, since the soul is at peace with God, this peace also extends to the holy angels who previously were against man. The Cherubim barred Adam from Paradise and barred the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24). Man now being reconciled with God, however, has communion with the holy angels, and is “come unto ... an innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22). The angels now assist them in their way, for they are all “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14).

Fourthly, there is peace with God and with all men as men, and that not only with the godly but also with the ungodly. From their side, the heart of the godly is peacefully disposed toward all, for they view them all as creatures of their God and thus are ready to help them; and if they are evil, they are far beyond their reach and will not be able to harm them. “In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by Me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord” (Isa 54:14-17).

Fifthly, there is peace with God, with all creatures (the devils excepted), with sun, moon, stars, clouds, rain, hail, fire, silver, gold, and wild and tame animals—yes, everything is kindly disposed toward them, and it appears as if everything smiles at them and is ready to be of service. “For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee” (Job 5:23).

Sixthly, when the believer experiences this peace with God, he can readily bear all crosses and also “glory in tribulation” (Rom 5:3). Then they find themselves to be in Paul’s condition: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then

am I strong” (2 Cor 12:10). Then death is no terror unto them, but only a departing in peace (Luke 2:29), even if, due to their witness of the truth, they must die a violent death. This peace causes martyrs to sing and rejoice in the midst of torture and flames.

If already here peace with God is so sweet and invigorating, what will it be when there are no more sins which time and again disturb the peace, and when there will no longer be estrangement from God, but rather eternal unity in joy, love, and peace! “For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!” (Zech 9:17).

The Characteristics of True Spiritual Peace

These excellencies mentioned are sufficient to stir up a believer, who is acquainted with this peace and has tasted it to some degree, to strive for an increased and more steadfast sense thereof.

However, since the matter is so great and they so readily lose this peace, and since they perceive that those who neither know nor seek God rightly yet boast of their peace and quietude, and because they, due to their ignorance, are not able to distinguish everything clearly, they fear that the sweet quietude and peace of their soul are not of a right nature; they thus have no peace with God. To convince such upright souls that they indeed have true peace with God, and to convict those who have carnal peace that they are without peace, we shall enumerate several infallible marks, in reflection upon which everyone may become manifest to himself.

First, one who possesses peace in truth is much exercised with peace; he cannot live without it, and if he does not find it, he is restless, in bondage, and goes about with a heavy heart. “... neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin” (Ps 38:3); “And Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace” (Lam 3:17). He seeks for it and cannot be comforted with anything until he has received it by renewal. “My sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted” (Ps 77:2). His continual prayer is, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation” (Ps 35:3). When such a person finds it again, he will delight himself in a most wondrous way and say, “I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3); “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8).

Secondly, the one who is at peace has reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ as the basis for his peace. There is no peace as long as sin is not removed, and sin cannot be removed except by the blood of Christ; however, one cannot be a partaker of this except by faith. For this reason a gracious person continually goes to Christ,

receives His offered atonement as a ransom, humbly and prayerfully comes to the Father while wrestling with the promises, and thus obtains peace. "... that in Me ye might have peace" (John 16:33); "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace" (Rom 5:1); "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom 15:13); "... preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36).

Thirdly, true peace is always accompanied by God's eye being upon them, by His presence, and by having fellowship with God. It is a quietude without inner unrest. Since God and man were separated due to enmity, they become one again by virtue of the atonement; thus, the peace which issues forth from the atonement is necessary for communion with God. The Father and Christ come and make their abode with him (John 14:23). The soul which is at peace, again exercises fellowship, "And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Such a soul cries out, "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:15). She has liberty to approach unto God and makes use of this liberty. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21); "... we have peace with God ..." (Rom 5:1).

Fourthly, true peace is tender and is readily impaired, and those who have peace readily perceive the impairment of this peace. It does not always please God to bring His children with the bride into the banqueting house, or with the disciples upon the holy mount, or with Paul into the third heaven.

(1) He frequently withdraws Himself, and hides His countenance from them. "Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?" (Ps 10:1); "How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?" (Ps 13:1). At times He remains silent as if He had no regard for them. "Where is Thy zeal and Thy strength, the sounding of Thy bowels and of Thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?" (Isa 63:15). At times He permits them to run after Him for a long time, call upon Him, and seek communion with Him with supplications and tears; however, it appears as if God does not heed this and does not hear them. "... I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He gave me no answer" (Song 5:6). "Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Ps 22:1-2). He appears to reject them and to be angry with them. "Why castest Thou off my soul ... Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; Thy terrors have cut me off" (Ps 88:14-16); "... hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" (Ps 77:9).

(2) Those that are at peace still have the old Adam within them, which frequently and very forcefully makes its presence felt. This

engenders laxity and laziness in seeking the countenance of the Lord, as well as neglect of exercise to remain near to the Lord and to exercise communion with God. Added to this are more serious sins committed by them against their conscience and contrary to the warning of the Holy Ghost, thereby grieving the Spirit of God. “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph 4:30).

(3) Furthermore, the devil secretly assaults them, or shoots at them with his fiery arrows. The world entices them with earthly beauty and terrifies them by its wickedness. Tribulations and various crosses overwhelm them. This tosses their faith to and fro, and darkens their peace; this they sense and it grieves them. It causes them to languish, and they cannot rest until they may have received it again.

(4) We have shown in the above in how many ways and steps this peace manifests itself. In all believers, peace does diminish, in the one as well as in the other. However, faith may continue to be in exercise in many who are strong in faith, so that they have peace with God, even though they miss the taste and the sense of this peace, and are subject to opposite sentiments. Since believers are very desirous of, and seek much for, this peace, they also readily perceive when this peace is disturbed in the least degree. “My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for Him” (Song 5:4). This sentiment is indicative of being a partaker of this peace. Yes, even the excessiveness of consternation due to missing this peace, such as discouragement, unbelief, hopelessness, sorrow, and the temporary refraining from seeking peace—giving up on this as if this could not be obtained—reveals the strong desire, the hunger and thirst, the love for and knowledge of this peace, and that they have tasted thereof in some measure. Thus it is a clear evidence that a person has peace with God if he is in unrest when this peace is absent, and if he promptly and with sorrow becomes aware of this condition.

Fifthly, they who truly have peace, actively guard against sin and endeavor to live in tender godliness before the countenance of God. Since they have tasted the sweetness of this peace (the one more and the other less) and know that sin disturbs this peace; since they know that the Lord gives more peace to those who are determined to live a life pleasing unto the Lord; since there can be no peace with God without the love of God—therefore they walk carefully, not as fools, but rather as being wise (Eph 5:15). “He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints: but let them not turn again to folly” (Ps 85:8).

He who wishes to deal faithfully with his soul will readily be able

to perceive from the above how he must judge of his peace; that is, whether it is a carnal peace of mind and carelessness, or whether his peace is true peace with God.

An Exhortation to Self-Examination

You who are not exercised with this peace, are not restless about its absence, are not concerned about having and preserving it, and are not suspicious as to whether or not your peace of mind is of the right sort; you who effortlessly and as a matter of course have attained to this peace, that is, without the wrestling of faith to receive Jesus as a ransom, and to be reconciled by His blood applied to the heart by faith, and only there to find your conscience purged of dead works; you who have a peace of which God is not the focus and which you enjoy apart from being in the presence of and in communion with God; you who are always stable and always have and are at peace within (except that shame and harm or a crime may occasionally trouble you), and you are not conscious of the fact that this peace is readily impaired and the heart immediately troubled about its absence; you who due to this inner peace of mind are not prompted to be on guard against all sins (also those of the heart) and to live a life pleasing unto God—I assure you that your peace is nothing but a carnal peace, and that God’s eternal and unbearable wrath hangs above your head. Yes, your peace of mind is a dreadful judgment of God upon you in consequence of your prior sins. “For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes” (Isa 29:10). You belong to those who are at peace and of whom you can read with fear, “I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The Lord will not spare him” (Deut 29:19-20). Amos 6:1 is applicable to you: “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria.” If you presently do not come to your senses and repent, how rude will your awakening then be when it will be too late and you will open your eyes in hell! “Wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph 5:14).

On the contrary, you who have ever enjoyed this peace in some measure as previously delineated, and who perceive that the five marks of this peace enumerated in the foregoing are truly found within you, see to it that you do not deny this grace under any pretext. You would sin against your conscience, grieve yourself, and impede your growth in peace and godliness. Rely upon the witness of your conscience in the presence of God—the conscience

witnessing that the inner frames mentioned earlier and their inner motions are truly within you. Acknowledge it to be thus, that is, that you have peace with God, even though the light and the sensible enjoyment of it may have disappeared. If the thought should arise in you, "I am deceiving myself," reject it immediately if it occurs to you without reason. You can always rest assured that nothing is deceitful except that which keeps us from Christ, love for and communion with God, and a tender guarding of our heart against sin. Whatever stirs us up to the former is not deceitful and cannot deceive us, since it guides us in the way of salvation. Therefore do not cast your liberty away, but approach God as being at peace with Him.

Exhortation to Seek and Preserve this Peace

First, be much exercised to attain to this peace within your heart and to increase in the sensible enjoyment of this, for a) to live without this peace causes a continual restlessness, and if you are and remain unconverted there will be nothing but eternal unrest, for the worm will not cease to gnaw unbearably to all eternity. b) To live in peace with God is inexpressibly sweet and engenders love and holiness, all of which is evident from that which has been said.

To this end:

(1) Allow yourself time to acknowledge and feel this lack of peace as well as the cause thereof: sin in its abominableness and bitterness. Let this stir up your heart in such a lively sense that you can no longer bear it.

(2) Do not avoid this anxiety, and do not allow hopelessness to take its place, which will result in a deadly insensitivity. Neither allow earthly attractions nor a yielding to lust to take its place, for this, rather than eliminating evil, would only make matters all the worse. With this restless heart, however, run to Christ, the Prince of Peace; receive Him and His offered merits by faith, and apply Him to your heart in order that you might have peace in Him.

(3) Do not pass this by too quickly, but frequently pause in order to reflect attentively upon the way of reconciliation and peace, the efficacy of Christ's death, the certainty of the promises, and the fact that one becomes a partaker of this without merit, without price, and out of free grace. Reflect upon the veracity of these matters, applying them to your own heart until you sense that the truth of God's Word is also true in your heart.

(4) Furthermore, let there be frequent prayer that the Spirit of God would testify with your spirit, seal you, and cause you to experience the power and the sweetness of this peace. An unpretentious

and upright soul who is thus engaged will find more peace than many who are knowledgeable (even though they are converted) and who hastily pass this by.

Secondly, be much exercised to preserve this peace—whatever the measure of it may be—for it is tender and is very readily impaired: a) by laxity in maintaining, exercising, and pursuing this peace (Song 5:3); b) by not heeding one's heart or by imposing less restraint upon sinful inclinations (Ps 37:3); c) by falling into greater sins (Ps 51:10); d) by quenching or not yielding to the promptings of the Spirit and by desiring to go upon a different way (Isa 63:10); e) by esteeming earthly things too highly, by having our heart set upon them in seeking after them, or by being too troubled when one has to miss them (James 4:4).

To that end:

- (1) Be continually engaged in exercising faith, hope, and love.
- (2) Acknowledge grace and rejoice in it in the presence of God.
- (3) Thank the Lord for this as being a singular and free gift from Him.
- (4) Use your liberty to approach continually through Christ, even if the sensible enjoyment is absent.
- (5) Walk carefully. If you have fallen, do not remain there but quickly rise and wash your conscience in the blood of Christ so that absence of peace will not be able to take root.

Thirdly, if you have lost the sense of being spiritually established, be it to a greater or lesser degree—yes, if it appears that wrath has come in its place, do not remain in this miserable condition, do not yield to it by being either discouraged or in despair, but rather conduct yourself with valor and seek to be restored.

To that end, know first of all that:

- (1) God never changes. All change is from the side of man, which does not affect the matter itself, but rather faith and our feeling.
- (2) A spark of life as yet remains in you which will surface and flourish if it could but come forth and break through. There continues to be sorrow due to what must be missed: the knowledge of the sweetness of this peace, and the memory of the previous peaceful frame. There continue to be thoughts of how you would rejoice if by renewal you could but attain to this previous peaceful frame, as well as a desiring for this. There will continue to be an intermittent lifting up of heart and eyes to heaven for the Spirit; you will not be able to return to the world. There will be fear for sin and there will be a desire for sanctification and an endeavor to be sanctified. All of this will always be present.
- (3) Know that it is God's way to lead all His favorites in this

manner, namely, that at times they may have the sensible enjoyment of this peace and at other times must miss this.

(4) Consider that you have also been in a troubled state prior to this peace being absent, have frequently been delivered from this, and have by renewal enjoyed this peace in some measure. These things ought to be of support to you and sustain you against discouragement and despair, for when hope collapses, the use of the means will cease.

Secondly, calmly search out the cause for the unrest of which we have spoken before. Having discovered this (or if you cannot discover this), labor to humble yourself deeply; that is, sink away in the sense of your sinfulness and the impotency of your soul. It is appropriate to set apart a day of fasting for this purpose, and then do as much as it pleases the Lord to enable you to do. If you have been very barren, dull, listless, and insensitive, you ought to resume this after some days, or after a week or two, bringing yourself before the Lord as you are, and as much as possible make known before Him your desire for peace. The Lord knows the intent of your spirit and for what purpose you have set apart that day, and He will at last speak peace to your soul.

Thirdly, lift up your soul to the covenant and to its Mediator, Jesus. Reflect upon former days, considering how you then were accustomed to wrestle and pray, how you received Him, how you surrendered to Him, but also the exercises and refreshment you indeed enjoyed at that time. This is suitable to quicken your soul in the exercise of faith and to receive Jesus by renewal, as a ransom for sin and as the Prince of Peace. A soul is frequently restored in this way and may receive a greater measure of peace.

Fourthly, do not expect, at first, to receive again the measure of peace and intimacy which you had prior to losing your peace, for that rarely happens; rather, remain humble and acknowledge the crumbs of grace whereby at one time you have been able to pray, weep, and pour out your heart before the Lord in order that some hope may intermittently arise. Therefore, quietly follow the leading of the Spirit who turns His hand to the little ones, comforts the humble ones, and gives them grace.

Fifthly, strictly adhere to your times of spiritual exercise; neither neglect it, nor engage in it hurriedly, as if you would only do so to satisfy your conscience; rather, remain prostrate before the Lord, however barren you may be, and wait to see if some light may not dawn. If not, be not discouraged, but keep your soul humble as a weaned child, and maintain that quiet hope that God will return. Let there be a determined resolution to nevertheless be willing to

seek the Lord as long as you live, being desirous rather to die at His feet than to depart from Him. And the Lord who is good to the soul that seeks Him will at last say, "Mary! My child, here am I," upon which the soul will rejoice. "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means" (2 Thess 3:16).

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Spiritual Joy

Justification also engenders joy. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10); “Bless the Lord, O my soul ... who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases” (Ps 103:1-3); “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (Isa 33:24).

Man was created to rejoice; to be joyful is his life and health. Sorrow is contrary to his nature, and if man had not sinned, he would not have been sorrowful for one moment. A young child shows its joy by laughter and skipping around; all that man does, he does to be happy. Sorrow grips, presses, oppresses, and brings pain to the heart, whereas joy enlarges the heart and causes one to be refreshed by leaping for joy. This is true in the natural, and also in the spiritual realm.

Joy is the pleasure, delight, and rejoicing of the heart. It is the expression of a spirit set at liberty (or enlarged), generated by a present blessing or due to the anticipation of a future blessing. The Holy Scriptures, the best and infallible chronicler of nature, expresses joy by the verb *rejoice*: “... my heart rejoiceth in the Lord” (1 Sam 2:1); by the verb *enlarge*: “... when thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Ps 119:32); by the verb *delight*: “Delight thyself also in the Lord” (Ps 37:4); and by the verb *cheer*: “... let thy heart cheer thee” (Eccles 11:9).

Since man is not all-sufficient within himself, he must seek all his delight and joy elsewhere, that is, outside of himself. An unconverted person does perceive that he is empty within, but he does not know where his true and complete joy is to be found. Nevertheless, he must have joy, or else his heart will succumb. Thus, he

seeks joy in creature delights, as everyone seeks that toward which he is most inclined and that which is most opportune. One person thinks that money will yield joy, whereas another person expects it from costly apparel, homes, furnishings, and gardens; another thinks that food and drink will yield this; again, others seek it in high positions and governmental offices, and some expect it from love and wisdom. Thus, every person labors for his own gain and with his own objective in view. However, this does not yield satisfaction. The heart even grieves when it laughs, and all such laughter ends in eternal sorrow and weeping.

The Lord, however, causes His favorites to see that all this is nothing but vanity, sin, and sorrow, and that all joy and happiness consist in having communion with Him. This is the spiritual joy which we shall now discuss. In considering this joy we shall deal with 1) the nature of this joy, 2) the opposite of this joy, 3) that which resembles this joy, and 4) the parameters of this joy.

The Nature of Spiritual Joy

We shall first of all consider the nature of this spiritual joy.

This spiritual joy consists in a delightful motion of the soul, generated by the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers, whereby He convinces them of the felicity of their state, causes them to enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace, and assures them of their future felicity.

The *seat* of this joy is the soul or the heart. “Thou hast put gladness in my heart” (Ps 4:7); “... your heart shall rejoice” (John 16:22). This happiness is not one of appearance only, but is in truth; it does not consist in external display, but rather in possession. It is not something external which delights the external senses, but it penetrates to the internal, that is, to the innermost recesses of the soul, the intellect, the will, and the affections.

However, the heart of all men does not partake of this joy, but only the heart of believers. “Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit” (Isa 65:14); “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous” (Ps 33:1); “Let all those that seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee” (Ps 70:4).

No one can manufacture this joy himself, but it is an inexpressible work of grace by God the Holy Spirit. “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy” (Rom 15:13); “For the kingdom of God is ... joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17); “Make me to hear joy and gladness” (Ps 51:8). For this reason David calls the Lord, “God my exceeding joy” (Ps 43:4). If someone desires this joy, let him be sensibly convinced that he cannot manufacture this himself and

that he is also unworthy to receive it; let him thus come through Christ to the Father and pray in His Name, “Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil” (Ps 90:15); “Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (Ps 86:4).

This joy pertains to being reconciled with God—to their being the recipients of His grace, goodness, love, and benevolence, He being their God and Father, their portion, delight, rest, keeper, and felicity, and Jesus Christ being their Savior. This is manifested by the expression of rejoicing in the Lord. “Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King” (Ps 149:2); “I will be glad and rejoice in Thy mercy” (Ps 31:7); “Be glad in the Lord” (Ps 32:11); “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isa 25:9); “And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:47). This joy is generated whenever they perceive and believe that God has bestowed a blessing upon them in His favor. Also the preciousness of the gospel, the benefits of the covenant of grace, and temporal deliverances and blessings bring forth this joy. They do so because they perceive that in all these things the Lord is manifesting His favor toward them. “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (Ps 119:111); “... Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer 15:16); “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy Name shall they rejoice all the day: and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted” (Ps 89:15-16).

In addition to the benefits which believers may enjoy here, they also have the promise of joy in heaven which is inexpressibly more excellent. Oh, how great is that treasure! How blessed is such a man who has been chosen, who is led for this purpose; what reason such a person has to rejoice! Therefore, rejoice in hope (Rom 12:12).

From that which has been said, it is evident what the nature of true spiritual joy is. This will be all the more evident when we consider the opposite of spiritual joy, as well as that which resembles and qualifies it.

The Opposite of Spiritual Joy: Sorrow

The second aspect to be considered is the *opposite* of or that which is contrary to joy, which is *sorrow*—not only the sorrow of the ungodly for whom weeping and gnashing of teeth are prepared, but also the sorrow of believers. God’s children do not

always have joy here; it has been foretold that they will cry, weep mournfully, and be sorrowful (John 16:22); they must experience that often they mingle their drink with their tears (Ps 102:9). This can be due to being very far from God, weakness of faith, fear of not being a partaker of Jesus, the power of corruption (which not only assaults them, but may also hold them captive for a long period of time), the assaults of Satan, or various temporal afflictions and tribulations. Therefore, their tears are their meat day and night and they pour out their soul within them (Ps 42:3-4); their life is thus spent with grief, and their years with sighing (Ps 31:10). However, the Lord does not allow them to sink away in sorrow. He is with them when they must go through fire and water, so that neither the rivers overflow them nor the fire burns them. He will yet refresh them in their sorrow, and afterwards cause their darkness to lift. He will by renewal comfort those who mourn and lovingly wipe the tears from their eyes. He allures them, speaks to their heart, and kisses them with the kisses of His mouth. This is the promise: “And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (John 16:22).

Now compare sorrow and joy with each other and observe the great difference between the two. From this can be deduced the exceeding excellency and desirability of this joy, as well as the inexpressible goodness of God that a people who are only worthy of eternal sorrow, are by Him filled and will eternally be filled with such exceeding joy. Furthermore, since God’s children encounter many sorrows in this life, no one ought to be too dejected as if they were no child of God, for what they encounter is no different from what all God’s children encounter. It can also be that one is sorrowful, humble, and ashamed over sin, mourns over the absence of sweet communion with God, and nevertheless rejoices in the assurance of his state, as well as in the promise that his sorrow will be turned into joy. He conducts himself wisely who accustoms himself to be joyful by faith, even though he weeps due to oppression.

Counterfeit Spiritual Joy

The third matter to be considered is that which *resembles* this joy: *counterfeit joy*. The difference between worldly joy pertaining to earthly goods and the commission of sins, and this spiritual joy is too radical to be considered here. The joy of temporal believers, however, resembles spiritual joy in an external sense, even though they differ entirely in nature. Temporal believers are also joyful at

times. “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it” (Matt 13:20; cf. Luke 8:13). Their objective is spiritual, for it pertains to the gospel, having Christ as a Savior, entering into heaven, being numbered among the godly, being loved and praised by the godly, etc. The apostle speaks about the object of the joy of temporal believers in Heb 6:4-5: “... *those who were once enlightened*” [those who came from the darkness of Jewry and heathendom to the knowledge of divine truth] “*and have tasted of the heavenly gift*” [those who have had a clear perception of the desirability and glory of heavenly and evangelical truths, so that they rejoice in seeing their beauty, since the viewing of a glorious object is delightful even though one does not possess it], “*were made partakers of the Holy Ghost*” [not the indwelling of the Spirit, but rather His common gifts], “*and have tasted the good word of God*” [who, in contemplating upon the blessedness of those who are partakers of the forgiveness of sins, God’s grace, and all the glorious promises found in the Word, imagine themselves to be partakers of them and thus flatter themselves with this and rejoice in it] “*and the powers of the world to come*” [who, due to their knowledge of the Word, contemplate upon eternal felicity, viewing it in a natural manner—who, without any misgivings, consider themselves to be heirs of salvation on the basis of such imaginations].

Such is the joy of temporal believers; now compare to this the joy of true believers. You will observe that in both cases the object of their joy is the same, but that, nevertheless, the difference is as great between the natural and the spiritual as between imagination and truth.

This difference needs to be carefully defined so that those who have counterfeit joy may be convicted, and those who possess true joy may be assured and, with liberty, make progress in this true joy.

First, all true joy proceeds from faith as a result of the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, even though it varies greatly in degree. Therefore, all joy which does not proceed from receiving Christ and union with Him—by which one becomes a partaker of all His benefits—is counterfeit joy. “... in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8). The eunuch went on his way rejoicing after he had become a believer (Acts 8:37,39); the jailor rejoiced in the fact that he had believed (Acts 16:34). Therefore let him who has attained to this joy by faith, acknowledge the veracity of his joy, and proceed with liberty.

Secondly, all true joy is experienced in the presence of God and

in communion with God as their reconciled God. “And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:47); “Rejoice in the Lord alway” (Phil 4:4); “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous” (Ps 32:11); “My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord” (Ps 104:34). All counterfeit joy pertains to matters pleasant to the person and which do not end in God. Although true believers also rejoice in their happiness and in the matters which they have or anticipate, they do not remain with the matters only; that is impossible for them. Rather, in the enjoyment of these matters, they find themselves in the presence of God.

Thirdly, all true joy makes the soul holier, drawing the soul away from all that is not God and does not please God—from sin. It enlarges the heart and makes them willing to do God’s will out of love with humility. “... the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10); “I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Ps 119:32).

It cannot but be that when one is joyful, there will also be love. One cannot but rejoice in a received benefit—rejoice in having communion with God. Furthermore, it cannot be different but that the heart will be inclined to manifest gratitude by surrendering oneself to the service of the Lord. When David joyfully exclaimed, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust,” he then exclaimed immediately, “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength” (Ps 18:2, 1). When he recognized that the Lord had heard his prayer, he said, “I love the Lord” (Ps 116:12). When he acknowledged that he had received many benefits, he said, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take ...,” etc. (Ps 116:12-14).

If someone considers himself to be joyful and is nevertheless not tender in his walk, but instead lives in the world and yields to his lusts, doing everything with the wrong objective and in seeking self, his joy is not a joy in God, but is a counterfeit joy. However, whenever joy proceeds from faith, functions in communion with God, and begets tenderness, willingness, actual opposition to sin, and the practice of godliness—then there is true joy. Let the heart of such a person rejoice, and endeavor to continually live in this joy.

The Parameters for this Joy: the Fear of God

The fourth thing to be considered is what *qualifies* this joy as being true: the *fear of God*. Since believers still have the old Adam within them, and the devil conspires and leaves no stone unturned to cause them to fall, he who has spiritual joy needs to be on guard

that, upon experiencing joy, corruptions do not arise from any given direction. When a believer rejoices in the Lord, he must give heed on the one hand that he forget not his insignificance and sinfulness and become irreverent toward the Lord; rather, he should remain reverent and humble in having fellowship with God. On the other hand, however, he must give heed not to become careless in watching against sin, for when rejoicing he will be vulnerable for this corruption. When a person, in rejoicing, deviates to the one side or the other, his joy will immediately cease. Therefore, whoever wishes to live in this joy ought to endeavor greatly to *fear God*. He must reverence Him and be on guard against sin. “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Ps 2:11).

From that which has been said it can be deduced what spiritual joy is. At the same time we must not understand by this joy the extraordinary illumination, being drawn up into heaven, and the elated experiences which some of God’s children occasionally experience. Not all, but only a few experience these; and these do not remain but again disappear. Therefore a weak believer ought not to think that, since he has not experienced this ecstatic joy, he therefore has never been joyful and ought to strive for nothing but this joy only. Rather, by joy we understand the cheerful, joyous disposition which issues forth from faith in God. Each believer must seek for this and acquaint himself with God, so that it may be the general trend of his life to be glad and joyful in God. This is commanded: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil 4:4). This is the promise: “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy name shall they rejoice all the day” (Ps 89:15-16). This was Paul’s desire and practice: “... that I might finish my course with joy” (Acts 20:24). Happy is he who may have this happy cheerfulness in view, seek it, and accustom himself to it.

Exhortation to Believers to Seek Spiritual Joy

Since believers generally aspire so little to this cheerfulness, considering it to be a matter too high for them, and spend much of their time in heaviness and sorrow, we shall seek to lift them up and endeavor to persuade them to seek this spiritual joy.

Therefore, come believers, “Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with singing” (Ps 100:2). Have you not tolerated this heaviness and sorrow long enough and spent your time being melancholy? Recognize and acknowledge the grace which is in you—however little it may be. Consider the disposition

of other children of God, not dissimilar to yours, and God's dealings with them. Be in submission to the measure of grace the Lord bestows upon you; do not continue in sin. You and the Lord know that your sins are a heavy burden to you; therefore, go with them to the Surety. Let neither unbelief nor inadvertent ignorance concerning the grace which is in you, nor a coveting of greater grace apart from submission, cause you to remain sorrowful any longer. Come, allow me to take you by the hand and instruct you in this matter. Permit yourself to be persuaded, be compliant, and do not resist.

First, this sorrow and being double-minded is contradictory to your state, and is harmful in every way, for:

(1) It is a dishonor to God, your Father. Apart from the fact that it issues forth from a lack of faith, and thus strengthens unbelief, it prevents God from being glorified or thanked. It is also capable of causing others to have a prejudice toward God, as if He were but a barren wilderness to His people, treats them too harshly, and gives them no occasion to be somewhat refreshed, whereas He is, nevertheless, so good and extraordinarily benevolent.

(2) It is capable of deterring natural men from godliness. Man's nature does not find delight in sorrow, and cannot imagine that godliness and salvation could consist of sorrow—and indeed, it does not. This hinders them if they begin to entertain thoughts about conversion. See to it that you are neither the cause of godliness being evil spoken of, nor hinder anyone from being saved.

(3) To mourn over sin at the appropriate time, and in an appropriate measure and manner is needful, and does not prevent one from living cheerfully. However, those who accustom themselves to be sorrowful, consume the strength of their body, and frequently acquire an illness from which they suffer their entire lifetime. This ailment is in turn the cause of sorrow and melancholy, and this sorrow in turn worsens the ailment. "... a broken spirit drieth the bones" (Prov 17:22); "... by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken" (Prov 15:13).

(4) It is very harmful for spiritual life, injuring it. It not only impedes its growth, but exhausts it; if God by His omnipotence did not preserve it, this sorrow would extinguish it. If one gives in to such mourning, he can progress so far that he finds no delight in anything except in mourning and in consuming his own heart. He is then not fit for anything—not for prayer, believing, battling and overcoming sin, the practice of virtue, nor for being beneficial to other people—and makes himself unfit to be restored by the common means, since he refuses to be comforted (cf. Ps 77:2). "A wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov 18:14). Therefore conduct

yourself valiantly, for it is as easy to yield to a mournful frame, as it is to collapse for a person who is fainting. However, the harmful consequences are too dangerous. Therefore, lift up your head and endeavor to break out of this.

Secondly, believers (even the most feeble) are entitled to and have reason for joy, for it is one of the promises of the covenant of grace. Let those of the world be troubled and fearful, and tremble about their present and future state. You, however, who have been delivered from the devil, hell, and wrath, for whom God is a reconciled God and is your portion, who have been adopted as a child of God, and have become partakers of justification, sanctification, and eternal glorification, what reason do you yet have for sorrow? If you say, “This is still lacking, namely, the actual and effectual enjoyment of all those promised spiritual benefits; and not only the comforts, but also the deliverance from sin itself,” then I respond, “Is God’s promise null and void with you? Are future benefits of lesser value because they are reserved for the future, where they will be an eternal and unchangeable reality—as if in the future you would be able to get by without them? Is not God a God of truth to you? Would His promises be able to fail? Or do you consider the promises of future blessings to be excuses for not presently fulfilling the promises that supplicants will be heard, that hungry ones will be filled, etc. Be ashamed that you entertain such thoughts about the only wise God who makes all things well at His time.” If a great inheritance has been bequeathed to someone, and the testator subsequently dies, would it then be considered worthless because he does not yet see and have the treasures in his hands, knowing, however, with certainty that he will receive them within a short time? Behold, a natural man will convince you. Therefore, value the excellency of the promised benefits, the infallibility of the testament which is confirmed by the death of the testator. Rejoice therefore in your title to the inheritance and in the certainty of future possession, even though you do not enjoy it as yet. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous” (Ps 97:11-12). It is sown, and it has been sown for you, and therefore you will also harvest at the appointed time; rejoice in this hope: “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple” (Ps 65:4).

Thirdly, God is pleased with the joy of His children. It is His will that they delight themselves, value the benefits, fully trust in His Word and in His promise, jubilate, leap for joy, and sing His praises with joyful and singing lips. Cheerfulness and joyfulness

are a delight to Him. “But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel” (Ps 22:3-4); “Thou meetest him that rejoiceth” (Isa 64:5). Is it your desire to do something which is pleasing to God? Is God’s nearness, His presence, and your familiar encounters with Him, your desire and your delight? Accustom yourself then to live joyfully by faith.

Fourthly, to be joyful in God is heaven. In heaven there is neither weeping nor sorrow; there is nothing but eternal, exceedingly great, and inexpressible joy. If you could but see and hear how joyful the inhabitants of heaven are, how they jubilate and sing, your heart would indeed be stirred. If you desire heaven, you must find delight in joy, for what else would you do in heaven where there are none but those who are joyful and where there is nothing but joy? Eternal felicity is therefore referred to as joy: “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt 25:21). If there is joy in hope, what joy will possession engender? Therefore, let your conversation be in heaven, and begin this heavenly work, that is, to be joyful. Or is being joyful such a heavy and distasteful matter that you would need many persuasive arguments to be stirred up to be joyful? Our nature is naturally inclined toward joy, and every person desires joy. Since you, however, have abundant reason to be joyful, would you then, nonetheless, be sorrowful?

Fifthly, you are very much in need of this joy, for in this joy there is strength against your enemies, as well as for your work. “For the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10). Believers, there is yet much to be done by you. There is a world that still needs to be conquered, a devil that still needs to be battled, and flesh that still needs to be overcome. You are yet in need of the ornament of holiness; faith, hope, and love still need to be strengthened and increased. There are yet people who need to be converted, and you yourself have yet to become the luster and the glory of the church. You must as yet place a footprint in this earth so that others may know that you have been here. How will you accomplish all this without being cheerful and joyful? A melancholy person is a breeding place for all sorts of sins. The flesh, the world, and the devil have great power and advantage over such a person. Such persons will very readily neglect grace received. Carelessly, they act as if present grace does not exist, and thus a melancholy person will be unfit to offer resistance. There is strength in joy, however, and a joyful person can avoid many assaults which then have no opportunity to arise; and if there are such assaults, a joyful person will be able to turn them away with little difficulty. A joyful person will very readily despise the things of this world and cross providences

do not oppress him very much. The practice of virtue will be a delight to him, and his joy will make it so attractive; yes, it will make *him* attractive. He will be suited to woo others, comfort those that mourn, and stir up those who are lax; everything suits him and he is desirous to do everything. Therefore “be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart” (Ps 32:11).

The Believer’s Difficulties Answered

Objection #1: A mournful person may object by saying, “How can a person rejoice who commits as many sins as I commit? That is impossible.”

Answer: The cause and foundation for your joy must not be found within yourself and your virtuousness, but outside of yourself and in Christ. If a person had to wait with being joyful in the Lord until he is without sin, he would never rejoice his entire lifetime, for the most eminent saint sees more sin in himself than does a little one in grace, since the larger measure of light reveals to him that which is lacking in his virtuousness, whereas others may see little of it. When someone’s sins are a heavy burden to him and grieve him; if he then flees to Jesus and receives His atonement, and surrendering himself to Him to be justified and sanctified; if it is the desire and delight of His heart to live a life pleasing unto the Lord; and if he may be convinced of the motive for such exercise and such a disposition—he has reason for joy. If he does not rejoice, it is evident that he still cleaves too much to the old covenant of works and desires to be justified by works. This reveals that he is not engaged in believing God upon His Word and promises, who declares those to be blessed who do so. This shows that he wants to teach God how He should deal with him. Therefore it also pleases God in turn to withhold him from being enabled to rejoice in God. All these sins are not commensurate with being a child of God. Therefore, be fearful of conducting yourself in this way. Accustom yourself to rejoice by faith in your title to and promise of salvation, even if you cannot do so with a strong sense of delight. Know it to be your duty.

Objection #2: How can I rejoice if I am not assured of being a partaker of Christ? I am not assured of this.

Answer: Here again is a misconception, perhaps even a subtle expression of resentment. Perhaps you do not wish to consider yourself assured except there be an extraordinary declaration and impression from God to remove simultaneously all inner objections and immediately lift up your soul to be joyful about her state.

You will most likely wait in vain for this. God rarely—and especially in the case of fretful persons who refuse to be comforted—does this. The normal way to assurance consists on the one hand in giving heed to the Word of God, and on the other hand in comparing yourself with this Word, coming thus to a *conclusion*—a conclusion made in the presence of God while praying, believing, and reasoning. This is the manner by which a man is assured. To that end we have previously, at various occasions and in various ways, convinced believers of this by presenting the marks of grace to them.

Objection #3: Another person may perhaps say, “I have indeed been assured (at least I thought this to be so), and I have indeed rejoiced in the Lord; however, it has all disappeared again, and I therefore think that I have deceived myself. I therefore do not dare to do so again, for I might once more deceive myself.”

Answer: We have dealt with this by demonstrating above what the essential nature of true joy is.

Objection #4: One must mourn, for God commands it and promises to dwell with such.

Answer (1) God dwells with those that mourn; however, He does so to comfort them, in order that the outcome of their mourning may be their rejoicing.

(2) There is a great difference between being mournful or being melancholy and despondent. The Lord delights when one mournfully humbles himself, tearfully seeks grace, and is active by faith to lift himself up again; being melancholy, however, is displeasing to God and men. Therefore mourn at the appropriate time, but flee from habitual melancholy and accustom yourself to be joyful.

Exhortation to Use the Means to Attain to this Joy

To that end you should first of all continually exercise faith in Christ, reflect upon the truths pertaining to the atonement and God’s way in which He leads man to salvation, and put your trust in Jesus, leaning upon Him. To entrust yourself thus to Him, without seeing Him or apart from any feeling, is the way that leads to joy (1 Pet 1:8).

Secondly, continue to read and acknowledge the Word to be what it really is: the Word of God. Acknowledge that it addresses itself at that particular moment to you. Search for the promises, deem them to be unbreakable, and when you apply them to your soul as such, you will experience joy. “For Thy word hath quickened me” (Ps 119:50).

Thirdly, pray much, and acquaint yourself with the Lord by

praying to Him, communing with Him, making request to Him, and laying before Him all that you lack and desire, especially your desire for joy. “Make me to hear joy and gladness” (Ps 51:8); “O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Ps 90:14).

Pursue the promise and lift up your heart to the truth that whatever you will pray for in Christ’s Name, He will indeed give you. While praying thus, the soul will find herself more often in a joyful frame.

Fourthly, engage much in holy contemplation and meditation. Reflect upon who and what you are, the ways the Lord has led you hitherto, and upon your former mourning, seeking, and tears. Reflect upon the comforts and deliverances which the Lord has frequently given you, upon the benefits of the covenant of grace (each individually), and upon future glory and all that the soul will forever enjoy there. This is suitable to cause the soul quietly to rejoice. “My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord” (Ps 104:34).

Fifthly, be much on guard against yielding to a sinful routine in your life. Even if there are no great falls, this yielding, this drowsy carelessness, and this departing from God will readily rob us of this joy. Rather, one ought to refrain from unrighteousness, and, upon falling, arise each time again and immediately run to the fountain once more; this will, time and again, quicken joyfulness. May the God of our exceeding joy gladden you! Amen.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

The Sealing of the Believer by the Holy Spirit and by Means of the Sacraments

All the ways of the Lord with His elect are mercy. Not only is this true in bringing the most wretched among them to the greatest felicity after this life, but also because He bestows so many benefits on them as they journey through this life. He leads them in a wondrous manner; every step is a manifestation of unfathomable wisdom and goodness. It is His desire that they see and know this, and that they would live in the assurance of His goodness toward them. To facilitate this, numerous marks and qualifications of gracious souls are presented in the Word of God, and in this manner many promises are made and repeated. Yes, above and beyond that, the Lord gives them an earnest and a seal, and transcending all adoration, the Holy Spirit Himself is that seal who seals the eternal inheritance to them. He does this Himself internally, as well as in a manner most commensurate with human nature: by means of external signs and seals, generally referred to as *sacraments*.

A Description of the Act of Sealing

Sealing is the imprinting of one's coat of arms—engraved in a signet—upon something, doing so 1) to distinguish one's own property from that of others, 2) to conceal something from others, 3) to preserve something in its purity, and 4) to assure one of being a partaker of something. The Holy Spirit accomplishes this work by the instrumentality of the Word in order to engrave His operations in the hearts of believers.

The Sealing by the Holy Spirit and what He Accomplishes Thereby

The apostle testifies that the Holy Spirit seals believers: “And

grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).

The activities and purposes of the sealing process are also applied to the children of God.

(1) The Holy Spirit Himself is the seal and earnest of the promised inheritance. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ... ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:13-14).

(2) The Holy Spirit impresses the image of God upon the children of God. They are the express image of Christ. “We shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor 15:49); “I travail ... until Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4:19). The Holy Spirit accomplishes this by regenerating and sanctifying them. “But we all ... are changed unto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

(3) Others recognize believers by means of this seal, and God knows them to be His property. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim 2:19). Hereby the unconverted recognize the regenerate, perceiving that there is a different Spirit and a different life in them. “... They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13); “And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed” (Isa 61:9). Believers know by this seal that they are children and heirs of God. “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

(4) Believers, by means of this seal, are hidden from the eyes of the world. The world indeed perceives that there is a different Spirit and life in believers, but is not acquainted with the glory and felicity of their state. “Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not” (1 John 3:1); “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:3-4).

(5) By means of this seal believers are preserved free of blemish. In reference to this they are called “a fountain sealed” (Song 4:12). Rev 7:3 also refers to this: “Hurt not the earth ... till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.”

(6) By the seal of the Holy Spirit God’s children are assured of being partakers of the covenant of grace and all its promises. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which

is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor 2:12). The Holy Spirit reveals to them the graces which have been laid within them. He directs them to texts which promise salvation to those who are in such a condition. He enables them to fully understand these texts and by them draw a conclusion about their state of grace. Their sanctified judgment convinces them of this, and the Holy Spirit joins with this by His immediate operation upon their heart. He thereby witnesses in harmony with what their spirit judges and witnesses of itself, confirming that their judgment concerning themselves is right. Therefore, by way of the witness of their own judgment, He makes it clear to them and immediately makes the assurance lively within them that they are partakers of the promises. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16).

Sealing also Takes Place by Means of the Sacraments

God, in addition to this inward seal, also seals by way of the sacraments. God deals with man in a manner which is most consistent with his nature. Man consists of soul and body. Since it is God’s desire to abundantly assure man of the grace he possesses, He uses means which relate to both soul and body. The Word of God affects the soul; that is, it engenders illumination, faith, regeneration, and strengthening; the sacraments affect the external senses, and thereby the soul.

The word *sacrament* is not found in Scripture and its origin is uncertain. It most likely is a derivative of *sacrare*, that is, to sanctify, and to separate and/or devote to a sacred purpose. Due to its common usage, we may preserve the word as such. The Greek writers also call a sacrament $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ (*mysterion*), that is, a mystery; however, this word is also extra-biblical. A sacrament is indeed a mystery; however, not all mysteries are sacraments. Scripture refers to a sacrament as a sign and a seal. “... and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you” (Gen 17:11); “And the blood shall be to you for a token” (Exod 12:13); “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith” (Rom 4:11).

A sacrament is a visible sign and seal of the covenant of grace, instituted by God to display Christ in His suffering and death to believers, and to seal to them that they are partakers of Christ and all His merits.

In order to understand the nature of sacraments correctly, we must observe in them five matters which must be present in every sacrament. Therefore, something is not a sacrament when the following five matters are absent: 1) the Author or the Person who has instituted it,

2) an external sign, 3) the matter signified, 4) the relationship between the sign and the matter signified, and 5) the purpose.

God, the Author of the Sacraments

The Author or Person who has instituted it can be none other than God. It does not suffice that something has been instituted by God, but rather it must have been instituted by God as a sacrament, and thus as a seal of the covenant of grace, for:

(1) God—and no one else—establishes the covenant. “In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram” (Gen 15:18); “And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee” (Gen 17:7).

(2) Only God makes the promises and gives the matters which are promised. “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa 43:25).

(3) The sacraments belong to that religion which God only has commanded and instituted. “But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:9).

(4) Scripture declares plainly that God has instituted the sacraments. This is true for circumcision (Gen 17:10), the passover (Exod 12:3,27; 2 Chron 35:6), holy baptism (John 1:33; Matt 28:19), and the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:26-28; 1 Cor 11:25).

In addition to the Author of the sacraments we consider the men who *administer* them—men sent of God, to proclaim the Word of God and to administer the holy sacraments. (We have previously discussed the calling and the commission of ministers.)

(1) This is also evident from the common practice in both the Old and New Testaments.

(2) Furthermore Christ has conjoined the ministry of the Word to this: “Teach all nations, baptizing them” (Matt 28:19). John baptized and preached in the wilderness (Mark 1:4); “... He that sent me to baptize with water ...” (John 1:33).

(3) Since the sacrament is administered to someone on behalf of Christ, no one can administer this unless he has been sent and authorized to that end by Christ. Furthermore, for the individual it is not a sacrament except he receive it from the hand of a commissioned servant—a servant who is a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1). We therefore reject any baptism which is administered by private individuals, be it a man or a woman. If persons who have thus been baptized are subsequently converted to the faith, they are baptized rather than rebaptized, for the former was no baptism. We shall deal with this more comprehensively in the next chapter (Holy Baptism).

Question: Does the intent of him who administers belong to the essence of the sacrament?

Answer: The Papists claim that the intent of the minister is absolutely essential here. Thus it is even true that if the minister does not have the intent he ought to have—to administer the sacrament to the communicant for such a purpose as has been instituted by Christ—it is then (so they claim) not a sacrament, and such a child is not baptized, nor has such a communicant partaken of the Lord's Supper. Yes, they go beyond this and maintain—which must necessarily follow—that if someone, having been baptized without the minister having the proper intent in doing so, subsequently becomes a priest, his entire administration of the sacraments is therefore rendered null and void, for the priest himself was not baptized and therefore is no priest. We do maintain that a minister must conduct himself in a holy manner in the administration of the sacraments, and that he commits a great sin if such is not the case. His good or evil intent, however, (or the absence of any intent) has no reference at all to the true essence of the sacraments.

First of all, there is not one letter in God's Word referring to this. Secondly, the efficacy of the sacraments would then not be contingent upon the promises, objectives, and sealing of God, but upon the servant. Then the priest's intent would be of more worth and be more efficacious than that of God, and his intent could nullify God's objective, promise, and seal. Thirdly, no one could then be assured as to whether he was baptized, for he could have no assurance that the person who baptized him had been baptized himself and was a lawful priest (I speak as the Papists)—and even if such were the case, whether he had the proper intention in baptizing him. It thus follows that this proposition destroys their entire religion.

The External Signs of the Sacraments

The second aspect which must be found in a sacrament is the *external sign*. A sign is *that which manifests itself to the external senses, thereby signifying something else to the heart*. Some signs are of a natural sort, such as smoke being a sign of the proximity of fire; if the sky is a melancholy red in the morning, rain is imminent. Some signs are signs by way of designation. Wreaths found at inns, and the signs found along canals and roadways, prove this to be true from the human perspective. This can also be true from God's perspective, who has instituted religious signs; such is the case with the sacraments which are also referred to as signs.

There is an external, visible, and tangible substance present in every sacrament—a substance distinct from the Word of God. Wherever such a substance is lacking, there is no sacrament. The church has at all times maintained this, and this is therefore also the basis for the following sentiment: *When the Word is conjoined to the element, there is a sacrament.* The Word which is conjoined to the element is twofold: There is the *institutional formula* by which this element is established as a sign and seal, and the Word of *promise*, assuring that the promised benefits of the covenant of grace will be given to the believing partakers of the sacraments. That there is the presence of a visible, tangible substance in each sacrament is evident in all sacraments.

(1) In circumcision there was the removal of the foreskin; in the Passover there was the lamb; in baptism there is water; and in the Lord's Supper there are bread and wine.

(2) The very nature of a sacrament requires this. Something cannot be a sealing sign unless it be visible and tangible. This must be noted in reference to the Papists who, in order to justify their seven sacraments, maintain that the hearing of the Word can designate something to be a sacrament. However, then there would 1) be no difference between the Word and a sacrament, and 2) either the sound of the words would then constitute the sacrament—however, there would then be no agreement between a sign and the matter signified—or else that which one wishes to convey by the sound of the voice would constitute the sacrament; but there would then be no external sign. It thus remains certain that a tangible and visible substance must be present in each sacrament. There is also the interaction with the elements by the *minister* who sprinkles the water, breaks the bread, pours the wine, and passes around the poured wine and the broken bread; and likewise by the *communicant*, who receives, takes, eats, and drinks them. These actions themselves also have their meaning and application.

The Matter Signified in the Sacraments

The third aspect to be noted in each sacrament is the *matter which is signified*. This is Christ and all His merits. It is evident in the following passages that the external signs point to Christ. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?” (Rom 6:3); “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27); “Take, eat: this is My body ... this do in remembrance of Me. ... This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor 11:24-25). It is also evident that the

sacraments point to the merits of Christ. "... be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16); "... which is broken for you" (1 Cor 11:24); "For this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28).

These two—the external sign and the matter signified—are not one and the same, but are distinguished from each other. They are distinguished in nature, 1) the one being earthly and the other heavenly, 2) the one being enjoyed with the body and the other with the soul, and 3) the one pertaining to the body and the other to the soul.

The Relationship Between the Sign and the Matter in the Sacrament

Fourthly, there is a relationship between the sign and the matter signified. These elements are not to be considered as merely water, bread, and wine, but as referring to something else: Christ's body and blood, broken and shed to make satisfaction. The elements are entirely and purely representative in nature, so that by way of representation the sign is united to the matter. This is not a *physical* union such as exists between substance and form, and soul and body. It is not a *local* union, as when two bodies are joined together, so that the body and blood of Christ would be physically united to the water, bread, and wine. It is also not a *spiritual* union, as if the efficacy of the matter signified were infused and would in actuality bring about the forgiveness of sins and regeneration in the communicant. It is rather a *representative* relationship, only consisting in applying the sign to the matter signified and the matter signified to the sign with the mind and faith—and then as determined by God in His Word, and not by way of mere contemplation or imagination.

This representative relationship does not exist in the nature of the element nor in the exercise of faith and the believing use of the element. It is also not established as a result of the minister's pronouncement of the institutional formula and promise. Instead, this relationship exists by reason of divine institution, and the communicant accordingly uses the signs (given by the minister) by faith. By faith in Christ's institution and promise, the communicant thus, in a sealing manner, makes application of Christ's suffering and its efficacy unto the forgiveness of sins, Christ being truly present, albeit not bodily. When a bride receives the wedding ring and subsequently views it, she considers it to be a representation of the love and faithfulness of the absent bridegroom, and her love to him is thereby strengthened and stimulated. In like manner, the communicant partakes of both the sign and the matter signified simultaneously. This is true for circumcision (Gen 17:7,11),

the Passover (Exod 12:14), holy baptism (Rom 6:4; Gal 3:27), and the Lord's Supper. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16).

Papists and Lutherans are not satisfied with such a representative relationship. They maintain that in the Lord's Supper there is a local and physical representation of Christ, although not in baptism. However, they each view this differently—a difference we shall discuss later. When we insist that the relationship is representative, it is their opinion that we do not truly unite the sign with the matter signified, but that we only imagine something which does not exist. They ought to and indeed do know, however, that—apart from this instance—there are other real relationships besides those which are purely physical in nature. A spiritual relationship is as genuine as a physical relationship. Does not Christ dwell in believers (Gal 2:20)? Does not Christ dwell in their hearts by faith (Eph 3:17)? Do not believers have fellowship with each other, the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3), or is all this also only imagination with them?

We maintain, however, that this relationship is *real*, as Scripture states it to be. Furthermore, this spiritual relationship has as its basis the institutional formula and promise; this relationship is therefore not imaginary but true and certain.

The relationship between the water in holy baptism and the blood of Christ—signified by the water—is that they cleanse and purify. As water removes the pollution of the body, the blood of Christ likewise washes and purifies from the spiritual pollutions of sin. "And from Jesus Christ, who ... washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev 1:5).

The relationship between bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and the body and blood signified by this bread and wine, consists in that they nourish, strengthen, and yield refreshment. As bread nourishes and strengthens the body, the crucified body of Christ—that is, His meritorious suffering and death—likewise nourishes the soul. Wine rejoices the heart of man; this is likewise true for the blood of Christ when partaken of by faith. "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; ... For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (John 6:35,54-56).

This representative relationship and resemblance between the sign and the matter signified have engendered a variety of expressions

relative to the sacraments. First, it occurs that the sign bears the name of the matter signified. Circumcision is called the covenant: “This is My covenant ... every man child among you shall be circumcised” (Gen 17:10); the Lamb is the Passover: “... it (the lamb) is the Lord’s passover” (Exod 12:11); the bread is Christ’s body: “This is my body” (Matt 26:26); the wine is the New Testament: “This cup is the New Testament in My blood” (1 Cor 11:25); and the water is “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5).

Secondly, the matter signified bears the name of the sign. Christ is called the Passover: “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7). He is also called the Lamb: “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36); the manna (John 6:51); also the Rock (1 Cor 10:4).

Thirdly, the efficacy of the matter signified is attributed to the sign, the removal of sin: “... the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him” (Num 5:8); “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16).

Fourthly, the matter signified is attributed to the ceremony associated with the sign. It is said that Christ’s blood is sprinkled, which in fact was true for the sign: “... the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:24); “... unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:2).

The Purpose of the Sacraments

The fifth aspect to be noted in each sacrament is its *purpose*. The highest purpose of all things is the glory of God. This is therefore also true for the sacraments. “The cup of blessing which we bless ...” (1 Cor 10:16). The believing soul rejoices since all the benefits of the covenant of grace have been sealed to him and he acknowledges and praises God for His goodness and mercy. He gives Him the honor and glory, as it is all out of Him and through Him. Having nothing wherewith he can repay the Lord for all His benefits, he thanks Him with his heart, mouth, and deeds.

The other purpose of the sacraments in regard to the true partakers is to represent Christ and all His benefits spiritually, to *signify* all this, and to bring to mind all that pertains to the suffering and death of Christ as Mediator. David did this in the ministry of shadows: “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps 27:4). Therefore the sacraments are called signs, since they visibly represent that which is invisible.

The Sacraments are Also Seals

The sacraments do not only signify, but they above all seal to

true communicants that they are partakers of the promises of the gospel, all the benefits of the covenant of grace, and of Christ and all His fullness. This applies to true believers only; for them the sacrament is a seal. The unconverted, however, not having true faith, do not benefit from the sacraments due to their sin and unbelief; and therefore, instead of having a sealing function, the sacraments make their judgment all the heavier. “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body ... (and) shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:29,27).

Socinians, Anabaptists, and Papists are in error here. They agree in their denial that the sacraments are seals; however, they differ as far as the purpose of the sacraments is concerned. Socinians and Anabaptists maintain that sacraments:

(1) are mere external signs by which faith (concerning the nature of which they are also in error) is only stimulated, maintaining that sacraments display the suffering and death of Christ in the signs and are merely a symbol and illustration of grace; and

(2) serve as a symbol of mutual union, thereby distinguishing believers from Jews and Gentiles.

The Papists deny the sealing function of the sacraments. In their opinion, the sacraments themselves have the efficacy to engender grace. The church, on the contrary, holds to God’s Word, maintaining that *the sacraments are seals whereby the covenant of grace is sealed to true believers*.

This is first of all evident from Rom 4:11, “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith.” It is stated expressly that the sacrament of circumcision was a *seal*, and that this was received by faith and imputed to Abraham by God, thereby sealing to him the righteousness of Christ.

Evasive Argument: This is only stated in reference to circumcision.

Answer: The circumstances of the sacraments are indeed different, but in essence they are all one and the same as far as purpose and efficacy are concerned. That which is essentially true of an individual is essentially true for such individuals. If rationality is an essential characteristic of John, Peter, and Paul, it is so concerning all men. If one sacrament is a sign, it is true for all; and if one sacrament is a seal, all are seals.

Secondly, the Passover also had the efficacy of a seal. “It is the Lord’s passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. ... And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exod 12:11-13).

Furthermore, consider 1 Cor 10:3-4, “And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” Sealing efficacy is also attributed to baptism: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? (This is for confirmation that Christ’s death is for us.) Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). This conveys that baptism does not only seal that one is a partaker of Christ, but also that he will be a partaker of sanctification. Sealing efficacy is also attributed to the Lord’s Supper: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). How else can the cup and the bread constitute communion with Christ, except that one is sealed as being a partaker of His suffering and death? The blatant evasive argument advanced by the Papists will be answered at the appropriate time.

Thirdly, other symbols of God’s promises, which are not sacraments of the covenant of grace, have a sealing efficacy; therefore, this is much more true for the sacraments. Consider the rainbow, for instance: “And I, behold, I establish My covenant with you ... and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you ... neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood ... I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant (that is, of My immutable promise) between Me and the earth” (Gen 9:9-13). Observe this likewise with Gideon’s fleece (Judg 6:37, etc.). The dryness and wetness was a sign whereby the defeat of the Midianites was sealed. Likewise, Christ washing the feet of the apostles symbolized their spiritual cleansing (John 13:6-10).

It is evident that the sacraments seal much more than that, for they are signs of the covenant of grace. “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you” (Gen 17:11). Nothing can be a sign of the covenant, however, except that it be sealed by this covenant. Since all sacraments have an external sign (as has been demonstrated above), all evasive arguments have been unravelled and it remains certain that the sacraments are signs which seal.

Objection #1: If the sacraments seal the grace and merits of Christ, grace would be sealed to many who are no partakers of this grace, such as all hypocrites and unconverted persons.

Answer: Such an argument would be valid if, as the Papists maintain, the sacraments would have an inherent efficacy. However, since no one is sealed by the sacraments except those who partake of them by faith, this objection is without validity. The engagement ring seals faithfulness; this, however, is neither true for all, nor for the one who steals it. This is only true for the bride who is engaged to be married, to whom it was given as a confirmation of faithfulness by the bridegroom.

Objection #2: If the sacraments had a sealing function, the sacraments would be more efficacious than the Word of God—that Word which irrefutably supersedes everything in efficacy and infallibility, and is fully sufficient to render assurance to all. A sealed contract is more efficacious than a bad contract.

Answer (1) Word and sacraments are of equal certainty and infallibility, since they both originate in the true God; we therefore believe the one as well as the other.

(2) The manner in which assurance is wrought differs. Even though the Word of promise is sufficient, one must nevertheless deem it to be an act of unsearchable wisdom and goodness that God assists man in his weakness by granting assurance in a variety of ways, doing this in a manner which is most appropriate for man consisting in body and soul.

(3) One could likewise object before the Lord that the divine oath was unnecessary, the Word being sufficient. Such persons, however, are rebuked and refuted by the apostle. “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb 6:17-18).

The Signs Do Not Communicate Grace

Since the Papists deny the sealing function of the sacraments, viewing them as being operative by way of infused efficacy, it is necessary to consider this matter somewhat more closely.

Question: Is grace *physically* inherent in the signs of the New Testament sacraments and do they function *ex opere operato*; that is, do these signs bestow, work, and communicate this grace to those who receive them?

Answer: Papists are very divided about the manner in which grace is inherent in the sacraments and is communicated to the communicants. They agree in essence, however, and answer this question in the absolute affirmative.

Several Lutherans also lean in that direction when they refer to the sacraments as vehicles, vessels, channels, troughs, and as true and essential causes whereby grace, merited by Christ's death, is rendered and communicated to the communicant.

The Reformed church answers *negatively* upon the question, but maintains that the sacraments function *moraliter* (in a moral sense), that is, uniting the communicants to the matter signified by faith on the basis of the institutional formula and the promise. This is applied to their soul as they partake of the sacraments, and they are sealed as being partakers of Christ and all His benefits.

Since this question actually pertains to baptism, and since the Papists maintain that Christ is personally present in the Lord's Supper, thereby rendering the sacrament efficacious, we shall deal with this question in the next chapter.

A Comparison of the Sacraments of the Old and New Testaments

Having discussed the five requisites for each sacrament, we shall also discuss the resemblance and the difference between the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments, and between the Word and the sacraments, and consider the number of sacraments in the New Testament.

The covenant of grace, being first revealed in the first promise made to Adam, is and will remain immutable until the last day; however, the administration of this covenant differs. Prior to Christ it was administered differently from how it is administered after His coming. In both cases it is confirmed by means of sacraments, which differ in the same manner as the modes of administration differ.

In the Old Testament, prior to the coming of Christ, and during the time period from Adam to Abraham, the church was gathered indiscriminately from a variety of nations. Little is recorded of this time period. We know, however, that the covenant of grace was sealed by means of *sacrifices*, sealing to believers the atonement of the Messiah by reason of His suffering and death. Subsequently, God called Abraham and incorporated the church in his seed, giving her, in addition to the sacrifices, the distinct sign of circumcision as a seal of the covenant. When this nation with which God had established the covenant of grace—which is therefore called a national covenant—journeyed from Egypt to Canaan, God appointed the sacrament of the Passover for them, while the sacrifices continued which the church had from the beginning.

This external administration, which typified the future Messiah, changed after Christ's coming. This was also true for the sacraments,

which are now only the sacraments of holy baptism and the Lord's Supper.

These sacraments, those of the Old and New Testaments, agree in some points and differ in other points.

They agree in the following four matters:

- (1) They have both been instituted by the same Author: God.
- (2) The matter signified is the same in both: Christ.
- (3) The means of application is the same in both: faith.
- (4) They both have the same purpose: to signify and to seal.

The differences are as follows:

(1) The external sign is different. In the Old Testament they were the circumcision of the foreskin, sacrifices, and a passover lamb; now they are water, bread, and wine.

(2) The point of reference differs. In the Old Testament it was Christ who would come, and now it is Christ who has come.

(3) They differ in clarity. In the Old Testament they were more obscure but now are more clear. This was not due to there being lesser resemblance, but due to all future matters being more obscure to us than the present.

(4) They differ in the ease of use. In the Old Testament circumcision was painful, the sacrifices and passover lamb were more costly, and everything was more cumbersome as far as the body is concerned; now the sacraments require less effort.

The Papists, in order to exalt the sacraments of the New Testament, belittle those of the Old Testament and maintain that the difference consists in this: *The sacraments of the Old Testament had no inherent grace, but only typified this; however, in the sacraments of the New Testament grace is inherent and in actuality works and bestows grace.* This we resolutely deny. Their error is evident for the following reasons:

First, the sacraments of the New Testament are without inherent grace and do not in actuality apply this grace; this already has been proven and will again be proven. Therefore, this cannot constitute the difference.

Secondly, the sacrifices sealed the forgiveness of sins by Christ, which is to be seen in the letter to the Hebrews. Circumcision was a sign and seal of the covenant (Gen 17:10), and a sign and a seal of the righteousness of faith (Rom 4:11). The passover lamb was a sign and seal of the spiritual deliverance by Christ, our Passover (cf. 1 Cor 5:7; Exod 12:11). They therefore were not merely shadows of grace, for a seal grants a right to the matter which it seals, and assures one of being a partaker of grace.

Thirdly, "And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock

that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:3-4). What resemblance is there? There is not a resemblance as far as the sign, but as far as Christ is concerned—which is now also true in baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Therefore there is no such difference between the Old and New Testaments.

Objection #1: The sacraments of the Old Testament are shadows and thus they are not the matter itself.

Answer: They were neither shadows of the sacraments of the New Testament, nor of the grace to be given in the New Testament; rather, they were shadows of Christ and of all His benefits. Not only were they shadows, but they were also signs and seals of it, such as is true for the sacraments of the New Testament.

Objection #2: The following passages deny all value and efficacy of the sacraments of the Old Testament: “Circumcision is nothing” (1 Cor 7:19); “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything” (Gal 6:15).

Answer (1) The apostle refers to the New Testament time in which all the ceremonies of the Old Testament—and thus also circumcision and the Passover—have been abolished. Therefore they are of no benefit to us; yes, they are even detrimental, since they imply that Christ has not come as yet.

(2) The apostle considers the external matters as divorced from the matter which is signified, that is, from the essence of all shadows and sacraments in both the Old and New Testaments. He states that all external matters and privileges have no value, but that all salvation is in Christ, and is received unto justification and sanctification.

Objection #3: In the New Testament we have better promises and a better covenant. “For finding fault with them, He saith ... when I will make a new covenant” (Heb 8:8); “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (Heb 7:22).

Answer: The word “better” does not pertain to the promised benefits; this ought to be proven before using these texts as an argument. These benefits are identical in both Testaments, since there is but one covenant between God and man, and since Christ is the same yesterday and today. Rather, the word “better” pertains to the fact that Christ had not yet come, and now, He indeed has. Everything is now clearer, and the Holy Spirit is poured out upon His people in a more abundant manner.

A Comparison of the Word and the Sacraments

There are also some resemblances and differences between the Word and the sacraments.

The Word of God and the sacraments resemble each other as follows:

- (1) They both have God as their Author.
- (2) They both hold forth Christ unto justification and sanctification, and both lead the soul to Christ.
- (3) They both are to the comfort and assurance of true believers.

Their differences are manifold:

- (1) The Word is the means unto faith and repentance; the sacraments are not instrumental in conversion, but rather require repentance and faith prior to use.
- (2) The Word is addressed to all, converted and unconverted alike; the sacraments are only for believing converts.
- (3) The Word is operative without the sacraments; however, the sacraments are not operative without the Word.
- (4) The Word is only for those who have the ability to understand; the sacrament of baptism is also for children.
- (5) The Word promises and the sacraments seal.
- (6) Without the Word there is no salvation; however, salvation is possible apart from the sacraments.
- (7) The Word functions in reference to hearing, and the sacraments function in regard to hearing, vision, smell, taste, and feeling.

The Number of Sacraments

There are two sacraments in the New Testament: *holy baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*. That these two are sacraments is evident:

(1) from the five matters which must be present in all sacraments: its institution as a sacrament by God, the presence of a visible and tangible element, Christ as the matter signified, the agreement between the sign and the matter signified, and the fact that they signify and seal the covenant of grace to believers—all of which has been discussed above.

(2) Scripture conjoins these two: “And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink” (1 Cor 10:2-4); “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). It is not necessary to elaborate about this since these two sacraments are acknowledged by everyone.

The Papists, however, not being satisfied with these two, have contrived five other matters which they also have designated as sacraments. They are: Confirmation, Confession, Holy Orders, Marriage, and Extreme Unction. It is evident that they are not sacraments since the five requisites of a sacrament, discussed

above, are absent. With the one this mark is missing, and with the other different marks are absent. Even though some are mentioned in the Word of God, they have nevertheless not been appointed to be sacraments, and that is the essential point here. We therefore reject them as inventions of men and deem Matt 15:19 to be applicable here: “But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

 CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Holy Baptism

The Word Baptism Defined

The first New Testament sacrament is *holy baptism*. The Greek word βαπτίζω (*baptizo*) means “to baptize”: “... be baptized every one of you” (Acts 2:38). It also means to *insert or to immerse into* water: “... that he may dip³³ the tip of his finger in water” (Luke 16:24). Since the insertion into water occurs for purification purposes, it is also translated as “to wash.” “And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not” (Mark 7:4). Consequently, the words βαπτισμός & βαπτισμα (*baptismos, baptisma*) mean “baptism”: “Of the doctrine of baptisms ...” (Heb 6:2). It also means “washing”: “... the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables” (Mark 7:4).

The word “baptism” has various connotations. It first of all can refer to doctrine. “This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; ... knowing only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25). The ancients referred to this as the *baptism of light*.

Secondly, it refers to heavy suffering, to be overwhelmed with suffering, and to be immersed in suffering as one would be immersed into water. “But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). This is referred to as *the baptism of blood*.

Thirdly, it refers to the abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whereby the soul is purified and is made to burn with spiritual zeal.

³³ In the Statenvertaling the word “dope” is used, which is the subjunctive of “dopen.” This verb is the equivalent of “to baptize.”

“He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matt 3:11). This is referred to as the *baptism of fire*.

Fourthly, it refers to being showered upon, to be immersed in water, to be sprinkled with water, and thus to being washed. As such, it is used 1) in a civil sense for the cleansing of the body and of other things; 2) for ceremonial washings in the Old Testament: “... and divers washings (baptisms)” (Heb 9:10); and 3) in reference to the New Testament’s first sacrament which we shall now consider. “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5).

In our treatment of this subject matter, we shall follow the same order which we have pursued in the previous chapter. We shall consider: 1) the Author, 2) the external sign, 3) the matter signified, 4) the relationship between the sign and the matter signified, 5) the purpose, and 6) the subject—who are to be baptized.

The Author of Baptism

The Author of holy baptism is God, that is, Christ, the Bridegroom of His church. This is evident in the following passages: “... but He that sent me to baptize with water” (John 1:33); “The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?” (Matt 21:25). The Lord Jesus concludes from this, and convinces them by their own faith, that the baptism of John was from God. Christ gave the following command to His disciples when He was about to ascend to heaven: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 28:19).

The instrumental causes, the administrators of baptism, are men commissioned by God to baptize. The first of these was John; he was therefore called *the Baptist* and his baptism, the baptism of John (cf. Matt 3:1; Matt 21:25). Afterwards Christ’s disciples baptized upon His command. “... that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples)” (John 4:1-2). After His resurrection He commanded His disciples (and thus all ministers) to baptize, giving them the promise that He would be with them until the end of the world (Matt 28:19-20).

Question: Is there an essential difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ, or are they the same?

Answer: Socinians, Anabaptists, as well as Papists maintain—albeit with different objectives—that they differ essentially. We maintain that there is some difference in the circumstances: 1) John baptized as the forerunner of Christ and sealed the forgiveness of sins by Christ, who had already come and was engaged in His

atonement work, but had not yet finished all things. 2) With John's baptism there was no outpouring of extraordinary gifts. 3) It was less clear in nature. We do maintain, however, that they are of one and the same essence.

This is first of all evident because all that belongs to the essence of a sacrament is equally true for the baptisms of both John and Christ. 1) They both have one and the same Author (John 1:33); 2) they have the same sign, that is, water (Matt 3:11); 3) they signify the same matter: Christ's blood unto the forgiveness of sins (Acts 19:4); 4) the relationship between the sign and the matter signified is the same: the washing away of filth—in the one of the body, and in the other of the soul; 5) they have the same purpose: incorporation into the church, the sealing of the forgiveness of sins (Acts 19:4), and conversion (Matt 3:11). All these matters are identical in the baptism of Christ, which will subsequently be demonstrated in this chapter. It is consequently one and the same baptism.

Secondly, the baptism with which Christ was, and believers are, baptized, is one and the same baptism. "... one baptism" (Eph 4:5); "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:12-13). Christ was baptized with no other baptism but the baptism of John. Therefore the baptism of John and of Christ are one and the same baptism.

Thirdly, there is but one baptism in the New Testament. The baptism of John was a New Testament baptism, for he preached Christ who had already come (although He had not yet died) as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And all the prophets and the law have prophesied until John. The baptism of John and of Christ are therefore one and the same.

Objection #1: A very clear distinction is made in Matt 3:11, for John baptized with water, and Christ with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

Answer (1) The baptism of the apostles is administered with water until this present day; by the same argument this would then also not be the baptism of Christ. The invalidity of this argument should be obvious to everyone.

(2) There is a distinction here between the external sign, which John could only administer, and the matter signified, which only Christ could give.

Objection #2: John did not baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity, which the apostles, however, did upon Christ's command. It is therefore not one and the same baptism.

Answer (1) The doctrine of the Holy Trinity did not have as many opponents as is presently the case, and it was therefore not necessary to state this expressly each time. Not everything John said is recorded; from the fact that it is not recorded, one can therefore not conclude that it did not transpire.

(2) He had been sent by a triune God, and John knew Him who had sent him. Knowing Him, he also preached Him and therefore also baptized in His Name.

(3) The Holy Trinity revealed itself in the baptism of Christ (Matt 3:16-17). The Father spoke from heaven to the Son who was being baptized, and the Spirit of God descended.

(4) Nowhere is the baptism of John disqualified, which would have occurred if John had not baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

(5) Then Christ and all others would not have been baptized in the correct manner.

Objection #3: Those persons who were baptized by John were later rebaptized, as is to be observed in Acts 19:4-5, “Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Answer: This misunderstanding is a result of separating the words of verse 4 from those in verse 5, and by acknowledging the words of verse 4 to be the words of Paul, but deeming the words in verse 5 to be those of Luke, the writer of this history—as if he were recounting what followed upon the instruction of Paul. This, however, would have to be proven. These words integrate very well when one conjoins verses 4 and 5, and considers them to be the words of the apostle Paul. He instructed the disciples in verse 4 about the manner in which John baptized and taught, and thereupon declared that all who heard it were obedient and believed John’s preaching, were baptized by him.

(2) Even if one admits that these disciples who were baptized by John were rebaptized, it therefore does not follow that John’s baptism differed from the baptism of the apostles. Neither here nor elsewhere is this baptism disqualified. From this it could only be alleged that the disciples of John were baptized twice; this, however, is denied.

Then the point of contention remains whether or not one may be baptized twice. We maintain that this generally ought not to occur. There is no need for repetition since it is the sacrament of regeneration and incorporation into the church, which indeed only occurs but once. Moreover, an example of such repetition is lacking.

If one considers grace to be inherent in baptism, causing regeneration in the baptized person by reason of this efficacious power, then it could not be repeated, for whoever is regenerated remains regenerated. Since, however, baptism is only a seal of regeneration, there is no objection as such if someone were to be sealed twice in reference to the same matter. If someone, having been baptized in his youth, does not know and cannot ascertain whether he was baptized, and is nevertheless very desirous to be baptized, what objection would there be if he were rebaptized? This concern issues forth from the Papist position concerning the efficacy of baptism; it is, however, contrary to the practice of the apostles and the church.

These disciples of John could have had a strong desire to be baptized by the apostles, for at that time it was generally accompanied by the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost. In these early times Paul, being cautious, was very lenient as far as the ceremonies were concerned, and he would also have been lenient toward the disciples of John by baptizing them again. Even if he has done so to a few at a special occasion, we nevertheless do not admit that it thus follows that the baptism of John was repeated to everyone. This was neither true upon the day of Pentecost, nor thereafter. Much less is it true that the baptism of John is essentially different from the baptism of the apostles, and that thus the baptism of the apostles was rejected.

The Qualifications of Those Who are Authorized to Baptize

We have thus demonstrated that the baptism of John and Christ are essentially one and the same baptism. We shall now proceed to consider the qualifications of those who are permitted to administer baptism. They must be men who have been *lawfully commissioned* to preach and baptize. This is first of all evident from common practice since the time of Christ. Secondly, Christ has conjoined preaching and baptizing; the apostles—and thus all ministers—have been commissioned to baptize. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them” (Matt 28:19). Thirdly, baptism must be administered in the name of Christ; that is, upon the command and according to the institution of Christ. “Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).

Therefore no one may baptize unless he has been commanded by Christ to do so—and thus is a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1).

Here we differ with the Papists.

Question: In case of emergency, when an unbaptized person—

whether young or old—is at the point of death and there is no ordained minister at hand, may not a private individual (be it a man or a woman) administer baptism to such a dying person?

Answer: Papists answer affirmatively, since they deem baptism to be absolutely essential unto salvation, and declare an unbaptized person to be damned. We, however, answer this question negatively. One who is not ordained may, under no circumstances, administer baptism. Salvation is not contingent upon baptism, and a believer can indeed be saved without baptism. We prove this as follows:

First, as we have shown above, it is just as necessary to be divinely commissioned to baptize as it is to preach. Private individuals, however, are without such a commission and thus they may not baptize.

Secondly, since salvation is not contingent upon baptism and baptism has no inherent power to bring about regeneration in those who are baptized—which has been shown in the previous chapter and will be demonstrated in this chapter—then such a case of emergency never exists. Consequently, a private individual may not baptize. Even those parties who permit this at no other time but in case of emergency, concur in this.

Thirdly, the Lord's Supper may under no circumstances be administered by a private individual, and this is therefore also true for baptism. The sacraments are of one and the same nature. The one does not require a different person for its administration than the other.

Objection #1: To be instrumental in the salvation of souls is a work of love to which all Christians are obligated. To baptize someone in case of emergency is equivalent to saving a soul. It is thus the duty of every Christian to baptize in case of emergency.

Answer: Such a case of emergency does not exist; baptism is not the saving of souls. This argument has thus been rendered invalid.

Objection #2: In the New Testament, we read of several private individuals who have baptized. Philip baptized the eunuch (Acts 8:38); Ananias baptized Paul (Acts 22:16), and those who belonged to the household of Cornelius were baptized by private individuals (Acts 10:48).

Answer (1) This argument would prove more than is the intent of the opposing party, for private individuals would then always be able to baptize without their imaginary case of emergency; there was no such case of emergency in these examples.

(2) We deny that the individuals mentioned above were without a divine commission; let this be proven. *Philip* was a deacon (Acts 6:5), whom both parties consider to have been commissioned to baptize,

and furthermore, he was an evangelist (Acts 21:8). *Ananias* was a disciple who received an express command from God (Acts 9:10-11,15). It is not mentioned who baptized the family of Cornelius; Peter himself was present there, and thus, there was no emergency. Baptism was administered in obedience to a command, and thus, whoever baptized was commissioned to do so.

Objection #3: Zipporah circumcised her son (Exod 4:25), and therefore women are also permitted to baptize.

Answer (1) They contradict themselves, for when a priest is present, they will not permit a woman to baptize. This is the case here, for Moses belonged to the tribe of Levi.

(2) This is an isolated example and was performed by a woman who did this with a violent temper and in a fit of anger; this is not to be imitated.

(3) The Levitical ministry had not yet been instituted.

(4) Papists maintain that there is an essential difference between the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments. One, therefore, cannot draw a logical conclusion from the one to the other upon the basis of this argument.

Additional objection: God was pleased with this act, for His wrath was pacified by it.

Answer: God's anger was pacified by this act because the child had been circumcised—but not because Zipporah had done it, and had done so in anger. God likewise blessed the Egyptian midwives for having helped the Hebrews in saving their children, but not because of their lies (Exod 1:20-21).

Question: Are heretics permitted to baptize? Are baptisms performed by heretics true baptisms?

Answer: First, baptism must be performed in the *true* church of Jesus Christ, for by baptism the baptized person is incorporated into the church in which the baptism is administered. Secondly, it must be administered by an *ordained minister*. If someone has therefore been baptized in an assembly which is heretical in doctrine, and whose ministers consequently are not lawfully ordained, such a baptized person, upon becoming a believer, must be baptized. This is not rebaptism, for the first baptism was not baptism.

A particular church can be in error in many points; however, as long as its doctrinal foundation remains pure, it remains a true church, and the veracity of baptism is not negated by impurity in doctrine. This is also true if the minister is personally unconverted and secretly espouses heretical views, for the efficacy of baptism is not contingent upon the person who administers it.

The External Sign of Baptism

The second thing to be considered in reference to baptism is the *external sign*. In this respect we need to consider the element as well as the ceremony, that is, the manner of administration.

The element is water, that is, common, clean water, without any distinction. John the Baptist and the apostles used this. “I indeed baptize you with water” (Matt 3:11); “... He that sent me to baptize with water” (John 1:33); “... because there was much water there” (John 3:23). This is also true for the apostles: “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized” (Acts 10:47); “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized ... and they went down both into the water ... and he baptized him” (Acts 8:36,38). Baptism is therefore called “the washing of water” (Eph 5:26).

The Papist additions of exorcisms, making of crosses, papal saliva, oil, salt, flour, and other such concoctions are human fabrications which are sacrilegious and therefore are to be rejected with abhorrence.

The Ceremony or the Manner of Administration: Immersion or Sprinkling

In early times, and in countries with a warm climate, *immersion* was used most frequently. The Lord Jesus was baptized by immersion (Matt 3:16), as was the eunuch (Acts 8:38). The apostle also refers to this: “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4). Subsequent to this, however, *sprinkling* has come into use, just as sprinkling is now generally in use, be it once or three times. The Greeks and Russians still use immersion. One need neither argue about this nor be concerned, however, since it is one and the same as far as the matter itself and the assurance it yields.

First, the verb “baptize” can also be translated as “sprinkle.” “... except they wash, they eat not” (Mark 7:4). The washing of hands generally occurs by allowing water to be poured upon the hands. “... Here is Elisha ... which poured water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kings 3:11).

Secondly, the matter signified, namely, the blood of Christ as cleansing the soul, is expressed as sprinkling. “And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling” (Heb 12:24).

Thirdly, the relationship between the sign and the matter signified is expressed both by sprinkling and immersion, for one cleanses the body by both methods. Concerning sprinkling or pouring out we read, “Then shall I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean” (Ezek 36:25).

Fourthly, it is obvious that the apostles also have used sprinkling in baptizing the three thousand upon the day of Pentecost, the jailor, as well as at other occasions.

It also makes no difference if one sprinkles the person to be baptized once or three times. If one sprinkles but once, the reference is to the Trinity of the divine Being; if one sprinkles three times, the reference is to the three Persons.

In considering the ceremony or manner of sprinkling, one may also consider the pronouncement of the words, "*I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,*" as belonging to this since 1) Christ in issuing His command to baptize uses these words; 2) it is a certainty that one must be baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, for there is no other God but He; 3) the person baptized is declared to be the property of a triune God; 4) the pronouncement of these words has at all times been used in the church; 5) there is a special relationship between each Person and the person being baptized: that the Father is his Father, the Son is his Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is his Comforter and Sanctifier; and 6) the Holy Trinity is expressly confessed in this manner. One must therefore preserve the pronouncement of these words.

If, however, the church acknowledges and confesses the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and if the adult to be baptized does likewise, I would neither consider such a baptism to be unlawful nor deem it to be null and void, even if the words in question were not expressly pronounced at his baptism. I neither consider the pronouncement of the words to be relevant to the essential nature of baptism, nor does it validate baptism as such. I do not know, however, if such a case has ever transpired, for the baptism of heretics is not baptism, regardless of whether they mention the Trinity or not.

When the apostle exhorts the people in Acts 2:38 to let themselves be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and when it is related in Acts 8:16 that those of Samaria were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, this neither proves that baptism was administered upon the pronouncement of the words, "I baptize thee in the name of Jesus Christ," nor that the names of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost were not used; rather, these expressions only indicate that baptism was administered upon the command and according to the ordinance of Christ. Baptism in the name of Christ does not exclude, but includes, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Matter Signified in Baptism

The third particular to be considered is the matter signified; that

is, that which the water and the manner of administration typify: the blood of Christ *as washing away* the filth of the soul, that is, sin.

The Relationship Between the Sign and the Matter Signified

The fourth matter to be considered is the *relationship* between the sign and the matter signified. This consists in the fact that as water cleanses the body from filth, so the blood of Christ cleanses the soul from sin. The first is verified by experience, and the second is taught by Scripture. "... Jesus Christ, who ... washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev 1:5). The water of baptism signifies and seals the washing of the soul; this is evident in the following passages: "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:26); "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 3:21).

The filth of the soul pertains to both the guilt and the pollution of sin; the washing away of both is sealed in baptism. Concerning the removal of guilt we read, "... be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). Concerning the removal of pollution we read, "... He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

The Purpose of Baptism

The fifth matter to be considered is the purpose of baptism, which consists in the assurance and sealing of the forgiveness of sins, regeneration, and incorporation into the church. Concerning the forgiveness of sins we read, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith" (Rom 4:11). If the Old Testament sacrament functioned as a seal, this is much more true for baptism in the New Testament, which came in the place of circumcision. "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism" (Col 2:11-12). As far as regeneration is concerned, refer to Titus 3:5. Concerning incorporation into the church we read, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13).

Concerning the purpose of baptism several questions need to be answered.

Question: Was baptism nothing more than a symbol of separation between Jews and Christians and between believers and unbelievers, this being the case only during the apostolic period?

Answer: This is the sentiment of the Socinians who deny the holy Trinity and the atonement of Christ, and thus any sealing function of

the sacraments. We do indeed consider baptism to be a symbol of separation between believers, as it constitutes incorporation into the church. This, however, was not merely true at the outset of the New Testament period, but rather for the entire period. We furthermore maintain that baptism seals the forgiveness of sins in all ages until the end of the world. This has been confirmed above (cf. Rom 4:11; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Eph5:26). Add to this Matt 28:19-20, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” It must be noted here that *teaching* is expressly distinguished from *baptizing*, and that the distortions of the Socinians, suggesting that in this instance baptizing is synonymous with doctrine, are contrary to the express words of the text. It must furthermore be noted that baptism was not—as they say—only a symbol of separation between the unconverted and the Jews who had been converted to Christianity, but that baptism had to be administered to all believing Gentiles of all manner of nations. It must also be noted that the administration of baptism had to continue until the end of the world, for the apostles had to teach all nations to observe whatsoever He had commanded them. This also included the command to baptize as expressed here. Christ also promises to be with them until the end of the world, which cannot have reference to the persons of the apostles, for they would not live that long. Rather, it pertains to the administration of baptism to their descendants by means of ministers.

Objection #1: There were several things in the original church which were but temporal, such as abstinence from eating of things which were strangled, the washing of feet, and the anointing of the sick with oil.

Answer (1) What conclusion does one wish to draw from this—that baptism was only valid for that time? That is as illogical as concluding that the Bible was also for that time only, and that there is now no need for preaching.

(2) The reference to that which was strangled could only be for that time since it then gave offense to the Jews who were weak in the faith. The washing of feet was a civil labor of love in those countries where one travelled on bare feet. The anointing with oil was a ceremony which belonged to the gifts of healing; these having ceased, this likewise had to cease.

Objection #2: All ceremonies have come to an end; religion is now spiritual in nature, and therefore there can be no baptism.

Answer (1) The ceremonies which typified Christ have been eliminated by His coming.

(2) Religion in the Old Testament was also spiritual in nature.

(3) To be directed to spiritual matters by way of physical matters does not negate the spirituality of man's religion, for he consists of body and soul.

(4) It has pleased God to institute the sacraments and therefore foolish man must be silent.

Objection #3: Paul himself testified that he was not sent to baptize (1 Cor 1:17), and thus there is now no baptism.

Answer (1) If Paul indeed had not been sent to baptize, does it follow that none were commissioned to baptize—also not those who were addressed by Christ in Matt 28:19?

(2) Did Paul then baptize those whom he did baptize without a divine commission (1 Cor 1:14, 16)?

(3) "Not being sent to baptize" is not stated in the absolute sense of the word, but rather comparatively speaking. His primary commission was not to baptize, since baptism by immersion required much more time than preaching. Such expressions are used several times in God's Word.

A Refutation of the Error that the Water of Baptism is Efficacious unto Salvation

Question: Does the water of baptism have inherent power to remove sins and to regenerate man *ex opere operato* (that is, by means of the external administration of the water to the person being baptized) and thus *physically* bring forth these said graces in the person being baptized? Can the water of baptism also be an actual and ordinary means unto regeneration in young children, apart from the hearing of the Word?

Answer: The Papists, together with the Socinians, deny any sealing function. The Socinians do so because they deny the atonement of Christ, and the Papists do so because they attribute the efficacy of baptism to the external signs. They therefore answer the question presented in the affirmative. We, however, answer this question resolutely in the negative.

First of all, a physical object cannot interact with the soul—which is a spirit—in a *physical* or natural manner, nor can it bring forth anything in it that is spiritual. The external sign, that is, the water of baptism, is of a physical nature; therefore the first proposition can be observed in nature. The second proposition is answered by Scripture, by the experience of all senses, and is admitted by the opposing parties themselves. For they themselves maintain that the water of

baptism is and remains water and is not changed into the blood of Christ. Our conclusion thus remains in force.

Evasive Argument: Although a physical object of itself cannot interact with a soul, this can nevertheless occur by reason of the power of God, who can give a physical object an ability as He pleases.

Answer (1) It is first of all certain that it needs to be proven that God has given such efficacy to water in baptism; this never will, nor can possible be proven.

(2) If such efficacy had been communicated to water, namely, that it could engender such spiritual graces in the soul, water should then have spiritual characteristics, for the operations of any cause are directly related to its qualities or characteristics. As are the qualities, so is likewise the efficacy of the operations; the efficacy of the operations agrees with the qualities. To be a physical object and yet to have spiritual qualities by which spiritual things are engendered in a spirit is contradictory in nature; a physical object would then be transformed into a nonphysical object. To be a physical object while simultaneously not being a physical object is as contradictory as “yes” and “no.” God is, however, a God of truth who works in His creatures in harmony with their nature; He does not reverse their nature.

Secondly, Scripture expressly denies that the sign has the efficacy to work grace. “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me ... shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matt 3:11). Here the persons and their work and the efficacy of their work are placed in distinction to each other. John and Christ baptized with water, and baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire is being energized by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is denied that John, the water, and his baptism have this efficacy, but it is attributed to Christ. Therefore the baptized person receives saving graces, not due to the efficacy of the water, but from Christ through the Holy Spirit.

This is also evident in 1 Pet 3:21, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The apostle drew a parallel with the flood. Noah was saved by virtue of the water which caused the ark to float. Peter applied this to baptism, declaring that it also saves. He added to this the manner in which it does and does not save. He denied that it is the water of baptism which saves by saying, “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh”; but he posits salvation as being in Christ’s resurrection after His suffering, which is received by faith and sealed in baptism. Thereby the believing soul receives freedom to come to God with a conscience

having been cleansed in the blood of Christ, and to ask if she is then not justified and has peace with God, a matter of which the soul becomes conscious while asking for it and perceives the efficacy while appropriating it.

Thirdly, whatever functions as a sign and a seal does not bring about the matter itself of which it is a sign and a seal. It is common knowledge that the entire thrust of a sign is to identify and to indicate something, and the entire thrust of a seal is to confirm and to guarantee. The *rainbow* does not have the capability of preventing a flood, the *fleece* of Gideon did not conquer the enemies, and the turning back of the *shadow* did not render health to Hezekiah. It is thus that the water of baptism is a sign and a seal, as has been demonstrated above from Rom 4:11. Consequently, the water of baptism does not beget grace.

Fourthly, since it is faith which renders baptism spiritually efficacious, it is thus not the water which does so due to inherent efficacy. Faith is not to be found in the water, but rather in the baptized person. This efficacy proceeds from faith. This is evident because the element is not a sacrament apart from the institutional formula and the promise. When the word is joined to the element, it then becomes a sacrament, and the Word of God cannot be operative and beneficial except it be received by faith (Heb 4:12); furthermore, one neither may nor can receive baptism except by faith: “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Acts 8:37; cf. Mark 16:16). Thus, the efficacy of baptism is not related to the water, but is due to faith which unites the sign to the matter signified, and is operative in reference to the institutional formula and promise.

Fifthly, if the water of baptism—due to inherent efficacy—would beget grace in the persons baptized in a physical, that is, natural manner, all who are baptized would be the recipients of the grace of justification and sanctification. Whatever has the inherent efficacy to be operative and is indeed operative, will be operative toward all objects which are within its sphere of influence. Fire warms the good as well as the evil. It would not matter whether a person were a Jew, Muslim, hypocrite, or heathen, or whether he was desirous for grace and to be a partaker of this grace; if such a person were baptized, even against his will, he would be the recipient of the grace of the removal of sin and regeneration. If he were to be killed at that every moment, he would then be saved, and it would thus be easy to get many of the most abominable among men into heaven. Shameful is such a doctrine! Scripture demonstrates the contrary and affirms that one who is baptized can go lost. Peter said to the baptized Simon the sorcerer, “Thou hast

neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21). Paul says concerning the unqualified partakers of the sacraments that they make themselves guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27).

From all this it is very evident that the water of baptism does not have the inherent efficacy to beget grace.

Objection #1: The efficacy to remove sins, to regenerate, and to save are attributed to baptism and thus it must have this efficacy. Consider the following passages:

(1) “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matt 3:11).

Answer: This text refutes their proposition, for water is denied such efficacy there; instead, efficacy is attributed to the Spirit of Christ which God gives His children.

(2) “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

Answer 1) Two matters are joined here in reference to one result; which, however, are not equal as far as efficacy and necessity are concerned. Without faith no one can be saved; however, salvation is possible without being baptized. If faith is absent, baptism can be of no benefit, which is evident in the following: “... but he that believeth not [it does not say, ‘he that is not baptized’] shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). 2) Baptism is conjoined to faith as sealing the veracity of the promises, thereby strengthening faith.

(3) “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

Answer: There is no reference here whatsoever to the sacrament of baptism, but only to the Holy Spirit with His purifying power. He is therefore frequently compared to water and to fire due to the energy attending His operations (Matt 3:11).

(4) “... be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38); “... be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16).

Answer 1) It is not stated here that either the water of baptism or the external deed of sprinkling forgives and washes away sin. This is the point that needs to be proven. 2) The reference is here to *being baptized for the remission of sins*. The remission of sins is God’s pronouncement to men, acquitting them on the basis of the merits of Christ. This is applied to the heart by faith, whereby one has peace with God (Rom 5:1). This faith is strengthened by baptism which seals God’s promises concerning the remission of sins, and thus baptism is administered for the remission of sins, sealing this to believers. 3) The apostle addresses believers about baptism and the remission of sins. The entire difference pertains

to the manner in which baptism washes away sin—whether this be due to a *physical* or natural operation, or by reason of a *moral* or sealing efficacy, which is rendered efficacious by faith. The first we deny; the text presented does not speak of it with one letter, but rather, of being cleansed by the blood of Christ, which is received by faith and sealed by baptism.

(5) “That He might ... cleanse it with the washing of water” (Eph 5:26); “... the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

Answer 1) Again, there is not one word here which states that water and its external administration have the efficacy to cleanse and regenerate, and that this comes about in a natural way by virtue of inherent efficacy. This would have to be proven, and it is this which we deny. We readily admit and defend the fact that baptism purifies the heart; however, it must be understood in the sense in which the apostle states it: as sealing the washing away of sins by Christ’s blood, whereby faith, being strengthened, purifies the heart the more powerfully from pollution (Acts 15:9). We also wish to safeguard the principle that the Holy Spirit renews and regenerates man. He does so by means of faith which, by the washing of water—that is, baptism as sealing regeneration—becomes stronger and thereby engenders comfort and sanctification. Concerning all these quoted texts it can be concluded that they speak of the *sealing* efficacy of baptism, and not of an *inherent* efficacy, whereby through the act of sprinkling, sins would be remitted unto justification and sanctification in a natural sense.

Objection #2: Small children are baptized who do not as yet have understanding and are as yet unable to be believably exercised with their baptism in order to be sealed by it. Baptism either has no efficacy—and is thus administered to them in vain—or by reason of inherent efficacy must beget grace in a natural sense. Since the first concept is absurd, the second is therefore confirmed.

Answer 1) The children in the Old Testament were circumcised and their circumcision was not in vain; it nevertheless had no inherent efficacy to circumcise the heart. It is thus evident that a child’s reception of a sacrament can be of benefit, even though the sacrament has no inherent efficacy to beget grace. 2) Since baptism functions as a sign and a seal, a child can likewise be sealed. God, the congregation, and thus also the parents, view him as being sealed. The parents derive their comfort from this, and the baptized child, upon coming to the years of discretion, derives from his baptism its sealing efficacy to his comfort and sanctification.

Having rendered the arguments concerning the presumed efficacy

of baptism invalid, the three propositions founded upon this presumed efficacy are automatically rendered invalid as well. We can therefore refute them with a few words.

Question: Does baptism remit all past and present sins, not only in the sense that they are not imputed to those who are baptized, but that they have been utterly eradicated as far as guilt and pollution are concerned?

Answer: The Papists answer in the affirmative and we reply in the negative, because 1) baptism has no inherent efficacy whatsoever to remove sin by way of a natural process; 2) if baptism were to remove sin in such a manner as to eradicate them fully, man would be as Adam was before the fall. Scripture says, however, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Prov 20:9).

Question: Is baptism absolutely essential unto salvation?

Answer: The Papists answer in the affirmative and we reply in the negative. We believe that baptism must be used because the Lord Jesus has instituted it, and one who despises the institution is condemned. This [that is, the errors of the Papists—Ed.] is evident for the following reasons:

First, since baptism has no inherent efficacy to remove sin physically—as has been confirmed already—it is also not absolutely essential unto salvation.

Secondly, the Lord Jesus denies such an absolute necessity since He, after conjoining faith and baptism, does not threaten condemnation upon those who are not baptized, but upon those who do not believe (Mark 16:16).

Thirdly, one can be a believer and be converted prior to baptism; indeed, in adults it is required prior to their baptism. Such a person has eternal life (John 3:36), and therefore the absence of baptism cannot keep him outside of heaven. Consequently, baptism is not absolutely essential unto salvation. As shown above, the quoted text, John 3:5, makes no mention of baptism.

Question: Are all unbaptized children subject to condemnation and therefore never able to get to heaven?

Answer: The Papists answer in the affirmative. We are repulsed by such a dreadful judgment, which is entirely contrary to the covenant of grace, for 1) as shown, baptism does not have the efficacy they suggest it to have; and 2) someone, without any fault of his own, could then be condemned due to the laxity or cruelty of someone else. This is contrary to Ezek 18:20, “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.” Then the issue as to whether a child would be saved or condemned would be in the hands of man, who could kill a child either prior to or after its baptism.

We have thus held before you baptism and its essential nature. It is evident that baptism is the first New Testament sacrament, a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, instituted by God, and its administration commanded by the Lord Jesus to His apostles—and in them to all ministers. This administration consists in the act of immersion or sprinkling with clean water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, thereby signifying and sealing to believers the cleansing of the soul from the guilt and pollution of sin by the blood and the Spirit of Christ, as well as the incorporation into the congregation of Christ so that through faith, love, and holiness, they may glorify God, be an ornament to the church, convict the unconverted, and stir up believers.

The Subjects of Baptism

In addition to that which has been said, it is necessary that we also consider the *subjects* of baptism; that is, those to whom baptism must be administered. These are not clocks or similar objects which the Papists baptize, thereby dreadfully desecrating baptism. Rather, the objects must be men, and then the true believers among men. Only true believers are entitled to the use of the sacraments. However, since the church is not authorized to require assurance of the probability of regeneration as the foundation upon which the minister may administer the sacraments to someone, all who have made confession of their sins, of their faith in Christ, and of their determination to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to lead a life which is in harmony with their confession, may rightfully and in good conscience be baptized. If the persons who are baptized are either unconverted or hypocrites, they are responsible and baptism is not a seal to them. They are neither partakers of the covenant nor are they entitled to its benefits. This is confirmed in the following passages: “And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: ... Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (Matt 3:6-11, 8); “Repent, and be baptized every one of you” (Acts 2:38); “... if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Acts 8:37).

If someone has therefore entered into the covenant—whether it be in truth or in an external sense—and has been baptized, they are also obligated to surrender their children to Christ by way of the covenant and thus permit them to be baptized, as the covenant has also been made with their children. Before we prove this, we must, for a further exposition of infant baptism, make a few prefatory remarks.

The Baptism of Children

First, children to be baptized must 1) not be children of Jews,

Muslims, heathens, or heretics, even if a member of the covenant has adopted them as children, for such adoption does not change the fact that they were not born within the covenant; 2) not be abandoned children in a country where the true church is not found, or if the true church is present, is filled with Jews, Muslims, heathens, Socinians, and other heretics, for such children can belong to the latter as well as to members of the covenant; 3) not be children of parents who have both been excommunicated—having been born subsequent to this excommunication—since such parents must be considered as heathens (Matt 18:17); and 4) not be children who as yet are unborn, or who are miscarried—as the Papists do.

Instead, they must be 1) children of members of the covenant; that is, one or both must be members of the covenant (1 Cor 7:14); 2) they may also be children of members of the covenant who are born as a result of adultery; or 3) children of those who are under censure, for the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.

Secondly, the place where children ought to be baptized has not been determined by Scripture and does not belong to the essence of baptism. However, where the church conducts public worship services, it is edifying that it take place during a worship service.

Thirdly, subsequent to the breaking of the covenant of works, God established a *covenant of grace* with man. Never, that is, neither in the Old nor in the New Testament has He established an external covenant wherein both converted and unconverted alike would be members on equal footing, such that God, upon external obedience, would have promised some external benefits—regardless of what name may be given to this covenant, such as a *national, typical, worldly, or external* covenant. One may therefore not baptize children in reference to an external covenant, but only in reference to the covenant of grace.

Fourthly, one can view elect children either as they are from God's perspective, or as they are in themselves. God knows them as being elect, as heirs of eternal life, and as being redeemed through the death of their Surety, Jesus Christ. As they are in themselves, they are identical to all other children, missing the image of God, having the image of the devil, without the seed of faith, without regeneration and the least gracious inclination, without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and thus, hateful and worthy of condemnation. Therefore, the basis for their baptism is neither a measure of grace which they have within themselves, nor eternal election, which is hidden for us.

Fifthly, God could either partially or fully sanctify children from infancy on. All children would have entered the world as being

perfectly holy if Adam had not sinned. This was the condition in which Christ was born (being perfectly holy), and in which elect infants are, who at their death are sanctified as perfectly as an adult believer is sanctified. God generally does not do this, however. Even if He does so with certain persons by way of exception, it is neither a precedent nor clear proof of this. Therefore, we state again that the basis for the baptism of children is not some inherent quality.

Sixthly, baptism is a sign and a seal, and thus has no other function but a signifying and sealing function. It neither works grace by way of inherent efficacy, nor is it an external sign whereby, whereupon, or wherewith God works regeneration. It is not comparable to what Christ did to make the miracle very obvious, availing Himself of something tangible in the performance of His miracles; nor is it comparable to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit being communicated by the laying on of hands. Thus, the gracious operations of the Spirit are not bound to the time or the administration of baptism. Baptism also does not bring the child into an internal state other than was previously the case, and God does not love the child with the love of His delight any more than before. Rather, the entire efficacy of baptism consists in this—that it seals the covenant of grace and all its promises to the child. This is not to suggest that the child has them already, but rather that the child is entitled to them and that God will accomplish this in this child. It is thus similar to the manner in which future benefits are sealed to adult believers.

Seventhly, all children of members of the covenant (irrespective of whether these members are converted or unconverted) who die in infancy—be it prior to or after the administration of baptism—must be considered as saved by virtue of God's covenant in which they were born and in consequence of which they are children of the covenant. If the parents are unconverted and unfaithful to the covenant, this will be imputed to their account, for the son will not bear the iniquity of the father. One must also consider them to be true partakers and children of the covenant as they grow older, until they show by their deeds that they are unfaithful to the covenant and thus are no partakers of its promises.³⁴ They then do not fall out of grace, nor is the seal nullified; rather, it is a proof that baptism was not a seal for them and that they have never truly been in the covenant. When, however, some

³⁴ On the basis of this statement, if taken out of context, one could conclude that à Brakel espouses what would later be called the Kuyperian doctrine of presumptive regeneration. However, the reading of this chapter in its entirety will negate such a conclusion.

are converted after leading a sinful life, baptism was a seal unto them, and they were thus truly included in the covenant and in very deed are partakers of its benefits, being entitled to them already since their childhood. This is true, even though between their baptism and conversion there was but an external resemblance to members of the covenant—in reference to both their personal spiritual state and sound judgment of others. Baptism only seals the elect.

Eighthly, the form for baptism asks of parents and witnesses, “*Whether you acknowledge ... that they (their children) are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of His church ought to be baptized?*” In order to understand this question correctly, it must be noted:

(1) This form addresses *members of the covenant* and speaks of *their* children.

(2) To be *sanctified* does not imply that the children at that moment are in truth possessors of the principle of faith, regeneration, and sanctification. It also does not imply that all baptized children are, and particularly, that my child is elect, will be converted, and be a partaker of salvation. Rather, it means in a general sense that children of members of the covenant, by virtue of the covenant made with them and their children, are entitled to its benefits and will become partakers of them. This is in distinction to the children of those who are not members of the covenant and for whom there are no promises in the Word. The salvation of the latter, if they die in infancy, is a matter which pertains to the sovereign and secret dealings of God, there being no foundation in regard to which something can be stated about them. And as long as children of members of the covenant manifest nothing which is either in their favor or disfavor, we may not discriminate among them, but by reason of the promise must deem them to be children of God until the contrary manifests itself. Therefore, to be sanctified in Christ means to be a partaker of Christ.³⁵

(3) To be *sanctified* does not mean to be included in an external covenant, for there is no external covenant. The parents have the salvation of their child in view, and not something of an external nature. The sacraments are not seals of an external covenant, but only of the covenant of grace, and signs and seals of the righteousness of faith. Also the child is acknowledged as being sanctified in Christ, which cannot be said in reference to an external covenant.

³⁵ In view of the first part of this paragraph it seems evident that à Brakel is here speaking of federal holiness and federal membership in the covenant of grace, rather than personal holiness and a saving relationship to this covenant. He makes an explicit statement about this on p. ###509.

It is furthermore acknowledged that the child is sanctified prior to baptism, and therefore ought to be baptized. The child therefore does not become a member of the covenant by virtue of baptism; he was already a member prior to baptism, and prior to the child's baptism there was also no other covenant but the covenant of grace.

(4) Some wish to change the form and say, "*to be sanctified in Christ, or those who are sanctified, must be sanctified in Christ.*" This is the result of ignorance and misunderstanding concerning this matter. If they wish these words to mean something different than to be in the covenant of grace (which appears to be the intent), I cannot understand on what basis they let their children or other children be baptized, since there is no other foundation for baptism but the covenant of grace, of which baptism is a seal.

The Scriptural Defense for the Baptism of Children

Having said this by way of introduction, we must now consider the following question:

Question: May and must children of members of the covenant be baptized?

Answer: Anabaptists, Socinians, and Brownists answer negatively, but we answer in the affirmative for the following reasons:

First, in the Old Testament children of members of the covenant had to be circumcised; therefore they must also be baptized in the New Testament. The first part of the statement is above controversy. The argument for the conclusion is as follows:

(1) Since there is one and the same covenant in both testaments, and this identical covenant also pertains to the children of the Old Testament who were obligated to receive the seal of circumcision, this is also true in the New Testament and they must therefore be baptized.

(2) Baptism has come in the place of circumcision; the external sign has changed, but the seal is the same. "In whom also ye are circumcised ... buried with Him in baptism" (Col 2:11-13). He who is baptized is said to be circumcised, since they are in essence one and the same sacrament.

(3) In both sacraments the same matter is signified and the purpose is identical: cleansing by the blood and the Spirit of Christ. If children had to be circumcised then, they must also be baptized today.

Secondly, children were baptized in the Old Testament. "... that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor 10:1-2). It is irrefutable that all their children were included

here (Exod 10:24). In a manner comparable to being baptized by immersion in water, they were all in the sea, and the water in the cloud which was always above them, covered them. This baptism was a seal of their spiritual deliverance, having escaped from the hands of Pharaoh by the water of the sea. They were overshadowed by the cloud—and thus protected against the heat of the sun and the Lord Jesus was present in this cloud (Exod 14:24). If children were then baptized as members of the covenant, they must also presently be baptized, for they are as much members of the covenant now as they were then.

Thirdly, the children of members of the covenant are in the covenant, and they therefore are also entitled to the seals of the covenant. Their inclusion in the covenant is evident in Gen 17:7, “And I shall establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations.” This was not only true in the Old but also in the New Testament, for believers from among the Gentiles also are Abraham’s seed and are thus included in that covenant. “... that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised” (Rom 4:11). Peter also confirms this: “Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (Acts 3:25). Add to this 1 Cor 7:14, where we read, “... else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” They do not have internal holiness, as has been proven in the above; rather, they are called holy because one of the parents is a believer, thereby being in the covenant. The holiness of such children is therefore a covenantal holiness.³⁶ An external covenant does not exist, for there is but one covenant between God and believers: the covenant of grace. The children of members of the covenant are therefore in the covenant. In this respect the Lord calls them His children. “Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto Me ... that thou hast slain My children” (Ezek 16:20-21). If they are in the covenant, they must also indeed receive the seal of the covenant. This is evident in Acts 2:38-39, where we read, “... be baptized every one of you ... for the promise is unto you, and to your children.”

Fourthly, children are partakers of the benefits of the covenant, the merits of Christ, the promises, and salvation itself. “But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me:

³⁶ See footnote #2 [p. ###506]. It is critical to bear this in mind when reading the remainder of this chapter.

for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:14). These were not children in the spiritual sense of the word, characterized by humility, but rather natural children who were brought to Jesus, and who were kept away from Him by others, since they were deemed to be too unimportant. The Lord Jesus declares them to be partakers of the kingdom of heaven, of which one cannot be a partaker except through Christ. Who then would dare to exclude those children from heaven who die in infancy? Consider also Acts 2:39, where we read that the promise is to *your children*. Those who are partakers of the promises of the covenant are also entitled to the seal of the covenant and its promises.

Objection #1: Nowhere is a command found to baptize children.

Answer (1) Scripture has been given to rational people who know that all must be understood to be members of the covenant who are in the covenant—whether this is the husband, the wife, or the children.

(2) It also is not written: Baptize a man, or baptize a woman, nor are they mentioned by first and last name.

(3) We read in Gen 17:12, “And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations.” In Acts 2:38-39 we read, “... be baptized every one of you ... for the promise is unto you, and to your children.”

Objection #2: Children cannot benefit from this; they do not understand it, and they frequently cry when they are baptized.

Answer (1) One must not be wiser than God who has thus commanded it.

(2) Any additional objections would also be applicable to the circumcision of children.

(3) The parents are comforted by baptism. It obligates and stimulates them to view their children as members of the covenant and to raise them as such. And when children come to the years of discretion, they may derive as much benefit from it as persons who are baptized as adults.

Objection #3: Christ was not baptized until he was thirty years old; we must therefore also wait with baptism until children come to the years of discretion.

Answer (1) We would have to conclude from this that one cannot be baptized before thirty years of age. This is refuted by their own practice.

(2) The institution of baptism was not until that time.

(3) Christ had been circumcised in His youth.

Objection #4: One ought first to be instructed, repent, and believe

before being permitted to be baptized (cf. Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:37-38; Mark 16:16).

Answer (1) It is also written, "... if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess 3:10). Should we then deprive children of food? Who does not see that in both cases the reference is to adults?

(2) We may not baptize any children except those of members of the covenant. Therefore, parents must first become members of the covenant, and as far as they are concerned, instruction, repentance, and faith must precede. These texts therefore do not run counter to the baptism of children of members of the covenant.

Various Conjectures About 1 Cor 15:29 Examined and Refuted

There are also conjectures about 1 Cor 15:29, where we read, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" This text has been debated very much. Also here it is true, "So many heads, so many opinions." What benefit is there in adding another opinion to this? Everyone chooses an opinion, not because he is convinced that it expresses the correct meaning, but only because he knows of no better one. Being currently engaged in expounding this letter for the congregation, we have come to this verse, and this gives us the opportunity to consider these words somewhat more carefully so that we may discern their correct meaning. We shall therefore add that which we have previously put in writing concerning this as an appendix to the doctrine of baptism before proceeding with the practical application.

We shall first present various sentiments and give our rationale as to why they cannot be approved; subsequently we shall seek for a different exposition. From among all these sentiments we shall only bring up these particular ones and examine them; the others are too farfetched and thus necessarily negate themselves.

Conjecture #1: This conjecture originates with the Papists. We shall present this, not because it has a semblance of truth, but in order to convince them of their error. They are of the opinion that after death, souls are gathered in a place which they refer to as purgatory, to be purged there prior to arriving in heaven. They furthermore believe that souls can be assisted in this by merits, prayers, masses, etc. They use this text in defense of their sentiment, and interpret *to be baptized for the dead* to mean *to be baptized for the benefit of the dead*.

Answer: No comment can be made, however, upon something which does not exist. They themselves show by their behavior that

they neither put any stock in this, nor trust their own interpretation, for they do not baptize daily for such souls, for whom they do celebrate daily masses (*cf.* vol. 3, chapter 51, p. 195).

Conjecture #2: Must one not understand “*to be baptized for the dead*” to refer to dying as a martyr for the truth? Severe and frequent suffering are typified in Scripture by water. “All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me” (Ps 42:7); “We went through fire and through water” (Ps 66:12); “The waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me” (Ps 69:1-2). Furthermore, baptism signifies dying a violent death and thus, to be inundated and baptized with blood. “But I have a baptism to be baptized with” (Luke 12:50); “... be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with” (Matt 20:23). That these words must be interpreted as referring to the baptism of blood is also evident from the following text, “And why stand we in jeopardy every hour ... I die daily” (1 Cor 15:30-31). The thrust of the argument is this: if there were no resurrection of the dead, why would one permit himself to be killed as a martyr? That would be useless and foolish. Since it is not useless and foolish, however, there must of necessity be a resurrection of the dead.

Answer: Much needs to be said in response to this exposition.

(1) Even though water is used to typify suffering, baptism never signifies suffering.

(2) The Lord Jesus indeed expressed His being put to death as being baptized and also applied this to the two sons of Zebedee. However, apart from this, being put to death is never expressed as being baptized. To apply this to all suffering and to the death of all martyrs is unacceptable. Since Christ here refers to His death as being baptized, Paul would also imply death when referring here to being baptized. This conclusion is incorrect. It would first have to be proven; however, this is not possible.

(3) The verses in 1 Cor 15 which follow speak of Paul’s suffering and therefore do not confirm this sentiment. These verses are not related to this verse; they furnish new evidence in and of themselves.

(4) It also does not agree with the expression *to be baptized for the dead*, which at best could mean to be baptized with death rather than for the dead.

(5) It also does not harmonize with the objective of the apostle, which is to prove the resurrection of the dead by means of these words. To die the death of a martyr does prove that the person is clearly convinced in his conscience of the truth of the gospel, and

that he will not deny it, but desires to confirm it with his death. This would not prove, however, that there is a resurrection from the dead on the last day, which it was the apostle's objective to do.

(6) Furthermore, such an explanation does not harmonize with the text. Paul is not speaking here of martyrs; there is no semblance of this being the case. Rather, he speaks of those to whom he refers as "they" and not as "we," "you," or "the congregation." He speaks of those to whom he has referred in verse 12 as *some among you*, who maintained that there was no resurrection of the dead. It is not probable that they would die for Christianity, for such persons could not have the resurrection of the dead in view with their martyrdom, as they denied this resurrection. This sentiment is therefore without foundation.

Conjecture #3: Must one not understand the words "*to be baptized for the dead*" to refer to the washing of dead bodies prior to burial? Such was the practice among the Jews. One reads in Acts 9:37 that the dead body of Dorcas was washed. Roman history also bears witness to the washing of dead bodies. Such washing was an indication of purification, and the resulting perfection of soul and body in the resurrection.

Answer (1) Even though the washing of dead bodies was customary among Jews and Romans, one does not know whether this was practiced among the Greeks and Christians in Corinth. That would first have to be confirmed.

(2) It is well known that the heathen and Sadducees among the Jews denied the resurrection of the dead and that their washing of dead bodies was not indicative of the resurrection of the dead; it was merely a civil custom. The Old Testament washings performed after having touched a dead person did not signify the resurrection, but rather sanctification in this life.

(3) This was indeed a baptizing *of* the dead, but not a baptizing *for* the dead. Therefore, this sentiment is also without foundation—yes, it does not have a semblance of validity.

Conjecture #4: Are not the words of the apostle "*to be baptized for the dead*" a reference to the custom of the first Christians who administered baptism upon the cemeteries of martyrs and Christians, doing so as it were before the countenance and in the presence of the dead, thereby expressing their hope in the resurrection?

Answer (1) During the time of Paul Christians had neither churches nor church burial grounds, nor separate cemeteries; how then would they be able to baptize there? Did they secretly gather the dead, half-burned bodies of martyrs, and did they bring them together to bury them secretly and then baptize at those graves?

Would this have been the practice during Paul's time? This is not probable and we do not have any early records which would indicate this. Such baptisms would have had to be performed very secretly, a practice which was not as yet performed in secret during the time of the apostles. Public baptisms upon the graves of the martyrs would have caused a great commotion among the people, and therefore such a practice was in all likelihood not in vogue.

(2) Furthermore, if such baptisms upon the graves of martyrs indeed occurred (a practice which is not believed to have been done during the time of the apostles), this would indeed give an impression of our mortality, and would also teach them to promote the Christian faith faithfully and to seal the truth with their death. This would not be a proof, however, for the resurrection of the dead, which is what Paul here endeavored to prove.

Conjecture #5: Does not the apostle refer to the baptism of dying persons when using the words "to be baptized for the dead"? Many postpone their baptism to the very last moment of their life, so that they may be kept from aggravating their sins, believing that sins committed after baptism are of a much more serious nature than those committed prior to it. There was also caution as far as the administration of baptism was concerned, since many, due to persecution, readily apostatized after baptism. They would be under probation and instruction for a long time; they were called *catechumeni*, that is, pupils. When such became ill and appeared to be dying, and if they were desirous to be baptized before their death, one would baptize such bedridden persons—called *clinici*—upon their deathbed. They were thus baptized prior to death, or as if they were dead. Therefore, the baptism of the dead is the baptism of the dying.

Answer: This long postponement of baptism is of a later date; it was a sinful abuse. The apostle would not have tolerated that in his time and would have earnestly opposed it. There is therefore not the least indication that the apostle would have had this in view with the words "to be baptized for the dead," since there neither was such a practice during his time, nor was there even a remote possibility of its existence. Also, the expression "to be baptized for the dead" does not harmonize with being baptized at the end of one's life. The one could not use the word ὑπερ (*hyper*) and also not τῶν νεκρῶν (*ton nekron*), that is, for the dead. This is not the meaning of the Greek rendering. This conjecture is therefore also unsatisfactory. Since these five conjectures are unacceptable, one must seek something else—something which is well-founded and will be satisfactory to everyone; that is, if one indeed can find such upon close examination.

A Doctrinal and Contextual Exegesis of 1 Cor 15:29

We shall thus seek to arrive at a logical conclusion.

First, holy baptism, when administered by way of immersion, vividly depicts death, burial and the resurrection from the dead. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Here we do not have burial in view, but rather, resurrection.

Secondly, holy baptism, moreover, seals the resurrection from the dead and, as is true for circumcision, is a sealed sign. “In whom also ye are circumcised ... buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him” (Col 2:11-12). I do not expect anyone to deny that holy baptism is a sign which seals the resurrection. We shall soon demonstrate this more extensively.

Objection: The apostle speaks in these texts of spiritual resurrection by regeneration, rather than physical resurrection, to which the reference is in this text. There is therefore nothing in these texts to confirm that the apostle is here speaking of bodily resurrection.

Answer: First, it is true that the apostle is referring here to spiritual resurrection. However, 1) this also implies the bodily resurrection of believers which cannot occur apart from spiritual resurrection and is a sure consequence of this resurrection. 2) The apostle also says that we are buried with Christ and risen *in Him*, so that baptism seals our union with Christ. Since believers are one with Christ, their experience must be identical both in death and in the bodily resurrection. The apostle shows this clearly in Rom 8:11, “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” It is an irrefutable fact that the resurrection of the dead is inherent in the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:12-13). There Paul conjoins them in such a fashion that the one either implies or denies the other. If Christ is risen, the dead will rise; if there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has also not risen. It is thus evident that holy baptism typifies and seals the bodily resurrection for believers.

Secondly, holy baptism seals to the person being baptized that God is his God, for they are baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Just as the Lord Jesus proves the resurrection of the dead from the fact that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—God not being a God of the dead but of the living (Matt 22:31-32)—it is thus evident that baptism, in which is sealed that God is the God of the persons being baptized, seals the resurrection of the dead.

Thirdly, it is beyond controversy that baptism is a seal of the covenant of grace and all its promises. However, to these also belong the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. “And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I shall raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

Because of these three arguments it is an irrefutable fact that baptism seals the bodily resurrection of the dead. If we apply them to this text, the argument of the apostle is as follows: If there were no resurrection from the dead, one would be baptized in vain and baptism would not seal the resurrection of the dead. However, one is not baptized in vain; baptism does seal the resurrection of the dead, and thus, the resurrection of the dead is a certainty.

It now remains to respond to two more difficulties.

Difficulty #1: The apostle refers here to a few individual persons and their activity. Prior to this he uses the words “we” and “you”; however, here he uses the word “they,” and this causes one to wonder whether the apostle indeed refers to the sacrament of baptism, since all are partakers of baptism.

Answer: It is true that the apostle here speaks of some individuals, and this strengthens our argument and explanation. One only needs to investigate to whom the apostle refers with the word “they.” He refers to them in verse 12, where we read, “... how say some among you ...” (1 Cor 15:12). They were the “some” who denied the resurrection of the dead. They were baptized, still belonged to the church, either administered baptism themselves or approved of baptism by their presence when it was administered in the church, which in turn sealed the resurrection of the dead. Such indeed could not deny the resurrection of the dead, for they would refute themselves by their own action. Such persons the apostle opposes in this chapter and in this verse, using their own behavior as a proof against them. If there is no resurrection of the dead, why are they themselves baptized, this being a seal of the resurrection?

Difficulty #2: This difficulty is the greatest and is the cause for various sentiments. The problem is this: Isn’t something special and of great emphasis concealed in the words “for the dead”? If not, the apostle could merely have said, “Why are they then baptized?” However, the apostle adds the words “for the dead,” and thereby something different and special is being said. What it is cannot readily be explained. What is it?

Answer: It is true that the words “for the dead” have not been added in vain; they have special emphasis and they do not ascertain

something else. On the contrary, they render the apostle's proof for the resurrection of the dead clear and forceful as long as one adheres to the argumentation of the apostle.

In my judgment, the darkness and misunderstanding is the result of conjoining τῶν νεκρῶν (*the dead*) and ὑπερ (hyper), this being the reason that these words are governed by the genitive, since the word ὑπερ (hyper) demands a genitive. I am of the opinion, however, that τῶν νεκρῶν (*ton nekron*) is not governed by ὑπερ (hyper=for), but by a word which is not mentioned here, and which, by way of conjecture, must be added and be deemed as being present.

This manner of speech is referred to as an *ellipsis*: a concealed matter or an omission. This is very common in all languages. One asks, for example, "What is the price of grain?"; to which one answers, "Wheat is so much, barley so much, and rye so much." Everyone will perceive that the word "price" is omitted each time, but must be understood to be there. One can likewise say, "The mayors of Rotterdam went to The Hague the day before yesterday, of Gouda yesterday, and of Delft today." There is a double omission of both the word "mayors," and of the word "went." A common person realizes without difficulty that these additional words are implied and to be understood without this creating any problem or obscurity. This manner of speech is also frequently found in the Bible. Every language has its own peculiarities which do not flow very well in other languages and which become obscure upon translation. Our translators have therefore included that which is omitted, have placed it between brackets, and have printed them with different letters. Observe such omissions in Luke 3 where the word "son" is frequently omitted and included by the translators. Also in Eph 2:1 something is omitted which is expressed in verse 5, and is completed with these words, "And you hath He quickened." Without adding this, the omission would be difficult to understand in our language; in Greek, however, one is as it were taken by the hand and guided to this. Consider also Rom 6:5, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." Here the words *in the likeness* have been omitted and have been added and placed between brackets by the translators. For scholars it is sufficient to say here that this is an *ellipsis*; we, however, needed to explain this more extensively for the unlearned. It is somewhat difficult to cause the unlearned to understand this technicality.

As we now consider these words, we deem that τῶν νεκρῶν (*ton nekron*), the dead, is not governed by ὑπερ (hyper= for), but by an

omitted word which also governs by way of the *genitive*. This is an *ellipsis*, that is, an omission, or something which is concealed. We need not seek far to find the omitted word. In this chapter, and also in this verse, the apostle repeatedly speaks of the *resurrection of the dead* (to be resurrected and to be raised are identical in meaning), and also mentions the word “resurrection.” “How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” “But if there be no resurrection of the dead ...” (1 Cor 15:12-13); “For if the dead rise not ...” (vs. 16); “... if the dead rise not at all” (vs. 29). Thus the apostle as it were puts the omitted word in our mouth: *resurrection*. If you mentally add this, the text reads as follows: “What shall they do which are baptized for (*the resurrection*) of the dead?” Why are they then baptized for (*the resurrection*) of the dead? In the Greek it would read: υ(περ (α)ναστα&σεωσ) τω~ν πεκρω~ν, that is, *huper (anastaeos) ton nekron*. And thus the *genitive* proposition υ(περ (*huper*), for, and τω~ν πεκρω~ν (*ton nekron*), of the dead, is governed by the genitive of the omitted word *resurrection*, α)ναστα&σεωσ (*anastaeos*). The use of “of the” in this construction rather than “the” does not change the meaning. It is common knowledge that we use “of” or “of the” to indicate the genitive; thus we say, “the book of books.” It is therefore not for (the resurrection) the dead, but rather *for (the resurrection) of the dead*.³⁷ In Greek there is no change; it reads “of the.” Whether I say υ(περ τω~ν πεκρω~ν (*huper ton nekron*), or υ(περ (α)ναστα&σεωσ) τω~ν πεκρω~ν *huper (anastaeos) ton nekron*, in both cases we have a genitive. If our translators had written *for (that which is) of the dead* as it is expressed in Greek: υ(περ τω~ν πεκρω~ν (*huper ton nekron*), everyone would have perceived that the word “resurrection” must be understood with it. If one therefore understands these words with an *ellipsis*, that is, an omission, everything proceeds with ease, and is in harmony with the words, the meaning, and the objective of the apostle. Then there is no diversion, and no difficulties remain. One will then observe that those words *for the dead*, that is, *for the resurrection of the dead*, give emphasis to the apostle’s argument, which is: How can they who are baptized for the resurrection of

³⁷ This sentence reads as follows in the Dutch: “Dus, de boeken der boeken; zoo opstanding, niet de dooden, maar der dooden.” à Brakel argues here that use of the Dutch genitive pronoun “der” would have resulted in a more precise rendering of the genitive construction in the Greek text. Since there is no English equivalent for the Dutch genitive pronoun “der,” we enlarged the translation a bit by inserting the omitted word “resurrection,” which harmonizes with what à Brakel has already done prior to this sentence. Our intention here is to preserve his argument that the grammatical construction in Greek supports his claim that the word “resurrection” is implied in this text.

the dead maintain that *there is no resurrection whatsoever*? Why then are they baptized for *the resurrection of the dead*? Baptism seals the resurrection, which the apostle expresses more clearly when he adds to this, *to be baptized for the resurrection of the dead*.

Objection: Such a manner of expression referred to as *ellipsis*, that is, omission, is indeed used both outside of and in Scripture. How can one prove, however, that there is such an *omission* here, and that the word “resurrection” must be implied here, for then one would be certain.

Answer: One must deduce this omission from the verbal and doctrinal context which, without this *ellipsis*, would either be unintelligible, confused, or obscure; whereas with an *ellipsis* it is clear, intelligible, and coherent, expressing the intent of the speaker or writer well.

It is in this fashion that one must proceed here. If one does not acknowledge the presence of an *ellipsis* or an omission here, the meaning remains unintelligible and obscure and one will deviate toward sentiments which are without foundation and which can neither satisfy one’s self nor another. The one espouses this view and another person deems another opinion to be the better one. Because neither is convinced of the truth, but merely because they know of no better opinion, they opt for what appears to be most probable.

On the contrary, if one acknowledges the presence of an *ellipsis* here, all is smooth and consistent in reference to the context of the words, the meaning of the text, the objective of the apostle, and the thrust of the argument. In one word, everything readily fits together and there are no obstacles.

As far as the insertion of the omitted word is concerned, it is used repeatedly throughout the entire discussion found in both this chapter and this verse. The subject matter at hand, the context, and the apostle’s objective lead us to the word *resurrection*, and they, so to speak, spontaneously yield it to us. The apostle mentions the word more than once, and he is dealing with the resurrection. I believe that no one will either desire, be able, or be willing to think of another word here, being fully satisfied with this fitting word.

Further proof for the presence of an *ellipsis* (omission) cannot be demanded. I deem that which has been said to be satisfactory. I am satisfied and have endeavored to satisfy others as well. We shall now proceed with the practical application.

Exhortation to be Spiritually Exercised with Baptism

It is not sufficient that one understands the essence of baptism. It is furthermore needful that one make proper use of and be

exercised with it; that is, regarding his own baptism, the administration of baptism, and his children who are to be baptized or who have been baptized.

First, one needs to be exercised with his own baptism.

If someone is not baptized, he must endeavor to be baptized. If he is of non-Christian or heretical parentage, he needs to know that what is written in Eph 2:12 is applicable to him: “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Therefore repent with your whole heart, believe in the Lord Jesus, and desire to be baptized, in order that thereby the washing of sins may be sealed, and you may be incorporated into the congregation of the living God and into the kingdom of Christ—for it is a command, “Be baptized every one of you” (Acts 2:38). If you despise baptism and refuse it, you shall bring the wrath of God upon yourself. “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of Him” (Luke 7:30).

If you are baptized, consider how you experience the reality of your baptism. If you live an ungodly, natural, careless, and worldly life, you must with terror reflect upon your baptism, for your parents brought you to the congregation of God, and have there surrendered you publicly to the Lord Jesus. There, as a member of the covenant, you received the seal, were baptized in God’s Name—that is, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost—and as a fellow-member of the covenant you were incorporated into the congregation of God. All of this obligates you to live a holy life as a true member of the covenant, and to walk as Christ has walked. Behold, however, you are an apostate, a reprobate, and one who has run to the enemy. You have departed from God, despised Christ, and contemptuously rejected your baptism. You were esteemed to be a true child of the covenant as long as you did not manifest the contrary. Now you manifest the contrary, however, and thus I must say: You have neither part nor lot in Christ, nor in all the promises of the covenant of grace. It will be more dreadful for you in the day of judgment and in hell, than if you had never been baptized. By your life, you cause the congregation of God and the truth to be slandered, and Christ to be dishonored, for it is as if Christ and the congregation had such ungodly members. Is it not sufficient for you to live an ungodly life unto yourself and to bear your own punishment? Must you besides cause the congregation to be slandered and Christ to be held in contempt? Choose one of the two: either live a godly life and walk worthy of the gospel,

or if not, come again before the pulpit and publicly recant your baptism before the congregation, declaring that you are displeased with the fact that your parents have had you baptized. Then depart and live as ungodly as you will, for then you will no longer be a disgrace to the church. However, what will then be your end? Your end will be what is recorded in Heb 10:29, “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” “But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you” (Luke 10:14).

A Special Exhortation Addressed to True Believers

If you are a believer, and if the principle of spiritual life is to be found within you, it is especially your duty to make good use of your baptism.

First, be reminded of your baptism as often as you hear your name mentioned, use it, or write it yourself. Meditate upon the following: “By that name the Lord has appropriated me to Himself, and in the public gathering of the congregation my name was pronounced loudly for the first time as being a fellow-member of the covenant. The name of my earthly father was not mentioned, but instead the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost was pronounced over me. By that name I am recorded in the church’s baptismal registry.” Approve of this deed of your parents, confirm it with your entire heart, rejoice in it, and may your baptism continually be as a binding relationship between you and the Lord.

Secondly, make use of your baptism to your comfort. God’s children are indeed very negligent in this, and in a very special sense are guilty here. For many it is as if baptism were but an external ceremony, as if there is no benefit in it, and as if it had been administered in vain to them. Many, when they think on occasion about their baptism, do so but for a moment, and then in a very aloof, superficial manner, without penetrating to the efficacy of their baptism. No longer proceed this way, nor deprive yourself of that which is declared in your baptism.

The apostle Peter says of baptism, “(... the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21). Therefore, in reference to your baptism, continually ask: “Has Christ died for me? Has not His blood been shed for the washing away of my sins and unto my reconciliation with Thee? Art not Thou my Father and I Thy child? Is not baptism a seal to

me? Can this seal be broken? Of course not; thus the forgiveness of my sins, reconciliation with Thee, and all the benefits of the covenant of grace are my portion. I shall hold fast to this and thus will go my way with joy and courage.” Strive to be exercised in this and it will greatly strengthen you that, without your knowledge, you have already been sealed in your infancy. Yield not to unbelief by being tossed to and fro continually, asking yourself: “Am I regenerated, am I already a believer, and is baptism indeed a seal to me?” How this will injure you and rob you of the efficacy of baptism! You are indeed conscious that sins—even the sins of your heart—are a bitter grief and a heavy burden to you. You know indeed that your heart yearns for and desires reconciliation with God, for the blood of Christ unto reconciliation, and to be continually in the presence of God and to live in His fear. You know that for this reason you make Christ your choice time and again, receive Him, and surrender yourself to Him, so that He may work all things in you by His Spirit. It is also your objective not to sin, but rather, to live a life pleasing unto the Lord. You know that it is truthfully so; this is now an evidence of grace, and thus also that baptism is to you a seal of the covenant. Therefore apply this to yourself and rejoice.

Thirdly, make use of your baptism unto sanctification. Baptism is the seal of regeneration (Titus 3:5) and of repentance (Matt 3:11). How forcefully the apostle exhorts to sanctification by way of baptism in Rom 6:1-7! He does so particularly in verse 4: “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Therefore reason continually with yourself in the following manner: “Shall I who have been buried with Christ in baptism; who have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death; who have been washed in His blood; who have been ingrafted into Christ and into His congregation—shall I yet continue in sin? Far be it from me! I desire therefore to arise from my sin, and I wish to manifest myself as being alive and as having been washed. I wish to be an ornament of the church and to bring honor unto Christ.” When you perceive your sin and your helplessness against sin, make renewed use of your baptism in order to be strengthened and stirred up, and esteem it to be the seal of the covenant in which the Lord has promised to remove the stony heart and to give a heart of flesh in its place, and cause you to walk in His ways (Ezek 36:26). Take these and similar promises, together with the seal of baptism, and come thus to the Lord, saying, “Lord, behold, here are Thy promises, and here is the seal of the promise, that Thou wouldest fulfil

them in me. I now prayerfully expect this, namely, that I, being cleansed, may walk in all purity and holiness. I believe Thy truth, I expect the fulfillment of the promises, and rely upon it.”

You must in the second place be exercised with the administration of baptism. When baptism is administered, you must neither leave the sanctuary, speak with others, nor think about or do something else, as if baptism did not pertain to you at all. Rather, you must attentively take note of the entire proceedings.

(1) Here you must observe the wondrous goodness of God that the Lord of heaven establishes a covenant with poor man and with us and our children, while passing others by—and that He now seals that covenant.

(2) Consider the magnitude of this matter. What precious and great truths are sealed, in which a member of the covenant will most certainly participate. When a child is baptized, he is exalted by God to a much higher level than an earthly king, so that more than a king is inaugurated.

(3) During the administration of baptism everyone must meditate and reflect upon his own baptism and consider: “In such a solemn manner, I also was once brought before the Lord and surrendered to Him, and the covenant was also sealed to me.”

(4) You must also think of your baptized children who, as is true for you, bear the seal of the Lord, and whom you have promised to raise in such and such a manner; this will bring conviction and stir you up.

(5) One must pray in the meantime that the Lord would make these children partakers of that which is sealed.

(6) And let your heart go out in love to the baptized children who are now members of the Lord Jesus, the congregation, and partakers of that same covenant.

In the third place there is also a special task for parents as far as their children are concerned—those who are to be baptized and those who have been baptized. They must not present their children for baptism out of custom or for a popish reason, as if baptism conveys salvation to the child. They should rather do so in consequence of their knowledge of this mystery, out of obedience to God’s command, and with a longing for the privilege that the covenant might also be sealed to that child. They should in sincerity of heart surrender that child to the Lord as being its sole proprietor. They should pray much for that child, asking that the Lord receive him, making that child a partaker of the matter signified.

The child should not be presented for baptism by just anyone; that is, by anyone who is able or willing to say “yes.” Rather, the witnesses should be of such a disposition to instruct the child,

while growing up, concerning the mystery of baptism, and exhort him to godliness in light of his baptism and the promises made to him. One must not make a show of the child as if he were being sacrificed to the world and the devil, but his appearance should rather be sober and modest. The child should be given a good name. The child should not receive a name of Christ or of one of the angels, such as, Immanuel, Michael, Gabriel, etc. Rather, they should be family names (thereby holding them in esteem), scriptural names, or names which have a special meaning whereby one expresses a wish by means of the name. One thus hopes that the child may indeed become a partaker of the meaning of that name, or one wishes to obligate the child to something by means of that name.

The child, having now been baptized, must be received again as from the Lord to whom one has surrendered him. One must consider him to be a child of God,³⁸ and as a nurse, raise him as such, doing so according to the rules which the heavenly Father has prescribed. “Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). One must teach the child the significance of baptism, to what he is sealed, and to what he is bound and obligated. Blessed is such a man. Blessed are such families. There the Lord shall command His blessing, even life forevermore. They will experience the blessing of Ps 128, which is generally sung at wedding ceremonies or at wedding receptions. Amen.

³⁸ See footnotes 2 [p. ###506] & 3; [p. ###507] that is, a child of God in a federal sense. God Himself refers to the small children in Israel as “My children” (Ezek 16:21; cf. Form for the Administration of Baptism).

CHAPTER FORTY

The Lord's Supper

In the natural realm, one is first born, and afterwards is continually in need of food in order to grow and be strengthened. This is also true in the spiritual realm: A person is first born again, and afterwards he is continually in need of nourishment. The Word of God is the means for both, and the Lord has also given signs and seals in addition to that Word. The first sacrament is baptism which seals regeneration, the washing away of sin, and the incorporation into Christ and into His church. We have discussed this in the previous chapter. The second sacrament is the Lord's Supper, by which the spiritual life received in regeneration is nourished and strengthened. We shall now consider this sacrament.

The Scriptural Names for the Lord's Supper

Scripture denominates this sacrament as *the Lord's Supper*: "... this is not to eat the Lord's supper" (1 Cor 11:20). It is called a supper since it was instituted in the evening. The Passover lamb had to be killed between two evenings and between light and dark, this being the latter part of the previous day and the beginning of the next day. This, according to Jewish calculations, began at sundown. By the time it was prepared and eaten, it would already be far into the evening. Upon having eaten the Passover (that is, the Old Testament sacrament), the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. It could not have been instituted any earlier since the Lord's Supper replaced the Passover, and two sacraments of identical nature could not have been observed at the same time. It could also not have been instituted later, for the Lord Jesus was captured that very night and put to death on the next day. Therefore, the chronological circumstances have nothing to do with the

essence of the matter. The early church frequently celebrated the Lord's Supper in the evening, as formal meals were then served in the evening. (Cf. Matt 25:12-13, etc.; Acts 2:15; 1 Thess 5:7.) Furthermore, persecutions later forced them to gather during the night. Then they would have their ἀγάπαι (*agapai* or *love meals*), at which time they partook of this sacrament (1 Cor 11). These love meals—due to the increase of the congregation and abuses which had crept in—were discontinued, and only the use of the sacrament remained.

The apostle also refers to this sacrament as the *table of the Lord* (1 Cor 10:21), signifying the food which one placed on it for consumption. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is referred to as the *breaking of bread* (Acts 2:46), and the cup is referred to as the *cup of thanksgiving* (1 Cor 10:16). These denominations are indicative of the loving and familiar fellowship of believers among each other, and with Christ, for the nourishment of spiritual life. The soul's inner communion with Christ is therefore also expressed by the word "supper" (cf. Rev 3:20; Luke 14:24; Rev 19:9).

The Papists, not being satisfied with this scriptural designation, use an unscriptural word for their unscriptural fabrication: the *mass*. We shall let them quarrel among each other as to the origin of the word "mass"; we shall hold to Scripture. In our consideration of this sacrament we shall maintain the same order as we did with the previous sacrament.

The Lord's Supper: Instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ

The first matter to be considered is the *Author* of this sacrament; He is the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. the historical record in Matt 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22). The apostle repeats this institution in 1 Cor 11:23-27. We must note Christ's actions and His words relative to this.

The *actions* of Christ are four:

(1) He took the bread into His hands, and after this the cup.

(2) He *blessed* and *gave thanks*, as all nourishment must be sanctified by prayer (1 Tim 4:5). As Christ blessed the nourishment which He distributed to others (Matt 14:19), He likewise has also blessed this bread and this wine—and thus also gave thanks for it—so that the efficacy for the communicants would be such as was intended by its institution. In doing so, that bread and that wine are set apart from common bread and wine for sacred use.

(3) He *broke* the bread, whereas we cut our bread; however, in those countries (which is still true in many countries) the bread is broken with the hand when it is eaten. When instituting this sacrament,

the Lord likewise took bread and broke it, and thus gave such a fragment to every disciple.

(4) He *gave* it to His disciples; that is, not into their mouths, but into their hands, as is customary at ordinary meals.

The *words* of Christ are both imperative and expository in nature. The *imperative* words are three in number:

(1) *Take*, that is, extend your hand, take hold of it, and help yourself.

(2) *Eat*, that is, I give it to you—not to preserve it, or to recline with it as having been sufficiently satisfied by the eating of the Passover, but I give it to you to eat it in the presence of everyone.

(3) *Do this in remembrance of Me*, that is, do this individually; and as I have commissioned you to preach and to baptize, I likewise obligate you to commit this sacrament to My church and to command her to keep it, so that My suffering and death may thus be continually depicted before her eyes, and she keep in remembrance My merits on her behalf and My love toward her. Maintain this practice.

The *expository words* (which simultaneously yield the motive for compliance) are, “*this is My body*,” and “*this cup is the new testament in My blood*.” It is the symbol and representation of My suffering and death, and a seal that My body has thus been broken for you, and that My blood has in this manner been shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

These words, “*this is My body*,” are not the essence of the institution itself; rather, the entire history related to it constitutes the institution. These words also do not have a sanctifying influence, much less do they change the bread into Christ’s body—a matter to be discussed further on. The sacraments are rendered sacred by thanksgiving and blessing. Thanksgiving is expressed toward God for the work of redemption on the basis of Christ’s suffering and death. The blessing upon the bread and the wine occurs by way of prayer—the prayer being that God would impress these signs as seals upon the heart of believers in order that they may be strengthened and encouraged thereby. This prayer of thanksgiving and blessing implies the consecration of the common bread and wine for holy usage so that they may be signs and seals. However, the benediction and the blessing had already been pronounced prior to Christ expressing the words, “*this is My body*,” for Christ did not say this until after He had taken, broken, and given, or was taking, breaking, and giving the bread. Also, these words are neither a prayer nor a benediction, nor are they of an imperative or ordaining nature, but they are narrative and expository in

nature. They convey the manner in which this bread and wine must be viewed and used: as signs and seals of His suffering and death for believers. The text itself also contradicts the Papists, since the word “for” is not found in the text—they have added this. If this word had been uttered by Christ, then the words “this is My body” would give the disciples reason to take and eat the same, so that the bread would already have been Christ’s body prior to expressing these words.

Moreover, if these words “this is My body” had the power to bring about a change, one would have to relate them as Christ did—and thus not add a word as they do by adding the word “for.” Also, the words which pertain to the cup are recorded variously by the evangelists. Matthew says, “... for this is My blood”; Mark omits the word “for,” and Luke says, “... this cup is the New Testament of My blood.” It is thus evident that the power to bring about change is not inherent in the usage of these words—indeed, no essential change occurs in the Lord’s Supper. In the entire Bible there is not one word to be found about such a change.

From this institution it is also evident how the ministers of the Word must administer the Lord’s Supper today, and must consecrate the bread and wine. This is not to be done by muttering under one’s breath and by pronouncing the words “for this is My body” while blowing and hissing as the wizards do. “... Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter” (Isa 8:19); in this they are imitated by the Papists. Rather the act of consecration, that is, setting wine and bread apart for sacred use, occurs by way of benediction and blessing, thereby requesting that God, who in His great goodness has given Christ, would also bless these signs so that they may be efficacious to the sealing and strengthening of true faith. After this the minister breaks the bread, and gives and distributes it to the communicants, doing likewise with the cup thereafter.

The External Signs of the Lord’s Supper

The second matter to be considered in reference to this sacrament is the *external signs*. We must here take note of the signs and the ceremonies associated with them. The signs are identical to those used in meals in order to nourish and refresh the body: *bread and wine*. One is to be neither superstitious nor concerned regarding the kind of bread and wine. The bread and wine which Christ used were such as were available and in common use. It is credible that in light of the Passover Christ used unleavened bread; but that was incidental, for leavened bread was neither permitted

to be used nor was it available in Jerusalem at that time. It is therefore not necessary to follow suit in this respect. It must be bread which one commonly uses for nourishment, thus to typify the spiritual nourishment of the soul. The wafers of the Papists and the Lutherans consist more of foam than of bread, and are not suitable for nourishment and strengthening. This is contrary to the institution of the Lord's Supper; Christ had no wafers, but took bread, broke off fragments, and gave them to the disciples. He did not give a wafer to anyone. As we may not be superstitious relative to the bread, so we must not be superstitious relative to the wine; that is, whether it be pure or diluted with water. The latter is customary in warm countries to prevent it from being overheated. However, it must be the "fruit of the vine" (Matt 26:29). It is also immaterial whether one drinks the wine from a cup or a glass; likewise the manner in which it is done. Common substances must be used without superstition.

The ceremonies associated with these signs are of express significance, and therefore are to be implemented as Christ has exemplified in the institution of it. Christ broke the bread, thereby signifying the breaking of His body, that is, His death. The apostle passes on to the congregation the ceremony of breaking; he refers to it as "the breaking of bread," and "the bread which we break" (1 Cor 10:16). The apostolic church did likewise, "... breaking bread" (Acts 2:46); "... when the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Therefore today the minister also must break the bread and give it as such to the communicants. The Papists and the Lutherans do this in an entirely different manner by giving a wafer to everyone without breaking it. No mention is made of the pouring of the wine. At mealtimes this is generally done by those who serve the table, and therefore in many localities the wine is poured by the deacons at the Lord's Supper; however, it is, as is necessary, given to the communicants by the hand of the minister.

Question: Must the cup be given to the communicants, as is true for the bread?

Answer: The Papists, motivated by blind superstition, fear that wine could spill out of the cup, or that some of it might cling to the lips or to the beard—and thus something of Christ's blood would be lost. Therefore, as an act of ecclesiastical robbery, they have deprived the common man of the cup, which until the year 1415 was given to each communicant along with the bread. In that year, however, the Council of Constance, in its thirteenth session, denied the common man the cup, with the knowledge and conviction that such is contrary to Christ's institution and gift to His Church.

They do not hesitate to state this boldly, and therefore we read, “This council declares, decrees, and determines that it be known that, although Christ has instituted this worthy sacrament as the Lord’s Supper by means of both signs of bread and wine, it must nevertheless be known that in spite of this ...” A bit further we read: “Even though in the original church the sacrament was received by believers by way of both signs,” etc. Contrary to this, we maintain that the cup, as well as the bread, must be given to believers.

This is, first of all, evident from the institution of the Lord’s Supper by Christ, who, according to their own confession, instituted it by way of bread and wine which He distributed to the apostles. “Drink ye all of it” (Matt 26:27); “... and they all drank of it” (Mark 14:23).

Evasive Argument: Christ gave the cup to the apostles and not to others, and therefore the priests must have the cup, but not the common man.

Answer (1) By the same argument, then bread must also be withheld from the common man. He should then be deprived of the entire sacrament, and it be reserved for the priests only, as Christ also gave bread to all the disciples and not to others.

(2) The apostles were here not present as apostles, but as communicants.

Secondly, the apostle, upon Christ’s injunction to him, instituted the Lord’s Supper among the Corinthians by way of bread and wine, and commanded them both to drink and to eat. “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup ... wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily ... but let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Cor 11:26-28). Here the apostle addressed the entire congregation of the Corinthians, which primarily consisted of common folk; he commanded them to drink. Therefore the common folk must have the cup as well as the bishops.

Thirdly, the apostle proves that believers have communion with Christ and each other—urging them to exercise this—by the fact that they all share the cup and drink from it. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16); “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Therefore all who have fellowship with Christ must thus as well drink from the same cup as they eat from the same bread and are baptized with one baptism.

Objection #1: The church is authorized to legislate and to make changes in reference to many matters. She has thus replaced immersion

by sprinkling in baptism, and the church is therefore also authorized to administer the Lord's Supper by means of bread alone.

Answer (1) Sprinkling in baptism is founded upon God's Word.

(2) Scripture makes no restrictions as far as immersion and sprinkling are concerned.

(3) Immersion and sprinkling do not pertain to the essence of baptism, but are external circumstances.

(4) The church has no right to add to or take away from the Word of God. If an external aspect of religion is not legislated in Scripture—be it in reference to time, place, or circumstances—then there is no restriction as far as the Word of God is concerned. If, however, there is a restriction, command, or prohibition in that regard, the church may not make a change whatsoever.

(5) The giving of the cup is not circumstantial but belongs to the essence of the sacrament, Christ having commanded and instituted it. That is the end of all arguments, and whoever deviates from this, opposes Christ who says, "Drink ye all of it" (Matt 26:27); "... this do ye" (1 Cor 11:25).

Objection #2: The Lord's Supper has often been celebrated by partaking of the bread only; it is thus not necessary to give the cup to the common man. "And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them" (Luke 24:30); here the cup is not given. "... if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh" (John 6:51). In the following passages the reference is only to bread. "And they continued stedfastly ... in breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42); "... continuing daily with ... breaking bread" (Acts 2:46); "... the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7).

Answer (1) These texts, advanced by the Papists, are a rebuke to themselves when they do not break the wafer which they give out.

(2) Luke 24:30 does not refer to the Lord's Supper; these disciples did not recognize Jesus and would not have received the sacrament from a stranger; it was but a daily meal to which the disciples had invited their unknown guest.

(3) John 6 also does not speak of the Lord's Supper which as yet had not been instituted. Furthermore, in this chapter the reference is to the drinking of Christ's blood, as well as to the eating of His flesh.

(4) In Acts 2 and Acts 20 we have a very common manner of speech; bread refers to divers foods, and the eating of bread with someone means to have a meal with him, at which there is both food and drink. "... as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees

to eat bread” (Luke 14:1); “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11; cf. 2 Thess 3:8,12; Gen 43:25; etc.).

Objection #3: In Christ’s body there is also blood; he who therefore eats bread, that is, Christ’s body, also partakes of the blood of Christ.

Answer (1) The bread is not Christ’s body, but it is and remains bread.

(2) One must not pretend to be wiser than the Lord Jesus who has instituted and commanded the use of the cup.

(3) Even though there is blood in a body, one does not drink this—and here one is commanded to drink.

(4) The bread does not signify Christ’s blood, but His body; the wine does not signify His flesh, but His blood. Each must be partaken of individually.

(5) Why then are the priests not satisfied with bread only? Who has given them the privilege of the cup above the common man?

The Matter Signified in the Lord’s Supper

Thirdly, we must reflect upon the *matter signified* in the Lord’s Supper. The signs have not been instituted for the purpose of serving God by partaking of them, for God is a Spirit who must be served in a spiritual manner. These external signs conceal spiritual matters. Christ has instituted bread as a sign and symbol of His body, and the breaking of it as a sign of the breaking of His body by His suffering and death. “This is My body which is given for you” (Luke 22:19); “... this is My body, which is broken for you” (1 Cor 11:24).

The wine is a symbol of Christ’s blood which was shed in consequence of a violent death. “This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20).

When seeing these signs, the communicant must not end in them mentally, but must proceed to the matter signified, that is, to the body and blood of Christ—broken and shed to satisfy God’s justice for the sins of believers. Thus, he must unite the sign to the matter signified. One must not do so on the basis of his own imagination, for then he would be able to ascend to the suffering and death of Christ by way of the physical; rather, one ought to do so upon the basis of Christ’s institution. It is thus not a union established by way of human imagination, but it is a union in the true sense of the word. However, it is not a local or physical union, but a spiritual union which is founded upon and derives its veracity from Christ’s institution. This union therefore does not relate to the substances of bread and wine as they are in the dish and in the cup at that moment; that is, apart from being used in the sacrament.

Instead, this union comes about when the communicant, by virtue of Christ's institution, exercises faith, taking note of the instituted relationship between the sign and the matter signified. This is similar to a stone which, taken from a pile and placed as a boundary marker upon the land, is not changed as far as its nature is concerned, but as to how it is viewed.

The Harmony Between the Sign and the Matter Signified

The fourth matter to be considered is the harmony between the sign and the matter signified, this being nourishment and refreshment. God has granted believers a twofold life: There is a natural life, which they have in common with all men, and they have spiritual life, which consists in the union of the soul with God. God also gives His people a twofold nourishment for this twofold life. He gives them food and drink for the maintenance of natural life, of which bread and wine are the most prominent. God also gives food and drink for the maintenance of spiritual life. Christ is this food and drink. By way of natural food and drink, that is, bread and wine, the Lord signifies the spiritual: Christ's body and blood. Thus as bread and wine have a nourishing and invigorating power when one partakes of them, Christ's body and blood (His suffering and death) upon being received by faith likewise nourish, strengthen, and invigorate spiritual life. "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Song 5:1).

Since these signs are not only symbolic, but also sealing, the believer thus accepts them as seals and, upon the basis of the promise, presses them upon his heart, believing that Christ's body has been broken for him, and His blood has been shed for him. He believes that thereby he has the forgiveness of sins and is a partaker of Christ and all the benefits of the covenant confirmed in Christ's death. A believer thus receives Christ while partaking of the signs and uniting the sign to the matter signified. He considers the signs as tokens of Christ's love for him, His merits on his behalf, and of His immutability in making him an eternal partaker of these benefits. It is thus that this spiritual food and drink nourish and refresh him in his spiritual life.

The Purpose for the Institution of the Lord's Supper

The fifth matter to be considered is the *purpose* for which the Lord's Supper was instituted. This consists in these three particulars:

First, there is the *remembrance*; that is, the declaration and confession of Christ, His suffering and death, and of what He has merited by reason of this suffering and death. "This do in remembrance of

Me” (Luke 22:19); “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come” (1 Cor 11:26).

This was not only true for the initial period of the apostolic church, as if—as some erring spirits maintain (having shown this in the previous chapter)—its intent was to remember that in Christ all types have been fulfilled, and to distinguish the Christians from the Gentiles and their sacrifices to idols. Rather, this is a sacrament given by Christ to His church and passed on by the apostles, doing so without any chronological restriction and thus for as long as the church will exist—until the end of the world (which also has been shown earlier).

Secondly, there is the *sealing* function. Previously we have also shown that the sacraments are sealing in nature. Thus, the bread and the wine seal to the believer that they are partakers of Christ and all that He has merited by His suffering and death; they are not merely signs of the mutual communion of believers, as is the view of the Anabaptists and Socinians. This is confirmed in the following passages: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16); “... this is My body” (Matt 26:28); “... this is My blood” (Matt 26:28). It is the goodness of God that He not only promises the forgiveness of sins to believers, nor only depicts by whom and how they receive the forgiveness of sins, but He furthermore gives them an earnest and seal, in order that they would believe that God indeed is, and will eternally remain, a reconciled God and Father to them in Christ, so that by this knowledge they may live in comfort and joy. Since the Lord Jesus has instituted this sacrament as a seal, believers must use it as such, and they, upon receiving the sacrament, must consider themselves as being sealed and rejoice in their temporal and eternal blessedness.

Thirdly, there is the mutual *communion* of believers. “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Communion does not occur with all who go to the holy table, for the communion which believers have with the unconverted does not go beyond a common confession. There is only communion with the godly—with those they know as well as those they do not know, and with those that are present as well as those who are absent—and thus not only with those of this particular church, but also with all who are dispersed over the entire world, for they unite themselves with Christ, and in Him with His body which is the church. Their love extends toward

them all, and being thus united with them, they are in agreement with all of them in their confession of Christ and His truth.

The Lord's Supper and the Popish Mass

Until the year AD 800 the doctrine of the Lord's Supper remained pure and all that was verbally expressed regarding it referred to its usage, the relationship between sign and signified matter, and its sealing efficacy. From that time forward, however, there was a gradual departing from this truth, and foundations for the most dreadful idolatry were laid.

The Papists fully deny the sealing function of the Lord's Supper, since they consider the bread and wine to be Christ's body and blood, and thus Christ Himself. Furthermore, they also maintain that every communicant, with his physical mouth, partakes of the entire Christ in His flesh—that is, God and man as He was born of Mary and crucified upon Golgotha—and swallows Him bodily.

To afford this a semblance of veracity, they maintain that the priest performing the mass—by mumbling under his breath these words, *for this is My body*—changes the bread and the wine, in very essence to the natural body and blood of Christ (His soul and Godhead included), and thus makes God from that piece of bread. Consequently, as many Christs come into existence as there are wafers over which he mutters these words.

Being not yet satisfied with this, they transform the Lord's Supper into a sacrifice—not of praise and thanksgiving, but as an atoning sacrifice in the literal sense of the word. Thus no one has the forgiveness of sins by the suffering of Christ unless Christ's body is daily broken and sacrificed for them. They do not dare to say that His blood is shed daily; but since the body of Christ is being broken, His blood must also of necessity be shed. They break the wafer—which to them is Christ—without Christ Himself being broken. How can the wafer be broken, however, without Christ's body being broken, if the wafer is Christ Himself?

This they call the *mass*, in which the celebrant (whom they call the priest) stands before a table (which they call an altar) decorated with silver, gold, and other physical ostentations, and with images, crosses, and burning candles (even during the middle of the day). He furthermore performs many ridiculous and ludicrous ceremonies such as the removal of a book from one location to the other, the making of knee-bends, the repeated overturning of stones, the ringing of bells, and a muttering behind his garment which he has lifted up from behind him. Last of all, he makes a Christ, that is, a God, out of his wafer, which he then lifts above his head and shows

to those who are present for the purpose of worship. This they do while bending their knees and smiting upon their breasts with great reverence. After the bread-god has been worshiped, he breaks him in pieces with a feigned trembling of his limbs—as if he were terrified. He then consumes him, upon which he empties the cup with one draught, having made its wine into the blood of his God. This then is a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, be it for the living or for the souls in purgatory who are strengthened by it as a hungry person is strengthened who dreams that he eats. Having concluded this, he declares, “*Ita missa est,*” that is, *this is in return for your money*.

They always have a supply of such created bread-gods at hand. They place them in a glass enclosure and occasionally they will carry this bread-god with great pomp along the street, obliging every one on the street to kneel before this god and to worship him. They daily carry these gods, having been worshiped along the way, in such enclosures to the sick. They then give this bread-god to sick persons who swallow him as their last meal or, when incapable of doing so, vomit him into a water basin; and there lies their god.

They pronounce the *anathema*—that is, the curse, which is as powerful and as much to be feared as their bread-god himself—upon those who cannot believe this and who will neither bow before this bread-god nor honor him in any form. Yes, not being satisfied with the pronouncement of curses, they kill and, by a thousand different methods of torture, bring to their end all who do not wish to honor this bread-god and will not join them in the commission of this most dreadful idolatry. Thus, this great harlot of Babylon with all her cannibals and drinkers of blood has become drunk with the blood of holy martyrs.

This is the abomination of anti-Christianity. This is the “strong delusion to believe lies” which God has sent them, not having received the love for the truth in order to be saved (2 Thess 2:10-11). He who does not wish to be eternally damned must abstain from this most dreadful idolatry and should rather die a thousand deaths than that he would deny Christ and be a partaker of their idolatry—lest he come with them into the eternal pool of fire prepared for all idolaters. “... idolaters ... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).

The Error of Transubstantiation

In order to uncover the abominableness of this idolatry, we shall raise some questions and answer them.
Transubstantiation (or a change

of essence) is the foundation for this error. Once we refute this, everything founded upon it will necessarily topple.

Question: Does the proclamation of the five words, *for this is My body*, change the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the natural and essential body and blood of Christ (His soul and Godhead being included), and thus into Christ Himself?

Answer: The papists answer resolutely in the affirmative; however, they are very much at odds with each other as to how this change transpires, and by the arguments which they use to refute each other's arguments (which from both sides are equally powerful and irrefutable) they unravel the very doctrine of transubstantiation which they seek to establish from both perspectives. The one party maintains that the bread is annihilated and removed, and that the body and blood of Christ instantly descend from heaven to replace the bread and the wine. The other party maintains that the body and blood of Christ issue forth from the substance of the bread and wine. Some call transubstantiation a preserving change and others call it a creative change; some call it a unifying change, and others are of a different opinion. It is no wonder that they are so divided and attack each other so vehemently, for a lie cannot be corrected—and in order to cover this up, they should be in agreement, lest they make it all the more evident. They are also not in agreement about the timing of this change. The one maintains that this change transpires when the priest says the word *hoc* (this); the second party maintains that it is when he says *est* (is); and the third party maintains that it is when he says *meum* (My). No one maintains that it is when he says *enim* (for), since they know that this is not recorded in the Bible, but has been added by them. It can be easily deduced from this that if all the words which together engender the efficacy of transubstantiation are not to be found in the Bible—if one of the five words were to be left out, this change would not occur—this doctrine would be entirely extra-biblical.

We indeed admit that

(1) the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper change in a relative sense and are appointed as signs of Christ's body; this is indeed not true for other bread;

(2) the bread and wine have been instituted as seals to assure believers that the body of Christ has been broken for them and that His blood has been shed for the forgiveness of their sins;

(3) believers, in partaking of it, unite the sign with the matter signified by an active faith, doing so upon the basis of Christ's institution.

Thereby they spiritually receive Christ, unite themselves with Christ, and become a partaker of Him, doing all this in very deed and in truth. We resolutely deny, however, that this change is one of essence. We shall prove this.

Proof #1: A matter of such importance whereby a man becomes an idolater if there is no such thing as transubstantiation (that is, a change in essence), should expressly have been made known in Scripture, the only rule for doctrine and life. There is, however, not one word or letter to be found concerning this in the entire Word of God. Let one single text be shown which expresses that the bread and the wine are transformed into the essential body and blood of Christ upon the pronouncement of the five words in question, and that the bread and the wine are also changed into both the soul and Godhead of Christ. They are not satisfied with the bread being transformed into Christ's body, for they know that if the soul is absent, there can be no sacrifice which is pleasing to God. They also know that if the bread were not to have become God, then it would be a most abominable act of idolatry if they were to worship it. I repeat, let one single text be produced. They have to this time not been able to respond to this, however, and they will not be able to do so unto all eternity, for there is neither a word nor letter concerning this to be found in the entire Bible. Thus, whatever they say and practice in this respect is but a human fabrication, which therefore must be rejected with abhorrence and the greatest aversion.

Proof #2: It is expressly contrary to Christ's institution of this sacrament which is recorded in Matt 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and 1 Cor 11. One will not find the words *transubstantiation*, *change of essence*, and *transformation*, but the contrary. The institutional formula is clear and evident; a plain person who reads the words of the institutional formula can understand them at once. It is stated clearly that Christ took *bread*, and that He blessed that which He took (as He always did when He partook of food). It is evident that He broke this *bread* which He had taken and blessed, that He gave this broken *bread* to His disciples, and that He commanded them to eat this *bread*. One will observe that all this had transpired prior to His pronouncement of the five words (Christ, however, only said four words), "for this is My body," and thus the *bread* could not have been changed by the pronouncement of these words—or else it should, after breaking and giving it, have been changed in the hands and mouths of the disciples; thus they contradict themselves.

Concerning the words *this*, *is*, and *My body*, the following is to be

noted. One even without education will be able to see with a glance that the word *this* refers to the bread which He had taken, broken, and given. Paul states this clearly: “*The bread which we break*, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16); “... the Lord Jesus ... took *bread*: And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you. ... For as often as ye eat this *bread* ... let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread” (1 Cor 11:23-28). Anyone who does not pretend to be blind will readily observe that it is bread rather than the body of Christ which is being broken, given, and eaten. Furthermore, by the giving of the cup it is said, “this cup” (Luke 22:20). This is likewise true for “this *bread*.” Also, in each transformation there is something which changes and there is something into which it changes, and therefore there is either no change or the word *this* must be understood to refer to *bread*. Furthermore, what a peculiar statement this would be if one were to understand the word *this* to refer to Christ’s body, for then it would be, “this body is My body; this is My body and the communion with My body.”

Christ says, “This is My body.” A plain person will first of all be able to see that the word *is* does not mean *to change* or *to become*, but that in this context it means as much as to say “Christ’s broken body,” that is, His suffering and death. This manner of speech is very common in social conversation, in Scripture, in speech unrelated to the sacraments, and in the sacraments. One can say of a painting: “This is the king of England, and that is the king of France.” The bride says about her engagement ring: “This is my fidelity.” Everyone knows that in such cases the word *is* implies that this is the image or the likeness of this king, and that this is the token and the seal which the bridegroom has given as a confirmation of his fidelity. This manner of speech is equally common in Holy Writ. We read there as follows: “The seven good kine *are* seven years” (Gen 41:26); “The field *is* the world; the good seed *are* the children of the kingdom; but the tares *are* the children of the wicked one; the enemy ... is the devil; the harvest *is* the end of the world; and the reapers *are* the angels” (Matt 13:38-39); “The seven stars *are* the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest *are* the seven churches” (Rev 1:20); “The seven heads *are* seven mountains ... and the woman ... is that great city” (Rev 17:9,18). It is also used in reference to Christ: “I *am* the door” (John 10:9); “I *am* the true vine” (John 15:1); “... and that Rock *was* Christ” (1 Cor 10:4). No one is so foolish as to take the word *is* in its literal sense; the most simple person would be able to see that it means as much as to say *it signifies*.

The word *is* is even understood to mean *signifies* relative to the other sacraments. This was true for the Passover, “It is the Lord’s passover” (Exod 12:11). Passover means to *pass by*. It signified the passing by of the angel who killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. However, he passed by all the houses of the Israelites at whose doors the blood of the slain lamb had been applied, and did not kill the firstborn. The children of Israel, while being prepared to journey, had to eat the slain lamb with girded loins, shoes on their feet, and staffs in their hands—for *it*, that is, the *Lamb*, is the Lord’s Passover. No one will be so foolish as to maintain that the lamb was the Passover itself. Everyone knows that it means as much as to say, “the lamb *signifies* the Passover.” This is also confirmed by the expression *to eat the Passover*, which occurs frequently in the Old Testament, and refers to the eating of the lamb. We thus have here a manner of speech which is figurative in a twofold sense. First, *is* means *signifies*, and then the lamb is called the Passover, signifying Christ. “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7).

We have the same expression relative to circumcision, “This is My covenant” (Gen 17:10). It is irrefutable that the word *this* refers to circumcision, and that it is not the covenant itself. Rather, it means as much as to say, “This is a sign of the covenant”—it signifies the covenant. We have the same manner of speech when saying, “this *is* My covenant,” or “this *is* My body.”

This is also true for holy baptism, which is called “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). Baptism is neither the washing nor is it changed into this. Baptism is also not regeneration; however, baptism—as performed by either immersion or sprinkling—is a sign and seal of regeneration.

We must yet consider the last words, *My body*. It is not a point of contention that the words, “this bread is (signifies) My body,” refer to the natural body of Christ, as being born of Mary and crucified upon Golgotha. Rather, the question is how this must be understood. It must not be understood as referring to the vital union of His body with His soul and Godhead, that is, the Person of the Godhead, but as being broken and crucified, so that it must be understood to refer to the suffering of Christ.

(1) For the Lord Jesus says this Himself: “This is My body which is given for you” (Luke 22:19); “... this is My body, which is broken for you” (1 Cor 11:24). It is also written about the wine, “For this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many” (Matt 26:28).

(2) It is likewise confirmed by the fact that in the Lord’s Supper the bread and the wine, signifying the body and blood of Christ,

were each consecrated separately, were each passed out individually, and in like manner consumed—all of which naturally is expressive of the death of Christ, which also must be commemorated and declared in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:26).

(3) Since these signs are also seals of the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28), and since the forgiveness of sins has been merited by Christ's death (Rom 5:10), the bread as it is present therefore signifies the body of Christ as being crucified and not as being glorified. The bread signifies the death of Christ and not Him who is now in heaven at the right hand of God.

From that which has been said, we draw the following conclusion:

(1) If neither at the institution of the Lord's Supper, nor anywhere in the Word of God, mention is made of transubstantiation, that is, of an essential transformation of the bread and the wine into the natural body and blood of Christ;

(2) if the institutional formula clearly states that Christ took *bread*, blessed *bread*, broke *bread*, gave *bread*, commanded to eat *bread* (all of this coming prior to the statement, "this is my body," as well as the words pertaining to the cup), and if after the blessing and also after the pronouncement of these words, the bread remains and is bread upon being eaten (1 Cor 11);

(3) if among those words the relative pronoun *this* refers to the bread, and the word *is* cannot and is not to be understood to have any other meaning than *signifies*—it being understood as such in general conversation, in Holy Writ apart from the sacraments, and as used for the other sacraments where the word *is* means as much as *signifies*—and the word *body* is to be noted as being broken and crucified, then neither is the bread transformed into Christ's body, nor the wine into His blood. Since the first part of the argument is true, as we have presently shown, the latter part is also true.

Proof #3: It is irrefutably true that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament. If such a change of essence from bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ did indeed occur in the Lord's Supper, it would be no sacrament, for in all sacraments these five matters must be true: 1) its institution as a sacrament; 2) the presence of an external, physical sign; 3) the signification of a spiritual matter which points to Christ; 4) a relationship between the sign and the matter signified; and 5) its purpose—which is to signify and to seal. All of this has been proven above. Such an essential change thus nullifies all this.

(1) It eradicates the external, physical sign, for it implies that the bread and wine are removed and do not exist when they are consumed.

(2) It eradicates the matter signified, for if the sign ceases to

exist, this is likewise true for the matter signified. If the bread is the body of Christ itself, it would not signify anything. It furthermore would destroy the body of Christ itself, since it robs the body of Christ of its magnificence, visibility, tangibility, and unity.

(3) It eradicates the relationship between the sign and the matter signified, for there is no longer a sign and no longer a matter being signified.

(4) It eradicates the purpose of the sacrament, for in the absence of a sign there is also no seal—which it nevertheless is, as it seals the suffering and death of Christ to believers. Since the body and blood of Christ itself would be present, it eliminates the remembrance of them, for remembrance relates to something which is absent. It thus follows that there is no such essential change.

Proof #4: Such a change does not occur in any of the sacraments; no one maintains that this is so. Yet the same manner of speech is used relative to the other sacraments: This is the Passover; this is My covenant, baptism, the washing of regeneration. The lamb remained a lamb and did not become Christ; circumcision continued to be the cutting off of the foreskin; and the water in baptism remains water. Since all sacraments are of one and the same nature, however, all have the five requirements just mentioned, and if such a change neither occurs relative to the two sacraments of the Old Testament, nor to baptism in the New Testament, there is also no such change for the Lord's Supper; sacraments are identical in nature.

Proof #5: Transubstantiation unravels several articles of faith confessed by the parties themselves, for such an essential change:

(1) Eradicates the truth concerning the human nature of Christ, whereby He became like unto us in all things. A human body without actual dimensions, capable of being represented by a crumb of bread, is not a human body. That which is separated in thousands of millions of places is not singular, but multiple in nature, and thus cannot be the one body which was born of Mary. That which is invisible and non-tangible is not a true human body. Therefore, if such an essential change indeed took place, Christ would not have a true human body as we do.

(2) Eradicates the one sacrifice of Christ by His death, for it intimates that Christ dies thousands of times each day, and that His body is broken and His blood is shed many times.

(3) Eradicates and conflicts with the ascension of Christ, which teaches that Christ's body, which visibly ascended into heaven, is indeed there and will remain there until the last day, "For if He were on earth, He should not be a priest" (Heb 8:4). Transubstantiation

implies, however, that this body continues to be on earth and is preserved by the church in special containers.

(4) Eradicates and conflicts with His second return unto judgment when we expect Christ from heaven. This could then not be true, for He would already be upon earth—and if He is already bodily present in all the churches upon earth, one would be expecting Him in vain. This proves the falsehood of this pretended change.

Proof #6: In addition to the proofs from Scripture, we shall also add one or two from the natural realm. First of all, God is a God of truth, who has implanted truth in His creatures and has given man the understanding to know this truth and to steadfastly walk therein. God, however, has ordained that an object can only be at one locality and that each object has its own location. Thus, the location occupied by the one object cannot simultaneously be occupied by another or many other objects. Each object has its own proper size and dimensions so that a thousand elephants cannot be in the same location as a small fly. An existing object, being one and the same object as long as it exists, can neither be created nor produced thousands of times. Also, an object or substance cannot be without its own proper qualifications and essential attributes. One and the same body, being alive at one location, cannot be dying and be dead at another location.

As far as occurrences are concerned, an occurrence cannot transpire independently from a substance, for the occurrence would then no longer be an occurrence but a substance. Also, one particular occurrence cannot transpire in relation to one substance after the other. These truths are inherent in the realm of nature, and man acknowledges them as infallible truths.

Transubstantiation thus is entirely contrary to nature and eradicates the law of nature in respect to independent entities as well as incidents. It teaches 1) that one and the same body of Christ is daily present at hundreds of thousands of localities, each miles apart from each other. The Papists maintain that there are as many bodies of Christ—and thus also as many Christs in the world—as there are wafers which are consecrated and which daily are being consecrated, while yet maintaining that it is but one and the same body of Christ; 2) that the entire body of Christ—its size being as it has hung on the cross—with all its members occupies the space of a small crumb of bread, and that the feet are where the hands are—the head and all other members also occupying the same space—while yet preserving the identical size and dimensions of the body; 3) that the body of Christ, while being and remaining in heaven, is generated thousands upon thousands of times by the act

of consecration, and yet remains one and the same body; 4) that the same body of Christ, while living in glory in heaven, is broken upon earth, is trampled upon by human feet, and can be eaten by rats and mice; 5) that the same visible and tangible body of Christ to which He referred (Luke 24:39) was simultaneously invisible and intangible, etc.; and 6) that the characteristics of bread and wine—smell, taste, and its ability to feed and to make drunk—remain without their being bread and wine, for the latter are removed in their opinion. Observe therefore that transubstantiation is utter foolishness as well as a lie. One can hardly believe that people are capable of subscribing to such nonsense; however, God has sent them a strong delusion to believe the lie, having rejected the love for the truth.

As foolish as their doctrine is, they yet endeavor to protect it by some evasive arguments.

Evasive Argument #1: The sacraments obligate one to believe, and wherever faith is exercised, reason must yield.

Answer (1) That faith which is required in the sacraments consists in believing that Christ has ordained bread and wine to be signs and seals of His crucified body unto the forgiveness of sins. Faith, however, does not relate to the nature of the bread and wine, any more than it does to the nature of the water in baptism; the nature of both is infallibly known.

(2) God never commands us to believe something which inherently is a lie and unravels His truth established in nature—all this is true for transubstantiation. God does indeed command us to believe something that is *beyond* the reach of reason, but never in that which is *contrary* to truth and *which is contrary* to reason; that is, when the truth of the matter is correctly understood.

(3) Sometimes faith relates to invisible things conjoined to physical objects, such as is true for all sacraments. Faith must then be exercised toward those matters which are invisible and transcend reason, while yet maintaining the true nature of the physical objects. Faith is not exercised toward that which one can see (Rom 8:24).

Evasive Argument #2: God is omnipotent and can do whatever pleases Him, and He is thus indeed able to do all the above-mentioned matters.

Answer: (1) Although God is omnipotent, He nevertheless cannot lie (Titus 1:2). To do these contradictory matters mentioned before, is to lie, for this would be contrary to the truths God has assigned to these matters. He, therefore, cannot do this. Thus, truth, not omnipotence, is the issue here.

(2) Even if God were able to do it—which He nevertheless

cannot do, it being contrary to truth—it nevertheless does not follow that God necessarily wishes to and actually does do so.

Proof #7: All men at all times—by way of touch and due to the nourishing and inebriating efficacy of bread and wine—have by their external senses of smell, taste, and touch verified that after the consecration, not the least essential change has occurred in the bread and wine—considering that all senses function normally, internally as well as externally, as far as the required circumstances are concerned. It has been verified that, rather than being a human body and human blood, it truly is and remains bread and wine, just as it was prior to this moment. This cannot be refuted. It is thus certain that there is no such thing as transubstantiation and that it is a matter of the utmost foolishness and dishonesty to maintain that the bread and wine are transformed into Christ’s body and blood by the pronouncement of five words.

Evasive Argument: Against this no response is made other than that 1) one is required to believe here as stated in the answer above; 2) one can be deceived by his senses.

Answer (1) That which can be does not necessarily have to be.

(2) That which has been experienced in identical fashion by all the senses of all healthy people at all times is according to truth and cannot be deceptive. Everyone is certain of this, and he who would refute this would rightfully be considered insane.

From all this we conclude with certainty and assurance that the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper are not changed into the body and blood of Christ. Let us now answer their objections.

Objection #1: The words of Christ, “this is My body,” must be understood literally, and thus the word *this* does not refer to bread. It is evident that its *gender* does not agree with that of the word “bread,” but rather with that of “body”; it thus refers to “body.” The word “body” literally refers to Christ’s body, as born of Mary and crucified upon Golgotha. The word *is* must also be interpreted literally as to mean “to be so naturally and in very deed.”

Answer: First, this objection does not pertain to the point of contention. The point of contention is whether or not the bread and wine upon the pronouncement of these words, “for this is My body,” are changed into the natural body and blood of Christ. These words, however, do not contain one letter or dot pointing to transubstantiation or change of substance, nor do they imply that this change would occur upon the pronouncement of those words. It is thus very evident that by using these words as an argument one misses the point of contention. Herewith we have

answered this objection. To provide ample proof, however, we shall follow this argument step by step.

Secondly, the word *this* does indeed refer to the bread which Christ took, broke, and gave; this has been proven above. The argument advanced by the opposing parties, namely, that the word *this* refers to the body rather than to the bread since its gender does not agree with the latter, is automatically invalidated.

(1) The word *this* cannot be viewed here as *adjectival*, but must necessarily be considered as a *substantive*. If it were *adjectival*, the words would read as follows: *This My body is*, that is, it exists. This is nonsensical, for the disciples saw that Christ was indeed bodily present, and the repetition of the word “body” would be illogical—for then it would read *this my body is my body*.

(2) If one relates the word *this* to the body, they themselves overthrow their transubstantiation; for then there would be nothing that was changed, since in every change there is something which changes and there is something which is the result of the change. That which is to come forth from the change is the body, but if the word *this* does not refer to bread, there is nothing which is changed into Christ’s body. Some parties perceive this and they are therefore very much in disagreement among themselves.

Thirdly, they maintain that the words, *My body*, must be understood as referring to the natural body of Christ. However, this can immediately be refuted with many arguments, and it can be demonstrated that the text itself refutes them. Christ’s body was present at the table, and Christ, with His hand, took the bread and not His body. He broke the bread and said, “This is My body which is broken for you.” Thus, the body of Christ was declared to be broken, crucified, and put to death while He stood before them alive and uninjured. And, if the body of Christ at that moment had been broken and sacrificed unto the forgiveness of sins, all would already have been finished and Christ would not have had to suffer and die, for He has perfected everything with *one sacrifice* (Heb 10:14).

Fourthly, they wish to understand the word *is* as declaring that the bread is the natural body of Christ. That it is not the natural body of Christ and that this is not expressed by the word *is* has also been proven above. We repeat once more that the words, *this is My body*, must be taken and understood in harmony with Christ’s objective. He expresses His intent to rational people by a manner of speech which is most apparent, clear, common, and understandable. If the word *is* must be taken for *to be in a natural sense*, then it could neither have been understood nor comprehended by the disciples, nor by any rational creature; for this would result in

a thousand absurdities and a complete reversal of the order of nature. However, when we understand *is* to mean *signifies*, then the language is most common, apparent, clear, and understandable. It is an irrefutable fact that it is just as common to understand the word *is* to mean *signifies* as to understand its meaning *to be in a natural and essential sense*. The word must therefore be interpreted according to the context and the matter about which this is said. If one says of a painting, “This is my father, and this is my grandfather”; if one says of an engagement ring, “This is my fidelity”; and if one says by way of a metaphor, “Dan is a serpent, Naphtali is a hind, Issachar is a strong ass, Joseph is a fruitful vine (Gen 49), Asshur is a rod, Herod is a fox, and the ungodly are blots, clouds without water, dead trees and wild waves of the sea,” would one then not rightfully be considered a fool in interpreting the word *is* to mean *to be* and consequently to exclaim, “Dan, Naphtali, Issachar, and Herod are beasts,” for it is written, “is a serpent, is a hind, is an ass,” etc. Everyone knows, however, that one cannot take these expressions literally; a child will be the judge here. Consider the following as well: Seven kine are seven years, seven heads are seven mountains, and the woman is the great city. It is very obvious that *is* means as much as to say, *signifies*. This is much more true concerning Christ: “I am the door, and I am the vine.” It is also written, “Christ is our Passover; the Rock was Christ.” From all this we establish the irrefutable fact that one in actuality must not conclude the word *is* to refer to natural existence, but that it means as much as to say, *signifies*.

Evasive Argument: This is indeed true apart from the sacraments, but here we are dealing with a sacrament, and therefore one cannot reason from the first to the latter.

Answer (1) From what has been said, we have observed what is the meaning of the word *is*. If it has this meaning in this one instance, it can also mean this in another instance. This is indeed certain: Simply because it says *is*, one cannot conclude that the bread is the natural body of Christ. Rather, one must show from the context that the word *is* must be taken literally. Such evidence is lacking, however, and as we have shown above it is evident from the entire text that it is not used in a literal sense by Christ.

(2) In order to satisfy them, however, that this is also a common manner of speech in reference to the sacraments, consider what is written concerning the Passover. “It (the Lamb) is the Lord’s passover” (Exod 12:11). The lamb was not changed by the act of passing by. Consider what is written about circumcision, “This is My covenant” (Gen 17:10), and about baptism, “The like figure

whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ... but the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Pet 3:21).³⁹

What more is there to be said?—perhaps the following.

Evasive Argument: In matters pertaining to faith and testaments one must not speak obscurely and figuratively, but one must speak clearly.

Answer (1) He who has given man speech should not be instructed as to how He ought to speak.

(2) Christ generally spoke about matters of faith by means of parables and figurative language.

(3) Jacob’s testament in Gen 49 is replete with figurative expressions.

(4) Figurative expressions are to be distinguished from ambiguous expressions. The latter can engender some obscurity; however, figurative expressions are clear, shed more light upon the matter, and express the nature of the matter more clearly and forcefully—especially if the expression is known and is as common as the actual matter itself, which is true here for the word *is*.

(5) The opposing parties themselves must be convinced that Christ uses a figurative expression in the institutional formula of the sacrament. “This cup is the new testament” (Luke 22:20). It first of all follows that not the cup itself, but that which it contains is understood by this. Secondly, this cup is not the New Testament, and also its content is not the New Testament. Rather, it is the confirmation and seal of it, which by the shedding of His blood has been fulfilled and accomplished for believers. Furthermore, they do not take the words *which is shed* literally, for they deny all shedding of blood in the mass, since in their opinion, the blood is not separated from the body, and the pouring out points to the shedding of blood at the cross. It means as much as to say that it would soon be shed, of which Christ made demonstration in the Last Supper. They also must admit that in these words, *this is My body*, there is a figurative manner of speech. They interpret this in their own way, when they understand this to refer to that which is present under the appearance of bread and wine, or is not yet, but upon the conclusion of the pronouncement of these words, it becomes an independent entity in the general sense of the word or an *inviduum vagum*, that is, something undefined and without name, etc. They vehemently disagree, however, about this among each other. Neither do they interpret the word *is* in its literal sense, but understand this to mean either, *is comprehended, shall be, be, be*

³⁹ The Dutch reads as follows: “... die een vraag is van een goed geweten.” The literal translation of this would be, “... which is the answer of a good conscience.”

changed or be transubstantiated. They also do not take the word *body* literally, considering it to be either a body without size, with size but without dimension, or with both size and dimension but not locally defined, for even among themselves the one holds to this and the other to that view. They must all understand everything in a figurative sense, however, for a literal body is both visible and tangible, and its size and dimensions are local in nature. Does the word *body* also refer to the soul and the Godhead?

Objection #2: “This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20). They insist that one cannot say *which*, but rather *the which*—that is, the cup—is shed, since the words, *is shed*, agree *in causa* not with blood, but rather with cup, and by the cup one must understand that which is in it: the blood of Christ. The meaning would then be as follows: “This My blood, which is shed for you, is the new testament in My blood.” From this they wish to conclude that the wine has been changed into the blood of Christ.

Answer (1) This objection refutes itself, for it is certain that the blood of Christ is separated from Christ’s body. It is then equally certain that there is also a shedding of blood; however, they do not wish to admit both, calling their mass an unbloody sacrifice.

(2) The word *cup* must indeed be understood to refer to its content, but there was no blood in it, but rather wine—Christ calls it the “fruit of the vine” (Matt 26:29).

(3) Even if one were to associate the words, *is shed*, with the cup, the meaning is equally clear. The cup, that is, the wine which is in it and which will be poured forth, is the New Testament; that is, it seals to believers the New Testament which is sealed in Christ’s blood—the wine being a sign and a seal of this.

(4) It is common with other writers as well as in the New Testament, that words which agree *in causa* with another word, nevertheless—as far as meaning is concerned—agree with the word upon which one focuses, as is to be observed, for instance, in Matt 28:19 and Rev 1:5.

Objection #3: “He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him” (John 6:56).

Answer (1) This text does not refer to the Lord’s Supper, for it neither had been instituted as yet, nor was there any reference or prophecy concerning it. Rather, the reference is to the manna, so that according to the popish argument one could conclude that Christ had been changed into manna, for He says, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35).

(2) However, Christ here speaks of the spiritual partaking of

Christ by faith, which occurs at all times. He does not refer to a physical eating and drinking, for He says expressly in verse 63, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life.”

Objection #4: “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27).

Answer (1) This text answers for itself, for Paul says that the cup must also be given to the common man, as well as that whatever is eaten and drunk is bread and wine; it is consequently not the body and blood of Christ.

(2) The unworthy partakers make themselves guilty of the body and blood of Christ since such unworthy eating and drinking is to despise and have contempt for the suffering and death of Christ. It is like someone who, in indignation, mars the king’s seal or image, thereby demonstrating that he despises and has contempt for the king himself. It thus remains unmovably true that the wine and bread in the Lord’s Supper are not the literal body and blood of Christ, but rather that they are signs and seals of Christ’s suffering unto the forgiveness of sins.

The Error of Consubstantiation

Question: Does consubstantiation occur at the Lord’s Supper?

Answer: The Lutherans maintain that the bread and the wine do indeed not change into the body and blood of Christ, but remain bread and wine. Instead, they maintain that Christ’s body and blood are *in, with, and under* the bread and the wine, and that relative to the words, *this is My body*, the word *this* refers to both the bread and the body of Christ together. This they refer to as *consubstantiation*. We deny this and prove this with the same arguments by which we have refuted popish *transubstantiation*.

First, this is evident from the history of the institution which relates clearly that:

(1) Christ was bodily, locally, and visibly present at the table, and was not injured, broken, dead, but alive. Christ took the bread, broke and gave it, and the disciples ate the given bread. Christ said of this bread, “This is My body,” so that the word *this* cannot refer to anything else but the bread only.

(2) Paul understood it thus when he says, “The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). The body of Christ was not the communion of the body of Christ, but only the bread was the communion of Christ, signifying and sealing it.

(3) This is also evident when considering the other sign. Concerning the cup Christ says, “This cup is the new testament.” The word *this* cannot but refer to the cup, for *this cup* is added, that is, *this wine* in the cup. Therefore the word *this* cannot refer to anything else but the bread, and not simultaneously to Christ’s body as well. For it would then necessarily follow that Christ had two bodies—one body that was alive and was visibly, tangibly, and locally at the table which took the bread, brake and gave it; and another invisible body which was taken, broken, and given. Or else the one body would have to be simultaneously visible and invisible, and entirely whole, while at the same time broken. This is absurdity itself.

(4) They maintain that these words, *this is My body which is broken for you*, must be taken literally. They do not in the least way want to permit the possibility of figurative speech. The words themselves will then convince them, however, for they must either agree with the Papists and maintain that it is Christ’s body itself, or else they are without any proof—for in the words, *this is My body*, there is not the least reference to *in, with, and under*. Also, when it is stated, “which is broken,” they must admit something figurative in this expression, for the body of Christ was neither broken at that moment, nor His blood as yet shed. Rather, it means as much as to say (they themselves being the judge), “which shall soon be broken.”

Secondly, the Lord’s Supper is a sacrament. A sacrament is not the matter itself, however, but rather a sign and seal of the matter. If Christ’s body were in, with, and under the bread, it would be the matter itself and it thus would be no sacrament.

Thirdly, there is no such bodily presence in all the other sacraments, and thus also not in this sacrament, for the identical expressions are used in the other sacraments: *This is the Passover, this is My covenant, which is the washing of regeneration, and which is the answer of a good conscience*. If therefore identical expressions in the other sacraments are not indicative of the presence of Christ as being in, with, and under, then it is also not the case in this sacrament. These expressions are identical, and all sacraments are of one and the same nature: They consist in signs and seals.

Fourthly, such a bodily presence conflicts with the incarnation of Christ, for it denies that Christ has become like us in all things, and thus denies that He is very man of man. It also conflicts with Christ’s ascension and sitting at the right hand of God, which indicate that Christ according to the body is not upon earth, but has left it. It would then necessarily follow that if Christ were still on earth, He Himself would be no High Priest.

Fifthly, such a bodily presence would be destructive of the body,

for the entire human body is confined to one place, is impenetrable (that is, the one body does not penetrate the substance of the other), and cannot be in the same place where another body is. A body is tangible, visible, etc. Therefore the proposition of Christ's bodily presence in the Lord's Supper is full of absurdities which contradict both nature and Scripture.

Evasive Argument: God is omnipotent, and therefore He can bring it to pass.

Answer: God is a God of truth, and given truths are part and parcel of the nature of His creatures. It is contradictory to be a true body and yet to be invisible, intangible, and penetrable, etc. Furthermore, from the power of God one cannot conclude the existence of something. However, the existence of something under specific circumstances must be proven from God's revealed will—from the Word of God. The Word makes no reference whatsoever to the presence of Christ's body in, with, and under the bread; rather, it testifies of the contrary—and that is the end of all arguments.

It now being a certainty that the bread and the wine are not changed into the body and blood of Christ, and that the body and blood of Christ are not physically present in, with, and under the bread and the wine, the sentiments of both have necessarily been invalidated, namely, that the body and blood of Christ are physically present in the Lord's Supper and are in a physical manner eaten and drunk with the physical mouth. We maintain that Christ, as to His suffering and death, is spiritually present in the signs of bread and wine. These signs, by reason of and on the basis of Christ's institution, are partaken of by faith. Believers are thus united to Christ in His suffering and death—this being the matter signified—and partake of these as seals of the forgiveness of sins. We furthermore maintain that the partaking of Christ by faith is immediately applied to the heart, and that spiritual communion is exercised with Christ by virtue of the operation of the Holy Spirit. Christ is thus truly present and believers truly exercise communion with Christ; however, they do so in a spiritual rather than a physical manner—for that which is spiritual is as real as that which is physical. We reject with abhorrence, however, the physical presence of Christ, and the physical eating and drinking of His natural body and blood by way of the physical mouth.

First, this is evident from all the arguments whereby we have refuted the errors of both parties: *transubstantiation* and *consubstantiation*. The foundation having been eradicated, the entire structure of their argument of necessity collapses—all of which has been dealt with in the above.

Secondly, this is evident from Christ's ascension. If Christ has ascended to heaven, has left the earth, is with His body in heaven only, would not be a High Priest if He were still upon earth (Heb 8:4), and is only expected from heaven upon the clouds on the last day, then Christ is not physically present in the Lord's Supper, and one can thus not eat Him physically with his physical mouth. Or else one must maintain that those texts all pertain to His visible rather than invisible presence. This is a futile argument, for Christ's body cannot invisibly be present elsewhere. It also conflicts with all the expressions of Christ pertaining to His departure and return.

Thirdly, it is furthermore evident from the nature and the objective of the sacrament. It is a sacrament of nourishment, for it is partaken of by way of eating and drinking. However, the objective is to feed the soul, and not the body. The nature of the nourishment is consistent with the manner in which it nourishes. Christ's natural flesh and blood are physical, and if it were indeed eaten and drunk with the physical mouth, it could not do otherwise than feed the body, and it could in no wise penetrate to nourish the soul, which is a spirit. It is the nourishment and strengthening of the soul which is the objective here—not in reference to the essence of the soul, but rather as far as faith and comfort are concerned.

The Lord Jesus speaks extensively of this spiritual nourishment of the soul in John 6, which the Jews interpret in a carnal sense by saying in verse 52, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Christ, however, refutes them by saying that He did not speak of His physical flesh, but of the spiritual nourishment of the soul. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). It is evident from verse 35 that He did not speak of physical eating with the physical mouth, but of spiritual eating by faith. "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." Thus, this entire chapter speaks of spiritual communion with Christ by faith unto the strengthening of spiritual life, and not at all of the Lord's Supper, which had not been instituted at that time.

Fourthly, opposing parties refute themselves when they maintain that to eat physically only without eating spiritually by faith as well, is not only of no benefit, but is also harmful and of a damning nature. Therefore to have eaten Christ's body with the physical mouth is no nourishment for the soul; only spiritual eating by faith nourishes the soul.

Fifthly, this practice mentioned is the most bestial, unspiritual, and abominable idolatry. God, believers, and all who are not wilfully

blind, hate and reject it as a loathsome practice. For the holy and glorious body of the beloved Jesus—and if one were to believe them, Christ as God and man is placed in the unclean mouth of a sinner—is eaten, swallowed, brought into a defiled stomach, digested, and secretly excreted; the ungodly tear it to pieces, and dogs, rats, and mice eat it. Let him who loves Jesus beware of such an abomination.

Sixthly, it inverts the entire nature of the body, proposing the existence of a body without size, dimensions, spatial restrictions, and the occupation of location. It furthermore proposes the existence of a body which is invisible, intangible, penetrating other bodies while being penetrated by other bodies in turn—yes, by being simultaneously visible and invisible, infinite and finite, and in a glorious state as well as being broken and eaten. All of this must be admitted if one adheres to Christ’s physical presence and the physical eating of Him in the Lord’s Supper. It is an error which a heathen will be able to refute, of which all rational men could be convinced within themselves, and which they themselves would reject if they used their reason and believed the Scriptures.

One will appeal in vain to the omnipotence of God if he wishes to make truth out of a lie, for God’s revealed will is silent on the matter.

Evasive Argument: Christ entered the house *when the doors were closed* (John 20:19). He thus penetrated a door.

Answer: Mention is made of both the time when Christ entered, as well as of His unexpected entry; however, no mention is made of His penetrating the door with His body. Everything must fall away and yield when Jesus wishes to gain entrance. He therefore does not need to bypass the ordained order of nature, nor does He have to make “no” and “yes” to be simultaneously true. When He willed to exit the grave, He did not need to penetrate the stone; He had angels who rolled it away for Him. When He traversed through the heavens (Heb 4:14) the thin air had to yield for the more solid substance of His body—this occurs daily when an object moves from one place to the other. When it is said of Christ that He departed out of their sight (Luke 24:31), this does not intimate a disappearance or His becoming invisible, but rather, a sudden and rapid departure out of their presence.

The Worship of the Wafer: An Abominable Heresy

Having refuted transubstantiation, the following most idolatrous error of the Papists is at once invalidated, namely, *that a consecrated or blessed wafer over which the five words “for this is My body” have been pronounced, must, as the true God, be worshiped with religious honor.* The Papists make a distinction between δουλεια (douleia)

and λατρεῖα (*latreia*). They worship angels and deceased men with *douleia*; however, no one may be worshiped with *latreia*, except the one, true, and eternal God. They maintain, therefore, that the wafer must be worshiped with *latreia*, that is, with the highest form of religious expression, of which the only true God alone is worthy, since the wafer is no longer bread, but the body of Christ united with the Godhead, and thus God Himself. An ignorant person may think that one would do them an injustice by ascribing such ungodly sentiments to them. The Papists are, however, known for this, want this to be known, and confess and defend it with all their might. Yes, they maintain that it is not sufficient if one worships the wafer in his heart. Rather, one must worship it with the deepest external humiliation and reverence, bowing the knees, folding the hands, removing the hat, etc. This is not only required in the church when the celebrant of the mass lifts the wafer above his head, but also when it is placed in a small enclosure and carried over the streets to the sick. This is especially true on their sacramental day, when the wafer with much pomp is carried about the streets, and also when the wafer at a special occasion is publicly put on display.

We maintain that Christ, being the one, eternal, and true God, must be worshiped, and that believers, during the administration of the Lord's Supper and upon use of the signs and seals, must also lift their hearts to Christ in heaven while eating and drinking; unite themselves by faith with Him; honor, worship, thank, and surrender themselves to Him in order to serve and entrust themselves to Him. We furthermore maintain that one must acknowledge, appreciate, esteem, and value the external signs of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper as signs of Christ's crucified body and shed blood, always distinguishing between the sign and the matter signified. However, we abhor with the highest indignation the worship of the wafer, and therefore let everyone who values his salvation abstain from this most abominable idolatry for the following reasons:

First, the wafer is not God nor is it Christ's body; it is but a piece of bread, or some bread dough. This we have proven above and have answered the objections. Since, therefore, the wafer is not God, one may also not worship it, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt 4:10).

Secondly, in the entire Word of God there is neither a command, example, nor the least semblance of the practice of worshiping the bread of the Lord's Supper. Everyone will have to acknowledge that the worship of the wafer is a matter of the greatest significance upon which the salvation of man hinges, for

idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor 6:10). Since the worship of the wafer is the entire pith of popish religion, everyone must be convinced that it is a matter of the greatest import; for a matter which is the foundation of an entire religion, and is a daily activity, must be commanded in God's Word with utmost clarity, and one ought not to engage in this without an express command. However, there is neither a word, trace, nor example of this practice to be found in God's Word—which the Papists themselves know and until now they have not been able to produce one text. Furthermore, since the time of the apostles as well as all the hundreds of years afterwards, the church did not know of the practice of worshiping the wafer. It is thus clear that one must reject the practice of worshiping the wafer as *an accursed idolatry* (which it is), and desist from founding his salvation upon it.

Thirdly, according to their own opinion, they are always in danger of committing idolatry and of worshiping that which is not God. They themselves maintain that if the priest celebrating the mass is not baptized, then all consecration is nullified, the bread has not been changed into Christ's body, and the wafer is not God. Furthermore, the priest celebrating the mass is not baptized if he was baptized by one who was not baptized; if this priest then in turn had not been baptized ... and so it goes on. Even if he had received the water, and either the one who baptized him or someone down the line did not baptize with the right intent, the baptism would be null and void, which would be true for the consecration as well. Also, if it were not the priest's objective to change the bread into the body of Christ, then the consecration would be null and void and the bread did not become the body of Christ. Furthermore, if he were to omit one of those five words or if he were to add one word, the consecration is null and void—and there are more such conditions. Who, however, can be assured with a divine assurance that all the conditions in the consecration have been observed? Someone, even if he worships the wafer with the utmost reverence, would then worship ignorantly, and if the wafer by reason of their proposition is not God, he commits the most blatant idolatry by worshiping a piece of bread as his God. Would they be excused by saying, "I worship Thee if Thou art God"? It is an abomination to worship something as God upon the condition that it is God; one must know what one worships. Let them then worship every tree—yes, even an animal—upon that condition, saying, "I worship Thee if Thou art God," and then let them perceive in the day of judgment whether or not they have been idolaters. He who therefore wishes to be saved, let him abstain from worshiping

the wafer, for it is not God, and according to their own propositions no one can assure you that it is God.

Fourthly, never has a more bestial religion been contrived, which worships a wafer as God, encloses God in a case, allowing Him to be observed through a window in the front, carries God about and then puts Him down again at His proper place, and carefully preserves God so that dogs, rats, and mice will not find Him and eat Him. Even after they have preserved and worshiped their God long enough, He must then succumb at last and be eaten by them. The Papists will acknowledge all this to be true, and yet they are nevertheless so foolish that they cannot perceive that they are committing idolatry—albeit that the wise among them acknowledge that, if the wafer is not God, they are then the worst idolaters of the world. Many among them no longer believe in transubstantiation and deem all this to be but ceremonial; they observe it so that they do not give offense or do not suffer. For the sake of personal salvation let everyone therefore abstain from this abomination.

And what can they bring forth in support of this their idolatry? Indeed, they can neither find one single Scripture passage, nor an example of the apostles or from the early church. However, in spite of this they advance the following objections:

Objection #1: It is written, “This is My body.”

Answer (1) Even if this referred to Christ’s natural body, it is not written, “Thou shalt worship it”; this is the point of contention. One may not worship the crucified body of Christ, for the flesh and blood of Christ are not God.

(2) Furthermore, the wafer—as has been demonstrated above—is not the body of Christ at all. This is therefore entirely erroneous.

Objection #2: One must worship God wherever He is. Since He is in the host or the wafer, one must also worship Him as such.

Answer (1) One must worship God who is omnipresent; however, not in relation to and as reflected in God’s presence in all creatures. Otherwise one would have to kneel before every tree and worship God in that tree, God being present in that tree.

(2) They are not satisfied to worship God as being in the wafer, considering He is in everything, but they insist that the wafer itself be worshiped since, in their opinion, it is God. Their argument is thus not watertight and the wafer is not God.

(3) But, say they, all must be worshiped in which God is to be found; this, however, we deny and they must deny it with us. God is in every tree and God dwells in a believer as in a temple. Who would be so foolish as to say that one therefore ought to worship every tree and every believer? The Lord Jesus was in the grave;

ought one therefore to worship the grave? The Lord Jesus is in heaven; ought one therefore to worship heaven? Therefore, even if Christ were in the wafer, one ought not to worship the wafer. It thus remains certain that it is idolatrous to worship the wafer.

The Popish Mass is Not a Sacrifice of Christ

Transubstantiation having been eradicated, the entire proposition of the popish mass being a sacrifice has been eradicated as well. This will become all the more evident when we deal with the following question:

Question: Is the Lord's Supper a new, true, and external sacrifice of Christ's body and blood in the literal sense of the word, and thus a sacrifice unto God of the entire Christ—that is, God and man—for the forgiveness of sins of the living and the dead?

Answer: The Papists not only maintain that there is a symbolic and applicatory sacrifice, but that it is even an atoning sacrifice, so that the living and the dead cannot have the forgiveness of sins by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross unless Christ is yet daily sacrificed in the mass.

We do maintain that prayer and thanksgiving must daily be offered—apart from and during the use of the Lord's Supper. This the apostle calls the offering of praise. "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually" (Heb 13:15). We deny, however, with the greatest indignation that this sacrifice is a sacrifice of Christ to God for the forgiveness of sins of the living and the dead. This we shall prove as follows: It is a certainty that God has caused the entire scope of religion to be recorded in His Word—and particularly the most significant points of the faith. One must therefore serve God according to His revealed will only, and all religious practice which God has not commanded must therefore be rejected as contrivances of men. "But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt 15:9). However, God's Word does not speak one word of a new, repeated, or continual sacrifice of Christ being made unto God subsequent to His finished sacrifice on the cross. It is not stated elsewhere, nor is it included in the institutional formula of the Lord's Supper (cf. Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23 and 10:16). Rather, the contrary is evident and is as clear as day. Christ Himself was visibly present at the table. Christ took bread, gave thanks, brake it, and gave it to His disciples and not to God—and afterwards He gave them the cup. He then commanded them to eat and to drink in remembrance of Him. What reference is there here to a sacrifice and to a sacrificing unto God? Furthermore, if this were Christ's sacrifice of Himself to God, His

sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins would already have been accomplished that evening; and if it had been a true sacrifice, it would not have been necessary for Him to sacrifice Himself the next day.

Evasive Argument: This is a symbolic and applicatory sacrifice.

Answer: The one sacrifice cannot be symbolized by another sacrifice which differs from this sacrifice to a far greater degree than in relationship and typification only. The Papists are not satisfied, however, with symbolism and application only. They insist that it be an atoning sacrifice—yes, that it is essentially the same sacrifice which was accomplished on the cross, except that the manner of sacrifice differs. Thus, in essence sin had already been paid for that evening when Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper and gave His disciples the bread and the wine. It is very evident, however, that at the institution of the Lord’s Supper no mention is made (nor is there the least semblance of this) that Christ sacrificed Himself at that moment, nor that He gave command that He be daily sacrificed until the end of the world. On the contrary, it is obvious that this is not true.

Proof #1: Christ has been sacrificed but once, and this one sacrifice is perfect in its efficacy to remove all sin; therefore a daily sacrifice for sin can no longer be made. “Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb 10:18). It is evident from the following texts—which cannot be subjected to argumentation—that Christ has been sacrificed but once and that this one sacrifice is perfectly atoning in nature: “Who needeth not daily ... for this He did *once*, when He offered up Himself” (Heb 7:27); “Nor yet that He should offer himself *often*. ... For then must He *often* have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now *once* in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was *once* offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:25-28); “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. But this man, after He had offered *one* sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; for by *one* offering He hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:10,12,14). Behold, there is but one sacrifice of Christ which perfects forever.

Evasive Argument: These texts refer to Christ’s atoning sacrifice and not to His symbolic, applicatory, and unbloody sacrifice, which is daily performed in the mass.

Answer (1) If this sacrifice is but symbolic, applicatory, and unbloody, it is certain that the sacrifice of the mass is a different sacrifice from the one which Christ accomplished on the cross.

(2) Scripture knows of no other sacrifice of Christ except that one, and therefore to speak of a symbolic, applicatory, and unbloody sacrifice is but trifling outside of the Word of God. It conflicts with the matter itself—for a sacrifice is made toward God and an application, man-ward.

(3) Furthermore, they are not satisfied with a symbolic and applicatory sacrifice only, but maintain expressly that their mass is an atoning sacrifice, whereas the texts say that the perfectly atoning sacrifice of Christ did transpire but once, and can only transpire once—for Christ would then have to suffer as frequently as He would be sacrificed. Therefore, these texts irresistibly refute the sacrifice in the mass.

(4) Also, is the symbolic and applicatory sacrifice of Christ in the mass a true sacrifice, or is it only a symbol of the sacrifice of Christ, depicting it? They maintain that it is a true sacrifice—and if it is a true sacrifice, then it is a literal sacrifice and therefore identical to the sacrifice which Christ accomplished on the cross. Else it is either a new or different sacrifice, or a repetition of it. No matter how one looks at it, if in the mass there is a true, literal sacrifice of Christ for the purpose of making atonement, this causes Christ to yet suffer daily (Heb 9:27), while denying the perfect atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Evasive Argument #2: It is in essence the same sacrifice; however, they differ in the manner in which they are performed. Therefore the texts just mentioned are not opposed to the sacrifice in the mass, but speak of the mass itself; the sacrifice in the mass is none other than the same sacrifice which was made on the cross.

Answer (1) If the mass represents the same sacrifice which occurred on the cross, Christ still suffers and dies daily, be it in a continual or repetitious sense, for Christ suffered and died on the cross. Furthermore, the suffering and death which is repeated cannot be the same as that which occurred prior to that.

(2) If it is the same sacrifice, Christ's sacrifice on the cross was not perfect, for it was not yet finished—it yet continues and must daily be performed.

(3) Even if there were a sacrifice in the mass (which, however, is erroneous), it is not the same sacrifice. It cannot be the same sacrifice which Christ performed on the cross, for it differs from this sacrifice in every respect.

First of all, there is a difference as far as the *priest* is concerned. On the cross Christ was the Priest in person and He sacrificed Himself. In the mass, however, a man who calls himself a priest sacrifices Christ, and that for someone else. Therefore this sacrifice

cannot give satisfaction because satisfaction receives its efficacy from Christ's high priestly office, in that He offers Himself.

Secondly, the *altar* differs; it is the altar which sanctifies the sacrifice (Matt 23:19). "Christ Himself is the altar who by His eternal Spirit has offered himself without spot to God" (Heb 9:14; cf. Heb 13:10). The mass makes use of a table of wood or stone. Furthermore, they maintain that the cross was Christ's altar, which is thus different from theirs.

Thirdly, the *sacrifice* and the manner of sacrifice differ. On the cross the body and blood of Christ were broken and shed with much sorrow, this being the essence of a sacrifice which would atone for sin. However, they admit that in the mass, even though Christ is present in His Person, there is not even sorrow, nor the breaking of His body, nor the shedding of His blood. Therefore, this sacrifice not only differs in the manner in which it was performed, but also in essence. We speak here assumptively, for the body of Christ is not present in the mass.

Fourthly, they differ in *location*. Christ's sacrifice occurred at Golgotha, and it did not occur simultaneously in many other places—that is, outside of that place. The mass is not performed at Golgotha, but simultaneously in thousands of different localities.

Fifthly, they differ *chronologically*. Christ's sacrifice, of which He said that it was finished, has been accomplished for many hundreds of years already; the mass, however, occurs daily.

Sixthly, they differ in *efficacy*, for Christ's sacrifice was atoning in nature—this was true for the sins which had been committed in the Old Testament from the beginning of the world, as well as for those sins which have been committed in the New Testament. A mass, however, does not have sufficient efficacy to atone for sin. The mass itself lacks the efficacy to bring about the forgiveness of a man's sins. Sometimes, if a person has been rich in his life, a thousand masses are celebrated to help one soul escape purgatory. From all this it is evident to all rational persons (however unintelligent they may be) that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the sacrifice which one fabricates in the mass are not one and the same. Thus, the quoted texts remain fully in force and prove that the mass is not an atoning sacrifice.

Proof #2: Everything which belongs to a sacrifice is lacking in the mass, and thus there is no sacrifice in the mass. Everyone will agree that the following belongs to a sacrifice: a priest, an altar, visible and tangible sacrifices, and the disintegration and annihilation of the sacrifice. None of these are present in the mass.

First, there are no priests present at the mass, albeit that all

believers are indeed spiritual priests (cf. 1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6 and 5:10). That is not the issue here, however. They are not capable of sacrificing an atoning sacrifice in the literal sense of the word. To accomplish that, priests must be present—in the literal sense of the word. There are, however, no literal priests in the New Testament; no mention is made of this anywhere in the Word of God.

(1) They themselves also know this, and they therefore cannot produce a single text by which they can prove the use of such a title. Where is Peter, Paul, any apostle, or any minister called a priest? Who of them has referred to himself as a priest?

(2) When the apostles enumerate the ministries of the New Testament, they do not place the priesthood among them. “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Would they then not have mentioned the priesthood as being the most significant ministry, if it indeed existed?

(3) If their clergymen were to be priests, they must either be priests according to the order of Aaron, or according to the order of Melchizedek. They are not priests according to the order of Aaron, for they are neither descendants of Jews nor of the tribe of Levi. They are also not priests according to the order of Melchizedek, for only Christ is a priest according to this order. “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). Christ has no successors in His priestly ministry, for He lives forever and will always remain Priest. “And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable (Greek: without succession) priesthood” (Heb 7:23-24). It is thus evident that they also cannot be priests according to the order of Melchizedek—and if they nevertheless insist on this, they must prove their order, which is impossible. And if they are yet priests in spite of this, albeit neither according to the order of Aaron, nor according to the order of Melchizedek, they must be either priests of Baal or priests of Jupiter (Acts 14:13)—which we shall not deny them.

(4) Even if we assume that they are priests, they could nevertheless not sacrifice Christ Himself, for no priest has ever presumed to do this. Priests sacrificed something which typified Christ, but not Christ Himself. Therefore at best they would be sacrificing something which is a reflection of Christ, but not Christ Himself. None other than Christ can sacrifice Himself.

Secondly, in the New Testament there are no literal altars consisting of physical matter. The Lord Jesus says that the altar is more than

the sacrifice, for it sanctifies the sacrifice (cf. Matt 23:18-19). None of the Papists would dare to say, however, that their altars are superior to Christ, and that they sanctify Christ and cause the sacrifice of Christ to be pleasing before God; and thus they have no altar.

Evasive Argument: “We have an altar” (Heb 13:10).

Answer (1) Here mention is made of *one*, but the Papists have thousands of altars.

(2) This one altar is Christ Himself upon which we sacrifice a “sacrifice of praise” (vs. 15). This is also true in Rev 6:9: “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God” (Rev 6:9). This altar is Christ who is their altar and their atoning sacrifice, and it is He who overshadows and refreshes them.

Thirdly, the Papists also do not have an *external sacrifice*, for bread and wine are no longer present. It is gone (so they say) and Christ’s body is not present. Even if it were present, it is nevertheless not visible—which they themselves admit—and thus there is no external and visible sacrifice. The appearance of bread is indeed visible, but not the appearance of the sacrifice, and that which appears as visible is not the sacrifice.

Fourthly, according to their own words, Christ’s body is also *not broken*. They maintain that the breaking of the wafer does not break the body of Christ; rather, Christ is and remains whole in every piece of the wafer. They also do not believe that the blood of Christ is shed, albeit that it runs from the cup into the mouth of the priest and is swallowed by him; instead, they call it an unbloody sacrifice. They thus confuse themselves and the one thing contradicts the other. Where there is no breaking of the sacrifice, accompanied with sorrow and death, there is no payment for sin; the wages of which is death. Likewise, where there is no shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness: “... and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22).

From that which has been said it is therefore evident that in the mass there is neither a priest, an altar, an external and visible sacrifice, the breaking of the sacrifice, nor the shedding of blood. Consequently it is certain that there is no sacrifice.

Objection #1: Melchizedek was a type of Christ, and he sacrificed bread and wine. “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God” (Gen 14:18).

Answer (1) What proof does this yield that popish priests are priests indeed, and that these priests sacrifice Christ unto the forgiveness of sins? Who will be able to tie these ends together? It is true that Melchizedek was a priest, and it is also true that Melchizedek was a type of Christ. Now what? The argument that

he is thus an example for the popish priests is not valid. “Yes, but he offered bread and wine.” What does that prove? Does it therefore follow that the popish priests also offer bread and wine? That would be the most logical argument if one were to draw a conclusion on the basis of this; however, they deny that they offer bread and wine—they maintain that they sacrifice Christ. This argument is therefore neither coherent, nor is it valid.

(2) Melchizedek, the king of Salem, was indeed priest and gave bread and wine to Abraham and to his people as a refreshment; however, he did not sacrifice bread and wine unto God in like manner as all other sacrifices are made unto God. He also was not a type of Christ as far as the bringing forth of bread and wine are concerned. The apostle in explaining the application of Melchizedek as type and Christ as antitype (Heb 7:17), makes no mention of bringing forth bread and wine, but he establishes a relationship in reference to other matters; he also did not do this as priest.

Objection #2: The Passover was a type of Christ who is therefore called the Passover (1 Cor 5:7). The Passover was a sacrifice and thus also Christ our Passover must be sacrificed.

Answer (1) In the sacrifice of the passover Christ Himself was not literally sacrificed, but rather a lamb as a type of Christ.

(2) We cannot conclude that since Christ was typified in the sacrifices of the Old Testament, He must therefore also be represented in sacrifices by way of antitype; the contrary is true. If Christ was typified in the Old Testament by way of a sacrifice, He must no longer be typified in a sacrifice, since all shadows and types have ended in Him and are fulfilled in Him.

(3) There is also no relationship between the sacrifice of the Passover and the sacrifice in the mass. In the Passover there was a visible sacrifice; in the mass the sacrifice is invisible. In the Passover Christ Himself was not sacrificed, whereas this is held to be true in the mass. In the Passover no bone was permitted to be broken, whereas in the mass the wafer is broken. These matters are too distinctly different to enable anyone to draw a parallel between them.

Objection #3: There are many prophecies which say that there still would be priests, altars, and sacrifices in the New Testament. “Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation” (Isa 19:21); “And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord” (Isa 66:21); “And in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering” (Mal 1:11).

Answer: It is common in God’s Word to express spiritual religion in the New Testament by way of terminology pertaining to the religion of the Old Testament. Instead of quoting many texts, consider

the following: "... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Rom 12:1); "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb 10:19). Believers are thus called *God's temple* (1 Cor 3:16), a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5). This is also repeatedly true in *Revelation*.

(2) The quoted texts themselves indicate that there is nothing in support of the sacrifice of the mass, but that they speak of the spiritual service of the New Testament—for they speak of an offering, of Levites, and of incense.

Objection #4: "This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). With these words Christ appointed the apostles as priests and commanded them to sacrifice His body, as He did.

Answer (1) There is not a semblance of a reference to priests, sacrifices, and the sacrifice of His body; therefore as quickly as this objection is raised, so quickly is it refuted.

(2) Christ did not sacrifice Himself at that time and He did not command them to do so.

(3) Christ commanded them to eat and to drink in remembrance of Him, to pass this sacrament on to the church, and cause it to be used by them.

Objection #5: "As they ministered to the Lord" (Acts 13:2). In the Greek text it reads λειτουργει=ν (*leitourgein*) which means: to celebrate the mass.

Answer: This word means "to serve" in a general sense; it is used to denote the angels as ministering spirits (Heb 1:14), and governments as servants of God (Rom 13:6); it also means to give alms (2 Cor 9:12; Rom 15:27). Here there is also no support for the nauseating mass.⁴⁰

We have thus exposed the abominable idolatry of anti-Christianity. How correctly did our forefathers act when, upon the command of the Lord, they departed from the mother of harlots, that great Babylon, and went out from her, so that they would neither be partakers of her sin nor receive any of her plagues! They thus permitted it to become a habitation of devils, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird (Rev 18:2-4)!

The Attending Circumstances of the Lord's Supper

Having considered the nature of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it remains to consider some of the attending circumstances:

⁴⁰ In the Dutch it reads, "de misselijke mis," which is an obvious play on words.

to whom, at which localities, in what manner, and at what time the Lord's Supper must be administered.

(1) The Lord's Supper must not be administered for the dead, for they have already reached the destination where they will forever be. If they are in heaven, they possess the matter in its fullness, and thus a seal is not necessary. If they are in hell, they have no promises, and thus also no seal of them. Purgatory is but a fabrication to raise money. The sacrifice in the mass for the benefit of the dead renders them as much refreshment as there is pain in purgatory.

(2) It must not be administered to those who are dying and who are in the agony of death, for they are not capable of uniting by faith the sign with the matter signified and applying it to themselves as a seal. The illusion that one thus infuses Christ into them, and that they thus die in and with Him and therefore most certainly are saved, is as true as the fable of purgatory.

(3) It must also not be administered to children, since they are not able to examine themselves and to make a believing application by means of the sacrament.

(4) Neither may it be administered to the unbaptized, for no one can eat unless they first be born. Also, no one can partake of a meal together with the church unless he first be in the church, has been received as a member of her, and has been sealed as such.

(5) It must also not be administered to those who are ignorant of true doctrine, to unbelievers, and to those outside of the church—be it that they have never belonged to the church or that they have been excommunicated. This must be enforced as long as they are in this condition, since they are not partakers of the promises, of Christ, nor of the communion of saints.

Rather, it must be administered to true believers. Only true believers have a right for themselves to the promises, Christ, and the communion of saints, and thus also to the signs of the covenant. The church, however, does not judge concerning man's internal state; the knowledge of someone's regeneration is not the basis upon which she admits persons to the holy table, but she admits all who have made a conscious confession of the true doctrine of the gospel, and who lead a life which is in harmony with their confession.

The location where this sacrament is administered does not relate to its essence, and is therefore immaterial. It does not matter if it is a public meeting place—called "church"—or if it is a private home, mountain, valley, or cave. One must adjust himself to the condition of the church; that is, whether she be in a state of freedom or in a state of persecution. It must, however, occur in the gathering

of the congregation, regardless of whether she be great or small. The bringing of the Lord's Supper to the sick borders on superstition. The secret celebration of the Lord's Supper with a few members of the congregation in a secret home is nothing less than schism.

The gestures or the external manner of administration of this sacrament must be such as most closely resembles the first Lord's Supper administered by Christ, as well as the administration of the Lord's Supper by the apostles and the apostolic churches as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Then the Lord's Supper was administered while seated at a table. Since it is a meal, it is therefore proper that it be administered in such a manner as one would serve either common or special meals. To come, one by one, to that which one calls an altar, to there receive the bread out of the hand of the celebrant—who time and again takes it from the altar and gives it to the communicant—to there receive it while kneeling, and to let it be put into his mouth, is superstitious and gives occasion for superstition. To use the sacrament standing and while passing the table is not as edifying. It also does not agree as fully with the first administration as does sitting at the table—be it that the minister gives the bread and the cup to each person one by one, or be it that he breaks the bread and puts it upon dishes which he passes on to those guests who are partaking, subsequently giving the cup to be passed on from hand to hand.

Both time and frequency cannot be determined and it is of no relevance as far as the essence of the sacrament is concerned. It is most desirable that it be administered upon the Sabbath Day when the congregation gathers, as well as at such a time when one would normally eat a meal, so that as a result of the physical desire for food, one would be that much more fit to partake of this spiritual food symbolized by the bread and wine. Christ instituted it in the evening, since He could not do so any earlier due to the last Passover having to be eaten in the evening. He also could not have instituted it at a later moment since His suffering began during that same night. We have thus considered this sacrament in its nature and attending circumstances. The observance of this sacrament will be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

The Practice of the Lord's Supper Consisting in Preparation, Celebration, and Reflection

Everything that is of the greatest benefit to a child of God is most severely attacked by the devil and his cohorts; this is also true of the Lord's Supper. A heavy cloud of numerous heresies has ascended from the abyss of hell to obscure the essential nature of this sacrament—a cloud which we have driven away in the previous chapter by means of the light of the truth. When the devil can no longer obscure the truth, he then endeavors either to prevent or corrupt the exercise concerning this truth. He does this by bringing all manner of riffraff into the church and leading them to the holy table, knowing that this will seriously impede the blessing (Jer 5:25-26). He also does this by most vehemently assaulting believers during the time of preparation, thereby causing them to fall into sin and subsequently into unbelief—and by diverting them so that they will neglect to spend time and to be engaged in that to which this time of preparation obligates them. Each believer must therefore be especially on guard during this season and strive to use this sacrament to his benefit. To this end it is needful that there be a good *preparation for, celebration of, and reflection upon, the Lord's Supper.*

Preparation for the Lord's Supper*The Need for Preparation*

It is of utmost necessity that he who desires to partake of the Lord's Supper should prepare himself to that end, for:

First, believers still carry within them the old Adam as well as an inclination to world conformity. So often they gravitate again toward the earth, as the weights in a clock, and therefore they find themselves unfit when something of a special nature needs to be performed. Consequently, especially at such occasions, believers need to encourage, stir up, and spiritually arouse themselves in order to perform spiritual duties in a spiritual fashion.

Secondly, everyone will be carefully examined at the table as to whether he wears a wedding garment; that is, whether he appears there with the proper frame of heart. “And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” (Matt 22:11-12). It is therefore needful to put on the wedding garment prior to this event in order to be a desirable guest.

Thirdly, it is furthermore a duty of an extraordinary nature. One approaches unto God in an extraordinary manner, that is, in a very intimate manner. One comes to the table as a partaker of the covenant in the presence of other partakers of the covenant, sits at the Lord’s table in the light of His countenance, and partakes of the signs and seals of the crucified body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus. And since it is the Lord’s will that He be sanctified in those who approach unto Him, it is needful to consider the following: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?” (Mic 6:6). One must therefore prepare himself in an extraordinary manner for this extraordinary duty.

Fourthly, it is also God’s command that he who approaches unto God in an extraordinary manner should also prepare himself to that end. When the Lord was about to descend to the people upon Mount Sinai, the Lord gave command to Moses, saying, “Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day” (Exod 19:10-11). When Israel was about to cross the Jordan dry-shod by a divine miracle, it was commanded, “Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (Josh 3:5). When Moses approached the burning bush—a symbol of God’s extraordinary presence—he heard the voice, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exod 3:5). When Samuel invited Jesse and the elders to the sacrifice, he said, “Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice” (1 Sam 16:5). Whenever the priests would approach unto the altar, they first had to wash themselves. Therefore, we also, when about to approach to the holy table, must first prepare ourselves.

Fifthly, it will generally be experienced that a blessing is received after having prepared one's self. I repeat, generally, for it does occasionally occur that a godly person who neglects preparation until the last moment and ultimately cannot bring himself to be properly engaged therein, in a short time can consciously sink away so deeply in his abominableness, insignificance, and sinfulness; receive the Lord Jesus in such a lively frame, acknowledging free grace; and with such sincerity arise from his sinful state, that he partakes in faith and does receive many conscious encouragements, so that in amazement he exclaims, "Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?" (Gen 16:13). On the contrary, it can also happen that a believer who has made much work of preparation, both during the time of preparation and in partaking, remains in the dark, is troubled, and is weak in faith. And even if he received light during the time of preparation, it can happen at the table that a sudden darkness and deadness come upon him, so that he who was encouraged while coming to the table, returns with sorrow to his seat. However, even though this does happen, preparation ought not to be neglected, for it is his duty. One must enter in God's way, and God generally bestows a blessing upon serious preparation, be it that which one had in view or that which is most beneficial for him at that time. To such a person the promise will be fulfilled, "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13). The soul will then not accuse itself of slothfulness, but will find peace in her sincere endeavors. From this, one can perceive the necessity of preparation.

Even though we may perceive the necessity of preparation, we nevertheless allow ourself to be readily hindered and to be kept from it.

(1) This may be done by way of postponement, saying, "Yes, I must, I am willing, and I shall engage myself in preparation; however, I will do it *then*, at such and such a time when this matter has transpired and after that task has been finished. I am not fit at this moment." Often, the *then* does not materialize. Meanwhile, the time which we thought would be available slips away, and before having prepared ourselves, we are overtaken by the event itself. One then finds himself unfit to use the remaining time properly, and will have to attend in such an unprepared fashion.

(2) The devil is active in a most subtle manner by providing us with so many activities that it appears we have no time for preparation, or by stirring up our lusts and causing us to fall into sin, so that we are tossed to and fro as chaff in the wind. He thus attempts

to captivate the heart, allowing it no quietude to formulate thoughts with composure.

(3) Sometimes one will be in doubt as to whether he ought to attend. One obstacle or the other is in the way, causing him to say, “I am so in the dark, so unbelieving, and so confused. Would it be better if I would not attend this time?” By thus being caught in the middle, whether to partake or not to partake—as if this were his own decision—time passes by and the desire fails. If, however, he determines, “I must go and I shall go,” he will be all the more motivated to be engaged in preparation.

(4) Having now begun with preparation, this work appears to be of a very difficult nature, and he perceives himself entirely unfit to perform such difficult work: “It is too difficult and impossible for me to make such an effort, to engage in such close self-examination, mourn over sin, pray and weep, and observe a day of fasting.” He thus refrains from doing so, or it is postponed from day to day. Or he will, with much hesitation, begin with that which he ought to undertake in an evangelical manner, that is, by quietly waiting upon the Spirit and quietly giving heed to His motions as much as he is able. For here it is true that it is not by might, nor by power, but it must take place by the Spirit.

(5) It can also be that upon engaging in preparation, one experiences himself to be more unfit than he expected to be—yes, becoming more unspiritual, confused, and in more darkness than was the case previously. A lively frame yields to a dead frame, and a believing to an unbelieving frame, relative to the truth as well as one’s spiritual state. This would cause a person to be discouraged and inclined to desist from this work. One must note such a frame, however, as an indication that God will deal with you in a special manner, and is desirous to give you much grace. Therefore do not walk away from this task nor refrain from it. Rather, take courage and wait upon the Lord; He will strengthen thine heart.

As we proceed to consider the work of preparation, three matters are to be practiced: 1) a stimulating of desire; 2) an examination of self; and 3) spiritual adornment.

The First Aspect of Preparation: A Stimulating of Desire

One must first of all endeavor to stir up *a strong desire* to be among God’s people, to appear before the Lord with the multitude that keeps holyday, to see the good of His chosen, to rejoice in the gladness of His people, and to glory with His inheritance. How David longed for this! “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the

Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps 27:4); “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps 42:4). How sorrowful he was when he was deprived of this! “When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday” (Ps 42:4); “Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!” (Ps 120:5). How he rejoiced when he was permitted to be among God’s people in the temple! “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem” (Ps 122:1-2).

Therefore, may your desires be also thus stimulated. Permit me to arouse a desire within you and to stir you up.

The meeting place where the Lord’s Supper is administered is at that moment none other than a portal of heaven—with Jacob one may say of it, “Surely the Lord is in this place ... how dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen 28:16-17). Heaven opens itself in such a place, and the rays of divine glory and grace descend to that place, filling it with the very presence of God. The Father comes to His people with His favor and reveals Himself in a familiar manner to His favorites, addressing them as *Ammi, ruhamah!* that is, My people, and object of My mercy! I have loved thee with an everlasting love and therefore I have drawn thee with loving kindness. I have come here to meet you in order to make known to you, and to cause you to feel, my delight and my love. The Lord Jesus, the Bridegroom, comes in His love to them to have this supper with them and to cause them to enjoy it together with Him. With love and delight He views them as they surround Him. It is there that the Holy Spirit is active, filling the soul with light, grace, and comforts. There multitudes of angels are present who delight themselves in God’s gracious coming to His people. They observe everyone’s behavior and investigate as much as possible what the spiritual motions of each person are. Here they observe one who faints for desire; there is one overwhelmed with love; there one who swoons due to the absence of Jesus; there a soul is bowed down in sorrow. There is one in whose eyes can be seen a fearful anxiety due to the heart being so oppressed and so hard that not one sigh to heaven can come forth; there quiet tears trickle down the cheek since the Comforter who should comfort the soul is so far from him. Yonder is one who is strong in the faith and stands firm upon the truths and promises of God as standing upon a rock.

Here is one who follows hard after the Lord, and there is one who is leaning upon her Beloved; there is one who is burdened with sin and who, with this heavy burden, comes to Jesus to be delivered. There comes an infant in grace in all simplicity, and here there are some who receive rivers of grace and comfort, so that they are filled to overflowing. All this longing, yearning, sighing, weeping, and goings forth of love are directed toward Jesus and end in God. Here all that is perceived and experienced in the soul converges in one focal point. All this the angels view with wondrous delight and they glorify God for His grace and goodness toward the children of men. Here is the household of God, and here spiritual friends are gathered together for a moment in order to delight themselves in the presence of their heavenly Father and in Jesus, their beloved Bridegroom. Whose heart, upon observing these manifestations, would not be stirred also to go there, to be part of this gathering, and also to delight oneself in the Lord? Even a barren soul will say, "There I wish to go, for it could be that I may receive a blessing there."

Secondly, consider this gathering as being led into the inner chambers (Song 1:4) and into the king's palace (Ps 45:15), where many wonders are unveiled to the godly which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, which has never entered into the heart of man, and which God has prepared for them that love Him. Oh, what glorious matters the Lord shows them there, and what sweetness He causes them to taste there! There He grants His children a profound insight into the eternal, sovereign pleasure of eternal election: He has known and loved them from eternity and has ordained them to be the recipients of a salvation which passes all understanding. There He reveals to them the covenant of redemption, the Counsel of Peace between Jehovah and the Man whose name is the *Branch*, together with all the conditions and promises of this covenant, the voluntary surrender of the Son to be a Surety for those elect, and the manner in which this covenant is their certainty and salvation. There He reveals to them His unfathomable wisdom in the way by which He leads them to salvation by first concluding them under sin and permitting them to come into a state in which they completely miss and are estranged from God, from which He afterwards, demonstrating His wondrous mercy, delivers them again. There He reveals to them the work of redemption; there they behold Jesus coming in the flesh, and they follow Him from the manger to the cross—in His preaching, His acts of benevolence, and His suffering and death. Not only do they reflect upon this as a truth, but they do so in a lively, intimate manner, considering the very essence of the matters themselves and all the

perfections of God which are revealed in them. They focus on every one of them and are in amazement about every one of them. The Lord reveals to them the wondrous ways in which He has drawn them and led them hitherto. There He reveals something to them of future glory, which at times brings them into ecstasy. There He assures them of, and seals to them, His eternal love and the certainty of their state, letting them depart with a loving kiss of His mouth.

Thirdly, consider for a moment the sweet and friendly invitation of the Lord Jesus Himself. He has no need of you; He could have passed you by and have invited others. However, He now says to you, “Come, for all things are ready!” This invitation He accompanies with so many sweet motives—yes, in His Name He beseeches you that you would come to Him. Furthermore, He Himself stands at the door and knocks, waiting for you to open to Him in order that He may sup with you and you with Him (Rev 3:20). The bride acknowledged this by saying, “I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled: for My head is filled with dew, and My locks with the drops of the night” (Song 5:2). Since He calls and invites you in such a friendly manner to have fellowship with Him, would you then yet walk away or remain standing? No, but allow your heart to be set aflame with love for such a gathering, and let your soul, so to speak, fly there with wings.

Fourthly, at the Lord’s Supper a public confession of the Lord Jesus is made. It is then that the celebrating church professes publicly before the entire world, and proclaims that Jesus Christ is the only and sufficient Savior, their Head, and their Lord. She commemorates His suffering and death as the only atoning sacrifice, and she declares the death of the Lord to be the only foundation for peace, comfort, and life. It is God’s way to convert men by confessing the Lord Jesus and to thus gather His Church. It is the honor which the Father has awarded the Lord Jesus upon His suffering. A true believer has love for the Lord Jesus, and wherever there is true love, the believer has a desire to say of his Beloved, “This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend” (Song 5:16). The Lord Jesus takes careful notice of those who are not ashamed of Him and whose delight it is, together with the church, to confess Him and to live to His honor and glory. He promises that He in turn will confess them before His Father, before the angels, and before the entire world. Since, therefore, the partaking of the Lord’s Supper is a public confession of the Lord Jesus, who would then not be stirred up to be among that people who profess and exclaim that Jesus is King? It is a confession that one would not

neglect to make in time of persecution, even if he would have to die for it.

Fifthly, one exercises communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper. Is not that the focus of all your desires, and the essence of your spiritual life? Is not your soul troubled in the absence of such communion? It is there that the Lord Jesus assures believers of being a partaker of Him as well as of His love toward them. It is there that the Holy Spirit generally works in a more perceptible manner. On the one hand, He reveals the promises to them and the marks of those who are heirs thereof, and on the other hand He reveals to them the graces which are to be found in them. Thus, on the basis of God's Word, He causes them to come to the following conclusion: The Lord promises these specific matters to those who are in such a condition; however, in the presence of God, I perceive such spiritual frames to be within me and therefore these specific promises are for me—and since the Lord is true, He will also fulfil them for me. Furthermore, believers consider the signs of the Lord's Supper as a seal and pledge by which they are assured that they truly belong to Christ and that Christ is also their portion. At such a moment the Holy Spirit works immediately and witnesses with their spirit that they are the children of God, impressing the Word, the seal, and their conclusion so powerfully upon their heart, that they know that the Lord Jesus loves them. This in turn causes their love to be revived toward Him and they thus exercise intimate fellowship with Christ. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16). How all this ought to stir up the believer to partake joyfully of the Lord's Supper!

Sixthly, not only is there a sealing communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper, but there are also times when one may enjoy extraordinary graces which engender ecstasy. A person may at times, with the disciples, be brought to the holy mountain and see Christ in His glory. Occasionally, the believer is there led into the banqueting house, and Christ spreads His love over him as a banner. He and the Father come and make their abode with him. He causes him at times to dip joyfully into the fountain of salvation, and such corn and wine causes even the lips of the young men and the young daughters to speak. He kisses them with the kisses of His mouth and satisfies them there with the goodness of His house, even of His holy temple. He causes them to sing praises with joyful lips. Therefore, "let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17).

Seventhly, consider furthermore the blessed company which gathers there, for there God's children are gathered together before the countenance of their heavenly Father and their beloved Jesus in order to find mutual delight. There they express their love to each other; there they fully separate themselves from the world and despise its love since they find satisfaction in their mutual love for each other. There they express their love, not only for those with whom they are acquainted, but also toward all believers with whom they are not acquainted. They not only unite themselves with all the godly who are present, but also with the angels and with the souls of just men made perfect. "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling" (Heb 12:22-24). Even if the world, as their enemy, hates, despises, persecutes, and oppresses them, there is yet no reason for concern; they can readily miss its love, for they have better company and they refresh themselves in a sweet manner in the exercise of mutual love. They confess this unity in the Lord's Supper by eating of the same bread and by drinking of the same cup. "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Thus, God's children may here enjoy a prenuptial celebration.

Eighthly, one furthermore gains strength from the Lord's Supper in sanctification, the mortification of sin, and the living of a life that is pleasing unto the Lord—for the food and drink of this meal yield strength and refreshment. Here faith is strengthened; love is stirred up and becomes more steadfast; and here is union with Jesus, the very life of the soul, and a willing commitment to serve the Lord. The Lord's Supper obligates one to a childlike obedience and here one becomes enamored with continual fellowship with God—fellowship impeded by sin, but enlivened by the exercise of godliness. Therefore the soul quietly begins to shine as Moses' countenance did. She is as the bride of Christ, receiving the eyes of a dove to keep her Beloved continually in view and to look away from all that is desirable. It is her desire to please her Beloved, and she therefore yields to His will.

If there be then a stirring within, a believer—however sluggish he may be and however many difficulties and objections he may be accustomed to bring forth—ought to be moved to go with longing

to the Lord's Supper and to say with Moses, "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight" (Exod 3:3).

The Second Aspect of Preparation: An Examination of Self

The second requisite for preparation is *self-examination*, that is, the determination as to whether one is permitted and able to come to the table in order to eat and drink spiritually. To that end we shall consider 1) that self-examination is necessary; 2) that the unconverted are not permitted to come to the table; 3) that the converted may not stay away from the table; and 4) the manner in which weak believers must encourage themselves.

Self-examination prior to attending the Lord's Supper is a *very necessary work*, for it is, first of all, an express command. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor 11:28).

Secondly, this supper is not intended for everyone; a stranger, an uncircumcised person, and one who was unclean were not permitted to eat the Passover (Exod 12). "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth?" (Ps 50:16). Christ invites friends (Song 5:1), and those who hunger and thirst (Isa 55:1).

Thirdly, it is a dreadful sin to eat and drink unworthily. "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:29). A dreadful judgment hangs over the head of such persons. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor 11:29).

Fourthly, many have a wrong perception of themselves; they measure themselves by themselves. They deem themselves to be fit, for they have no disagreement with their neighbor, are baptized, diligently go to hear God's Word, live in such a manner that no one can say anything about them, and believe that Christ is the Savior—one must thus not doubt that he will also be saved and that Christ is also his Savior. Therefore all is truly well—Christ invites and commands us, and I then wish to be obedient to the Lord in this respect. Others add to this the fact that, prior to that time, they refrain from indulging in their bosom sins, read pious books, and pray more frequently. One thus puts himself into a pious mold and peacefully attends, eating and drinking judgment to himself.

Fifthly, many are not capable of examining themselves. They are not familiar with the marks which all must have who will attend the Lord's Supper; they are not acquainted with themselves, nor do

they know that a person must examine himself. They thus attend without self-examination and bring God's wrath upon them.

Sixthly, many do not want to examine themselves, for they know that it would not turn out well. They would then become anxious and doubt their salvation. They perhaps would not dare to go to the Lord's Supper—but what would people then say of them? Therefore they keep the lid on the pot and peacefully live on in their sins, aggravating all this by eating and drinking unworthily. Is it therefore not very necessary that everyone perceive what his condition is?

Seventhly, if you engage yourself in the duty of self-examination, using God's Word as a touchstone, an earnestness and concern will begin to manifest themselves. If you perceive yourself to be unconverted, or if you doubt your conversion, you will begin to seek, pray, weep, and flee unto Jesus. If you may perceive true grace within yourself, this will engender joy and liberty to partake by faith. It is therefore evident from all this how necessary and beneficial it is to examine oneself.

An unconverted person may not attend. A stranger, one who was uncircumcised, or an unclean person, was not permitted to eat the Passover; likewise they may also not eat the bread and drink this cup. For the unconverted there is not a single promise, and thus there is also no sealing function. The unconverted are dead in sins and trespasses; however, dead persons cannot eat; faith is the mouth and the hand of the soul. The unconverted have no faith and thus they cannot eat of that bread which has been prepared for believers only. If they nevertheless do so, they must know that they make a mockery of Christ, make themselves guilty of the body and blood of Christ. With the Jews, they, so to speak, crucify Him anew.

Question: Who are the unconverted?

Answer (1) They are ignorant persons who do not even have an intellectual knowledge of Christ's person, natures, suretyship, humiliation, and exaltation, nor of the necessity of the atonement and the efficacy of Christ's death. They are those who as yet have no knowledge of the essence of faith, regeneration, spiritual life, God's righteousness, and the sinner's state of condemnation; they neither understand the essence of the Lord's Supper, know not how to unite the sign with the matter signified, nor understand its sealing function.

(2) They are not humbled by their sins and can live peacefully without seeking for reconciliation in Christ. They neither long for a conscious knowledge that their sins are forgiven, nor do they long for comfort, the assurance of salvation, sanctification, and a

life in the presence of God. They live carelessly and peacefully without being partakers of these matters.

(3) They have no exercise of faith, nor are they engaged in choosing Christ to be their Surety, in longing for Him, yearning for Him, fleeing to Him with prayers and supplications, receiving Him unto justification and sanctification, surrendering to Him, making Him the heart's desire, and living in union with Him.

(4) Their life is entirely in this world. They desire, long for, seek, concern themselves with, love, delight in, and are anxious about earthly things only; that is, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. This can be true whether one lives a civil life in an external sense and is religious, or one, either openly or secretly, indulges in blatant sin.

They who are thus, are unconverted; they must realize this. Such we warn most earnestly that they ought not to be emboldened to come to the holy table, and we declare to them that they are neither partakers of Christ nor of His benefits. The Lord's Supper is not for them, and if they nevertheless attend, we pronounce the wrath of God upon them.

Converted persons (if they are healthy and have the opportunity to partake) *may not refrain from partaking*, for it 1) is contrary to the friendly invitation of Christ; 2) is detrimental to their own comfort; 3) impedes their growth; 4) contradicts their confession of Christ; and 5) is detrimental to the communion of saints, running counter to all the good things which we have enumerated above. When believers make themselves unworthy of the Lord's Supper by giving offense, living in strife and hatred, or cleaving to a given sin to such an extent that prior to the event they do not wish to make a full resolution to part therewith, they sin in a double measure and ought to humble themselves deeply before the Lord. Let such remain in the sanctuary during the administration of the Lord's Supper, stand afar off, and observe the partaking of the Lord's Supper by believers. Let them thus mourn by themselves and think, "I may not be among them."

Question: What must a person do who, in examining himself, can neither arrive at the knowledge of his state nor conclude whether he is converted? Certainly, such a person may refrain from partaking, may he not?

Answer: One ought never to consider it a privilege if he does not partake; rather, it must cause great sorrow if he is not permitted to come forward, and must refrain from partaking. It is entirely wrong to seek for reasons to refrain from partaking, and thus to pacify the conscience. It is not a requisite for partaking that a

person have a complete, steadfast, and active assurance which renders him free from concern as to whether he is in the state of grace—an assurance by which he reflexively appropriates grace. Rather, it is sufficient for one to be assured of the extrinsic acts of faith and repentance, even if one dare not draw the conclusion: *I believe and am converted*.

(1) A true believer will perceive within himself that with all his heart—albeit the one time more perceptibly than at other times—he yearns for the Lord Jesus in order to be justified by His blood, to be clothed with His holiness as merited by His fulfillment of the law, and to be renewed and sanctified by His Spirit. He will perceive that he yearns for, longs for, cries after, flees to, waits upon, and surrenders himself to Him. He wrestles against unbelief in order that he may bring Jesus into his heart, and to be assured that he believes in Him and is a partaker of Him and His benefits.

(2) He will perceive that he cannot be satisfied with believing that he has received grace. He desires with all his heart the possession, the enjoyment, and the relish of the benefits of the covenant. He will perceive that he is enamored with being truly united to God, with a life in which there is an impression of the Lord's presence, with peace of conscience, and with the love and fear of the Lord. When he misses this, he is troubled, and if he has lost this, he cannot rest until he receives it by renewal; for this is his life, delight, and felicity.

(3) He will perceive within himself a hatred and distaste for sin, a grief when he sins, a repeated rising again and a fleeing to the blood of Jesus unto reconciliation, and a delight and love to live a life which is pleasing to the Lord. He perceives within himself a warfare between the flesh and the spirit. The lusts of the world continually draw him to the world and away from God, whereas the spirit—that which has been regenerated, his spiritual life within him—continually draws him away from sin unto God. He also perceives, to his grief, that the flesh at times has the upper hand in this battle, whereas at other times, to his joy, the spirit prevails.

If someone perceives that these frames and exercises are truly to be found within him, he will be able to come to the table, even if he lacks clear assurance. Many believers lack this assurance either due to ignorance of the Word, weakness of their historical faith, fear of deceiving themselves, or they may see so much sin coexisting with grace. Such may not refrain from partaking, but rather are obligated to come forward with the multitude which keeps holyday, so that by using the signs, the promises—which are made to such as have just been mentioned—may be sealed to them.

The Third Aspect of Preparation: Spiritual Adornment

The third requisite for preparation is *spiritual adornment*. When someone is to attend a wedding, he adorns himself with the very best that he has. A bride will adorn herself in a most excellent manner so that she may be desirable to her husband and honor him. Much more must a believer do this in order that the King may delight in his beauty. The guest who also sat down, but was without a wedding garment, was soon identified and cast out (Matt 22:12-13). This is meant as a warning, but also as an exhortation to put on a wedding garment.

This *spiritual adornment* consists, first of all, in *an enlivening of historical faith* by a quiet meditation and reflection upon the entire work of redemption, together with approval of and joy over the goodness, wisdom, righteousness, power, and truth of God which manifest themselves in the work of redemption.

(1) In your thoughts ascend to the fountain of all this: eternal election. Consider that from eternity it has been God's good pleasure to reveal His righteousness and mercy, in order to give reason for adoration, joy, thanksgiving, the magnification of God, and thus for felicity. Consider that He has furthermore determined that to that end some angels and human beings be punished for their sins, and has ordained others, due only to His grace and sovereign good pleasure, to be the recipients of eternal blessedness.

(2) From there proceed to a reflection upon the covenant of redemption, or the Counsel of Peace: The Son would be Surety for the elect who due to their own wantonness would fall away from God and subject themselves to a temporal and eternal curse. Consider how it was determined that He would assume the human nature in unity of His person, and as Surety would take upon Himself their sins as His own, satisfying the justice of God by His suffering and death, accomplishing everything which was needful to bring them to felicity.

(3) Then descend to the creation of man and to the breaking of the covenant of works. From there, proceed to the promises of the Mediator, to all the shadows and sacrifices by which God's people were taught how the promised Savior would deliver and save them, taking note how believers yearned for the fulfillment of the promise.

(4) Furthermore, consider that the promised Messiah came into the world after approximately four thousand years, assuming the human nature from the Virgin Mary in unity of person, and thus entered into a state in which He could execute His Suretyship. Consider how the Lord Jesus, from His birth, has taken upon Himself with such willingness and love the curse which was upon

the elect, and therefore immediately had everything against Him. He was born in poverty, and as an outcast was laid in a manger in the rear of a stable. He had to flee from the persecution of Herod, and in the sweat of His brow He ate His bread. Upon the initiation of His public ministry, He was first violently assaulted by the devil in the wilderness. He traversed the entire country, preaching with great power to bring men to repentance and salvation. Moved by deep compassion He healed those who had various sorts of misery; He healed the blind, deaf, dumb, and lame; He cast out devils and resurrected the dead, to the comfort of those that mourned. However, He also immediately experienced the wrath and slander of the Pharisees and scribes who endeavored to make Him despised, and subsequently conspired to put Him to death.

(5) Having finished His course, the wrath of God was poured out upon Him in such measure—due to the sins of the elect which He had taken upon Himself—that He became sorrowful, even unto death. He prayed with strong crying and tears, and the bloody sweat dripped from His countenance to the earth; He indeed went to His disciples, but none supported Him. He was betrayed by His own disciple, Judas, captured by His enemies, dragged away cruelly as a murderer, placed before the ecclesiastical council, falsely accused, and condemned to death as a blasphemer. Furthermore, He was mocked, spat in the face, beaten with fists, delivered to the Gentile judge, Pilate, brought to Herod, and led along the streets in a robe of mockery. His crucifixion was demanded by the people (having been stirred up by the chief priests). He was crowned with a crown of thorns as an act of mockery, and beaten over the head with sticks. He was condemned to death, led from Jerusalem to Golgotha while bearing the cross, nailed to the cross—the nails being driven into the wood through His hands and feet—and was raised up along with the cross, thus being suspended between heaven and earth. There hung this beloved Jesus—covered with blood from head to toe, experiencing the most excruciating pain, and enduring the greatest shame imaginable. He furthermore had to see the joy of His enemies, the shaking of their heads, and the pointing of their fingers, as well as hear all sorts of biting words of slander. God withdrew all light and the manifestation of His favor from Him, and filled Him instead with His anger and wrath. He cried out in the anguish of His spirit, “My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?” He suffered from a painful thirst; in response to which vinegar mixed with gall was given Him as a drink. The sun was darkened so that an oppressive darkness troubled Him even more, and last of all He

gave up the ghost. All this was comprehended in being Surety for a sinner; and, true believers who read or hear this, it was in this manner that He paid the ransom for you.

(6) He was buried and on the third day rose again from the dead. After forty days He ascended into heaven, and received the very greatest honor and glory at the right hand of the Father—and will return as Judge upon the clouds to judge the children of men.

The quiet and thoughtful contemplation of all this is one's duty around the time of the Lord's Supper, for by this, one remembers Him and shows forth His death. The contemplation of this will engender a clearer impression of God's righteousness, the necessity of satisfaction, the love of Christ, the severity of His suffering, and the resultant efficacy of the atonement.

Proceed from this point to the contemplation of the way by which God brings the elect into fellowship with the Savior. God causes the gospel to be preached at various places in the world, sends forth ministers to proclaim it, and calls His own by His Word—not only externally, as He does with many, but also internally. He illuminates them, convicts them, gives them a desire after the Lord Jesus, draws them to Him, and gives them faith whereby they receive Christ and entrust themselves to Him for justification, sanctification, and salvation. God thus regenerates them, makes them new creatures, leads each of them according to His counsel, and at last takes them into the glory merited by Christ. Simultaneously, meditate upon those ways by which the Lord has brought you hitherto—at each point you will thus observe wondrous things. You will be strengthened in the truth, joyfully approve of this, quietly be led into the truth, and thus be guided to glory by His counsel.

Secondly, spiritual adornment consists in the endeavor to *come into a spiritual frame whereby one can be an object of free grace*. This transpires when you observe yourself in reference to your insignificance and sinfulness in order to be humbled thereby. Those who are in such a condition are suitable objects of grace. "... for God ... giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5); "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57:15); "... I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt 9:13). Therefore, think as follows: "What am I, poor worm, that the Lord should remember me! I am a man whose origin is in the dust, who dwells in a vessel of clay, carrying about in my flesh the worms of corruption, and am but a dry root and nothing at all. Will such a one enter into

covenant with God, be a child of the Lord of lords, and hereafter have communion and fellowship with this glorious and all-sufficient God? Furthermore, I am nothing but sin, and by nature I miss the image of God; instead, the image of the abominable devil was in me. What abominations this wicked heart has brought forth—not only prior to my conversion, but also yet after my conversion! What sins I have committed in thoughts, words, and deeds at such and such a location, at such and such a time, in the presence of, and together with such and such a person, as well as in solitude! How void of desire and spirituality, and how sinful I am in my religion; that is, in hearing and reading the Word of God and in praying and singing! How unfaithful I am in reference to grace received, and how I have grieved the Holy Spirit! Truly, I am not worthy that God would look down upon me and bestow any grace upon me at all.” Reflect upon this for some time until you are rightly affected by these matters and sink away in your sinfulness. This is not so that you become unbelieving and disown your state, nor be terrified and devastated by the law and the prospect of eternal condemnation—as if this alone were the right manner of being humbled. No, such terrors are generally experienced at the outset of conversion. However, the conviction of one in whose heart there is faith is not of this sort. Rather, the humility to which we are here referring consists of these frames:

(1) Humbleness of heart: “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies” (Gen 32:10); “Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?” (2 Sam 7:18); “... I ... am no more worthy to be called Thy son” (Luke 15:21).

(2) Evangelical shame accompanied by faith: “I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens” (Ezra 9:6).

(3) Sorrow over the sinfulness of sin: “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight” (Ps 51:3-4).

(4) A humbling abhorrence of self: “I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly” (2 Sam 24:10).

(5) A being fearful of the rod: “O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure” (Ps 6:1).

(6) Confession of sin, coupled with the acknowledgement of it being hateful and condemnable: “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord” (Ps 32:5).

(7) Heartfelt prayers for forgiveness and peace of conscience: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities” (Ps 51:1-2,9).

(8) A lifting up of the heart by believing the promises made to those who confess their sins: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). These are the humble frames of the heart upon which God bestows His free grace and these are the adornments in which the Lord Jesus finds a delight. Pray for such frames, and highly esteem them if you may have them.

Thirdly, this spiritual adornment consists in *a restoration in and renewal of the covenant of grace*. Israel did likewise, for we read, “And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and they swore unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought Him with their whole desire; and He was found of them” (2 Chron 15:12,14-15). It is true that this covenant, which once has been made, remains sure to all eternity. “Neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed” (Isa 54:10); “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me” (Jer 32:40). Some frequently come into darkness, however, and doubt if they have ever rightly entered into the covenant and are concerned whether they are partakers of Christ. Others miss a lively frame, and the joy of being in covenant with God. The luster of the benefits of this covenant is so obscure for them. It is therefore beneficial and necessary to renew the covenant. Therefore quietly meditate upon the miserable, sinful, condemnable, impotent, and abominable state of those who are outside of the covenant of grace. Consider that you yourself were once one of these. Consider, on the other hand, how blessed it is to be in the covenant of grace, to be a partaker of its excellent benefits, and how surely and perfectly it has been established in the death of the Lord Jesus. Be enamored with this state. Give heed therefore to the sincere, earnest, and urgent invitation and calling of the Lord Jesus; listen to His lovely voice. Stir up your desires thereby and by way of that covenant surrender yourself earnestly and willingly to the Lord Jesus as if

you had never done so before, saying, “I now do this with my whole heart and by this covenant I wish to, and shall, live and die.”

Fourthly, this spiritual adornment consists in *a sincere resolution to lead a more holy life*. “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:8); “Come, eat of My bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding” (Prov 9:5-6). You must not only make a general resolution, but it must relate to specific sins, as well as to specific virtue. To that end, there must be an enlivened desire for holiness: “O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes!” (Ps 119:133 a wholehearted initiative: “I have inclined mine heart to perform Thy statutes alway, even unto the end” (Ps 119:133); and there must be earnest prayer for help, being aware of your impotence: “Order my steps in Thy Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Ps 119:133); “Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God: Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Ps 143:10). If the soul may be conscious of her sincerity in this, she will be at liberty to approach to the Lord. “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God” (1 John 3:21).

Fifthly, spiritual adornment also consists in having *an esteem for the Church*. “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Ps 137:5-6). The Church consists of the people of God, the beloved of the Lord, the body of the Lord Jesus, and the kingdom of Christ, and is a city adorned upon a hill, a light in the world, a terror to the kings of the earth (not due to her physical power, but rather, her heavenly disposition), awe-inspiring to the ungodly, the delight of the godly, an ornament of the entire earth, a goodly bonnet in the hand of God, and the glory of Christ! The Church is the object of God’s goodness and benevolence. “All my springs are in Thee” (Ps 87:7). The supervision and protection of the Lord provide a safe hiding place. “I the Lord do keep it (the vineyard); I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day” (Isa 27:3). What bliss it is to be among those saints and glorious persons and, with them, to appear before the countenance of the Lord, to confess Jesus, to glorify God, and to receive a blessing! Who would not be carried away with desires to be among them, and with them endure the sweet and the bitter, prosperity and adversity? Moses conducted himself as such: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the

son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb 11:24-26).

Sixthly, spiritual adornment also consists in having a heart *which is moved in love toward all God's children*, regardless of whether one knows them or not—yes, a heart filled with love which extends to all men. "And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Pet 1:7).

At the Lord's Supper communion is exercised with all believers. It is a communion which cannot but function by the love of the heart manifesting itself. Here the heart must be examined carefully as to whether there is any hatred, envy, or vengefulness—and if there is, special care must first be given to its removal. One must also consider whether there have been any differences or discord between you and your neighbor—be it that you have offended him with deeds, words, or facial expressions, or that your neighbor is of the opinion that you have not conducted yourself well toward him. It could also be that your neighbor has offended you and you did not behave yourself correctly toward him in defending yourself. Give heed to this and do not readily pass over this. Do not allow yourself to be blinded by self-love, neither be your own judge, nor insist upon your rights to the utmost, but rather accommodate him as much as the truth will suffer you to do. Do not demand that your neighbor be humbled before you, nor triumph over him, but be the least, even if he is the more guilty one, is younger in years, and is of lesser position. Even if he were to boast of this, go to him and discuss this in love, persuading him by your tenderness and peaceful disposition. If you have offended him, go to him and openly confess your guilt, request forgiveness, and be not ashamed *before* him, for you were not ashamed of your misconduct *toward* him. Give heed to this and do not pass over this by saying, "I forgive him in my heart," or, "I confess my guilt before God and my heart is therefore at peace," etc. You must not expect a blessing if you have not done everything from your side to promote peace with your neighbor. If your neighbor refuses to be reconciled, you have done your part. Consider the following passages in connection with this: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt 5:23-24); "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted,

forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32).

We have thus sought to motivate you to be engaged in sacred preparation. We shall add one more matter as a warning and as advice. *The warning is as follows:*

(1) Restrict yourself neither as far as time (that is, as far as the duration of your preparation is concerned), nor as to the manner in which you will perform this, so that you will be confused and troubled if you do not perform this as carefully as you ought. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operation; however, let there be neither laziness nor laxity.

(2) Do not force yourself to be in a specific frame and to be emotionally moved to such and such a degree. This would convey that you imagine yourself to be able to do this by your own strength and your own will. The best preparation is to engage in this duty in quiet resignation, as being destitute of everything, and with expectation—not running ahead of the Spirit, but rather, following His leading. This will provide the best preparation, and will teach you not to rely upon preparation.

The advice I wish to give is that I deem it to be most beneficial to have a *day of fasting and prayer* prior to the Lord's Supper—be it that one either does not work and eat at all, or that one works little and eats the simplest of foods. Let every one consider the circumstances in which he is; that is, whether he is in service or free, rich or poor, or whether he is in an ungodly or godly family. The Lord has left it to our discretion to what extent we wish to restrict ourselves, except that there be one day which we designate for the purpose of setting ourselves apart. This act of separation itself, and the repeated reflection upon this during this day will make an impression. To spend this day with the impression of it having been set apart will make one humble and pliable. If one has been barren, dead, without desire, and has had wandering thoughts the entire day, there may generally be special movement at night, so that one may as yet rejoice in having set the day apart. If such is not the case, however, the desire to seek will yet excuse us to some degree, and one will be humbled by having spent the day in such an unprofitable manner, not having been able to be humbled about other sins on this day.

This concludes our discussion regarding preparation.

The Celebration of the Lord's Supper

The person who has prepared himself in the aforesaid manner, must not sleep too long in the morning, lest time slip away and he

were to come in a hurried frame of heart. He must also not arise extraordinarily early, lest he be dull, sleepy, or exhausted during the hearing of the sermon and the administration of the Lord's Supper, for an exhausted body inhibits the motions of the soul. He ought to arrive in church punctually with clean and appropriate clothing; that is, without either a careless or proud appearance. If someone is poor and has no other clothing except his daily garments, and if even this is very plain, let him not refrain from attending, for the Lord looks upon the heart rather than on the clothing. The godly will not despise him for it, and what the others think does not matter; the dogs and the swine are themselves to refrain from the use of that which is holy.

When you leave your home and walk the streets to church, let your heart distance itself from the world, as Abraham went out of Ur, Lot went out of Sodom, and Israel went out of Egypt. Leave all worldly thoughts, desires, and concerns at home, and walk away from them. Walk the street with the heart of a stranger who is hastening to heaven, the fatherland—and as you go, pray, long, and yearn for the Lord.

Upon entering the church let a holy reverence arise in your soul, considering that God, the angels, and the children of God are present there. As you enter, pray, “O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God my God” (Ps 43:3-4). Quietly take your seat, and let attentiveness, reverence, and dignity manifest themselves upon your countenance and by your deportment. On the one hand refrain from looking around idly, and on the other hand, from affectedly allowing your head to hang, distorting your mouth, gesturing with your hands, lifting your eyes with affectation, heaving loud sighs which are audible to others, and leaning then in this and then in that direction, etc. How abhorrent is such affected behavior! It is abominable to the godly and ungodly alike, and it renders godliness suspect and despicable—and even if there is no subtle hypocrisy, such ought to know that it is so perceived. “Wisdom is before him that hath understanding” (Prov 17:24).

During the reading of God's Word, singing, prayer, and preaching, join in with the congregation and unitedly engage in singing, prayer, and listening; let your heart be focused thereon. This is not the time to strive for special frames relative to the Lord's Supper, for then you may lose the one as well as the other. “Take heed therefore how ye hear” (Luke 8:18).

As you arise to go to the holy table, arise as if you were a bride about to be married, doing so in response to the voice of the Bridegroom Jesus, calling out, “Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away” (Song 2:10); “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa 55:1). Moreover, arise with a desire to be near to your Bridegroom Jesus. “I will now turn aside, and see this great sight” (Exod 3:3). It is inappropriate to quake and to tremble at this moment, as if you were being drawn there with reluctance—love and desire are appropriate at this time.

While *going to the table*—if there is some time—reflect upon the pathway and the various aspects of Christ’s suffering. Else, maintain a quiet, introverted disposition and pursue those thoughts and motions which the Lord impresses upon you, or reflect upon the leading of the Holy Ghost, accompanied with ejaculatory prayers to be led by Him, saying, “Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Ps 143:10). You may also think by yourself how the Lord Jesus, being accompanied by holy angels, so to speak, takes you by the hand and leads you to the table. “She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought” (Ps 45:14-15); “Even by the springs of water shall He guide them” (Isa 49:10).

While *sitting at the table*, consider yourself as being seated in the brightness of an open heaven, shedding forth its light upon the table and all seated guests—and thus also upon you. Consider yourself to be in the presence of God your heavenly Father, and Christ your Bridegroom. Sink away in your insignificance and let a childlike awe and reverence arise in your soul, while saying, “Surely the Lord is in this place. ... This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen 28:16-17). Be observant and do not fear, for the Lord has determined to bestow much grace upon you in Christ. Remain steadfast in the faith, and glorify God in His grace and Christ for the perfection of His atonement.

While *eating and drinking*, be consciously active by faith.

(1) Partake as being invited by the Bridegroom who says, “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved” (Song 5:1).

(2) Do not focus on the external signs only, for you know that they cannot feed your soul. Also, let not your heart turn from them in order to receive Jesus immediately, that is, by faith only—such activity is to transpire outside of the Lord’s Supper. Rather, in a conscious and feeling manner, unite the sign with the matter signified, and behold in them the breaking of the body of Christ

and the shedding of His blood, and with that, His love and the efficacy of His suffering unto the forgiveness of your sins. Note these signs as a seal and pledge given to you by the Lord Jesus to assure you that His atonement is for you and that His love is toward you—and that this will forever remain true.

(3) Neither expect a miracle here nor an extraordinary measure of elevation, light, or ecstatic joy. If the Lord gives you this, enjoy this good thing while it may be your portion. Be it known, however, that it is the common way to exercise faith, and to assure you by means of these signs—as being seals and pledges—that as certainly as you eat that bread and drink that wine, so certain is it that Christ has died for you and loves you; thus strive to attain peace in your conscience by faith.

(4) Keep your soul in a steadfast, thoughtful, and expectant frame—a frame wherein faith is in exercise. Thus, if you are conscious of the sincerity of your heart and your objective in coming, refrain from instability and fearfulness, be it due to sudden thoughts which enter, fear of eating and drinking judgment to one's self, darkness suddenly coming upon you, or your inability to keep your thoughts together and being, so to speak, without thoughts. Such frames will prevent a fruitful partaking.

(5) While eating and drinking, apply Christ to yourself, unite yourself to Him in truth, with steadfastness, and in love. Ascend to the immutability of the covenant, which has now been sealed to you, saying, “My beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song 2:16).

Upon departing,

(1) say within your heart, “My Jesus will keep His word; with that I am satisfied. He will neither leave me nor forsake me and He will finish all things for me. He will preserve me, keep His eye upon me, lead me by His counsel, and afterwards take me into glory. I put my trust in His power and wisdom.”

(2) Enliven your desire to remain near to Jesus; since this is not possible, however, leave your heart there and entrust it to Him.

(3) Comfort yourself with His return on the Day of Judgment, and look for this day with great anticipation, for then you may be with Him eternally in body and soul.

(4) Depart from the table as being sent forth by Jesus to show forth His death and fullness of salvation to the world, and to finish that work which the Lord has given you to do.

I have presented each of these matters to you individually to motivate you to come to the Lord's Supper in a proper frame. Do not trouble yourself, however, to practice these matters in such an order. The soul must at such a time have freedom and the Holy

Spirit operates at such times in divers manners. Rather, by reading or rereading what has been stated before, you will engender a habitual tendency in the soul, and you will become more fit to engage yourself by way of such a frame. “Happy is that people, that is in such a case” (Ps 144:15); “Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple” (Ps 65:4). Blessed is he who may thus be led into the inner chambers of the gospel, who may say, “To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee” (Ps 63:2-3).

Reflection Upon the Lord’s Supper

After having been to the Lord’s Supper, you must not conduct yourself as if you have left behind a heavy burden about which you had been so concerned, and you are now quite satisfied because you hope that you have neither eaten nor drunk judgment to yourself—and thus return to your former state and way of life. See to it that you refrain from such behavior. Be very careful to conduct yourself well after the Lord’s Supper. If Satan has not been able to gain the advantage over you in the preparation for and celebration of the Lord’s Supper, he will yet endeavor to get the advantage over you after the Lord’s Supper. After the Lord Jesus had been baptized, He was tempted of the devil, and after the disciples had celebrated the Lord’s Supper with Christ, they were in that same night offended and dispersed, and Peter was sifted as wheat. After Paul had been drawn into the third heaven, there came an angel of Satan who buffeted him. This is generally also true for believers—after having been comforted they must arm themselves against the assaults of the enemy, so that he may not get a hold upon them. As one must be on guard against the enemy, he must likewise take special care to conduct himself appropriately toward God, his Benefactor. We may indeed apply to this spiritual meal what God demanded of Israel upon their arrival in Canaan with its abundance: “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which He hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God” (Deut 8:10-11).

Reflection consists first of all in a quiet *reflection* upon how we have fared at the Lord’s Supper, and furthermore, how we have behaved ourself and what God has done for us. “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness” (Deut 8:2).

Reflect upon *what your condition has been*.

(1) Have you been actively engaged during the time of preparation? Have you taken the time for it, or did you continually postpone it until time slipped away from you and a slight spiritual motion with a prayer or two had to do? Was there a reflection upon sin, and a wrestling to receive Christ? Was there a lively inclination and a stirring to repent, or were you in darkness, listless, and discouraged?

(2) What was your condition during the administration of the Lord's Supper? Were you sorrowful or joyful? Were you tender, or hard and insensitive—all this being intermingled with sorrow? Were you in the dark or was it light; were you moved or composed; did you exercise faith or were you full of fear? Were you filled with longing or was it barren within?

Reflect also upon *the manner in which the Lord has manifested Himself to you*.

(1) Were you sorrowful both when you came and when you returned, not having sensed the Lord's presence?

(2) Did you receive peace, quietness, hope, assurance, and joy? Did you sweetly cleave to the Lord, doing so while weeping, without much comfort? Or could you entrust it all to the Lord, and did you in love lean upon your Beloved? Did the Lord manifest Himself to you in a special manner with extraordinary revelations, or by granting clear and powerful assurance? Reflect upon these and similar matters. Do not deny what you have received; highly esteem the very least thing. If the soul can thus engage itself in quiet meditation, the Lord's Supper will have a sweet aftertaste. One will perceive his failures and acknowledge the free grace of God, His goodness, and His benevolence. It will be a renewal of friendship, and be as a wedding dinner, treating Jesus to His own dainties, saying, "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits" (Song 4:16). Yes, you may then receive that blessing during reflection which you missed while partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Reflection to Be an Expression of Gratitude

Secondly, reflection consists of *joyous gratitude*: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Ps 103:2); "Praise the Lord, call upon His Name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His Name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord; for He hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee" (Isa 12:4-6).

Gratitude consists:

(1) In knowledge of, observance of, and appreciation for, the good which has been received. This pertains to the entire work of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ and to all the benefits promised in the covenant of grace, as well as to those good spiritual frames and the Lord's manifestation to you at the Lord's Supper. "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand" (Ps 139:17-18). He who does not know the worth of what has been received cannot give thanks.

(2) In the acknowledgement that one is a partaker of these benefits: "... who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Such knowledge—of being a partaker—makes one joyful and renders the heart grateful.

(3) In the acknowledgement of the sovereign goodness of the Lord as the fountain from which alone these benefits have come forth. "Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Ps 100:3). Goodness doubles the value of the gift.

(4) In a manifestation of joy before the countenance of the Lord about all that you have received, be it more or less. "For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy work: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands" (Ps 92:4). A joyful giver demands a joyful recipient.

(5) In an inclination to requite. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps 116:12-13). Even though you are not able to requite, the inclination to do so is nevertheless required.

(6) In a blessing, boasting of, and praising of the Lord's goodness, grace, and benevolence, which are manifested in the received benefits. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

(7) In not being reserved when in the company of godly members with whom you are familiar. Instead, we must tell each other how it was with us at the Lord's Supper; this is generally of much benefit both for those who listen and for those who speak. The one recognizes his own heart, the other is comforted, and someone else is encouraged to seek. They may then concur to thank the Lord together with psalms and prayers. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul" (Ps 66:16).

Reflection Must Consist in the Anticipation and Enjoyment of Having Fellowship with God

Thirdly, reflection consists in a continual looking unto and *having fellowship with the Lord*. "... walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen 17:1); "And Enoch walked with God" (Gen 5:24). To that end it is necessary that one views God in Christ as a reconciled Father. Even when spiritual light dissipates, if one falls into sin and if strife comes, he must nevertheless hold fast to the immovableness of the covenant. It is neither your feeling nor your standing or falling which determines the steadfastness or stability of the covenant; rather, it is based on the immutability of God. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isa 54:10); "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal 3:6). Therefore do not succumb so readily; hold fast what you have, be steadfast in faith, and conduct yourself manfully. If, according to your feeling, you cannot conclude the certainty of your state, then make the conclusion judgmentally. Observe this in the following passages: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:11); "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor 5:14). Therefore set the Lord continually before you and live in a continual dialogue with Him—at one time pray, then ask for counsel, then express your dependence upon Him, then wait upon Him, then reverently worship Him, then rest in Him, then thank Him, and then again, offer yourself to His service. Acquaint yourself thus with Him.

All salvation, comfort, delight, holiness, and felicity for the soul is to be found in having fellowship with God. Such a soul perceives the *righteousness of God* as being only light, glorious, and pure—she loves it and rejoices herself in it, doing so all the more, since this righteousness is not against her unto condemnation, but the Surety having merited this, it is to her advantage. The soul also perceives the *goodness and all-sufficiency* of God, and in enjoying their efficacy, she not only is unable to find any desirability in creatures apart from God, but apart from God there is nothing which she desires, since the soul finds everything in God. The soul also perceives the *holiness* of God. Since she is unable to endure its luster, she covers her countenance and perceives in this luster her own sinfulness; and for shame, she shrivels away, so to speak, and becomes as nothing.

The soul also perceives the *love of God*, and being irradiated by this love, she delights herself in a most wondrous way, reciprocal love being ignited within her. She perceives *the will of God* as being uppermost and sovereign over all things. Thus, she loses her own will in whatever suffering comes her way and in whatever duties are before her. She wishes it to be thus because it is the Lord's will. The soul perceives *the majesty and glory of God*, in comparison with which all creatures lose their majesty and glory and she bows herself deeply before her majestic God, worships Him with deep reverence and gives honor and glory to Him. She perceives the *omnipotence of God*, both within Himself and as it is operative toward His creatures. Then the power of the creature, which manifests itself either for or against her will, disappears. She sees *the wisdom of God* as revealing itself in all His works—both in nature as well as in grace. Thus, the wisdom of all creatures melts away and she is quiet and well-satisfied with the only wise government of God. The soul also perceives *the veracity and faithfulness of God*. She is acquainted with the promises, believes them, and is so confident as far as the certainty of these promises is concerned, that it is as if they were already fulfilled.

All this engenders a *thoughtful and steadfast* spiritual frame, *quiet submission* in whatever circumstances the soul encounters, *a fearless courage* in the performance of her duty, and a *delighting herself* in the task she has done for the Lord, leaving the outcome *with resignation* to the Lord's direction. Such a life is truly a *joyful life*, and *pure holiness* issues forth from this. She acknowledges any virtue which is not practiced by having God in Christ in view, as a vice. Such fellowship with God is *heaven itself*: "... and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess 4:17-18). David says of this: "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps 16:11); "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness" (Ps 17:15). "Heaven" is quickly said, but it far transcends all comprehension. The soul who acquaints herself with God by way of such fellowship, has much liberty to lay her need before the Lord her Father and to present all her desires to Him in prayer, seeking their fulfillment. God, in turn, is a hearing and answering God to her. "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer 33:3).

Behold, such is the eminent felicity of fellowship with God. Since you have entered into covenant with God, however, and this covenant has been sealed to you, you thus have the privilege to

walk humbly with your God—this also being your duty. Therefore, acquaint yourself with the Lord, have peace, and let your holiness shine forth.

Reflection Must Result in a Despising and an Abandoning of the World

Fourthly, reflection consists in *a despising and an abandoning of the world*. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16). You are obliged to abandon the world, for:

(1) This is inherent in the covenant into which you have entered and which has been sealed to you. This means that God alone is your desire, resting place, joy, delight, and the One whom I fear. The world is therefore from now on, of no significance. It is merely to be used as a means through which you traverse as a stranger in order to come to the fatherland.

(2) The world is nothing but pollution itself and lies in wickedness; you, however, are washed by the blood and Spirit of Christ. How then can you again defile yourself? The Lord has called or drawn you out of this dreadful and wicked world, as He drew Abraham out of Ur and Israel out of Egypt—how then can you return there again?

(3) Those two, God and the world, stand in direct opposition to each other; whoever loves the one hates the other, for no one can serve two masters. “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

(4) The love of the world is an adulterous love, and your Bridegroom, Jesus, to whom you have been espoused, will be very jealous in response thereto. It also dishonors Him, for it is as if He could not sufficiently satisfy the soul—as if you needed something besides Him. It would then appear as if He were not sufficiently good and friendly to refresh and gladden His bride.

(5) He shall respond to such denial with more abundant comfort. The Lord shall not allow the abandonment of all that is of the world—motivated by love for Him—to go unrequited.

(6) It is nothing more than vanity. Moreover, what is the world with all its glory without Jesus?

(7) All this confusion, beloved, and all this grief, sorrow, and trouble originate nowhere else but in the world which, as your enemy, wounds you by either flattering or frightening you. Will you then seek out your own sorrow? Have you not tasted her

bitterness long enough? Therefore come out of her, and let your walk henceforth be in heaven.

Reflection Consists in a Public Manifestation of One's Christianity

Fifthly, reflection consists in *a public manifestation that one is a Christian and a member of the covenant*. Therefore, from now on wear the livery of Christ by walking as He has walked (1 John 2:6), so that all who observe you may know that you are loyal to Jesus and His cause (Acts 4:13).

This manifests itself primarily

(1) *In love*: “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). Love the Lord, and indulge yourself continually in the love of your beloved Jesus. Manifest your love also to all believers since Jesus loves them and they cherish Jesus. Let not their imperfections and shortcomings hinder you in your love, since this love has another foundation. Let your loving heart also manifest itself toward all men—just as light and fire illuminate and yield warmth to both the good and the evil.

(2) *In humility and meekness*: “... learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt 11:29). Since having made Jesus your choice has yielded honor, love, and safe-keeping for you, can there be any concern for the honor and love of men? What interest can there then be for the goods of this world? If you therefore have cast out ambition and lust for money, humility and meekness will show forth their luster. And since you have nothing unless you have received it from your beloved Jesus, you ought to remain small in yourself and manifest this by your friendly conversation, in being honorably dressed (and thus void of external show), by your conduct in your family and wherever humility is appropriate. If you are wronged or an opportunity to become angry arises, be on guard against wrath and vengeance. Show that you are of a meek spirit, that you can endure this, and that you can love your enemies and do good to them.

(3) *In benevolence*, thus bearing the image of Christ. How benevolent the Lord Jesus was! Who did ever depart from Him, being yet uncomforted? Thus it must be with you: Comfort those who grieve, visit the sick, and be generous to the poor. If there is nothing you can give, nevertheless be friendly and manifest your compassion toward them. Let your light thus shine among men and manifest your faith by your works.

Reflection Must Manifest Itself in a Public Confession of the Lord Jesus

Sixthly, reflection consists in *confessing the Lord Jesus*. The Lord's Supper obligates you to show forth the death of the Lord until He

comes. Be not ashamed of Christ, His doctrine, church, children, or cause. Express yourself freely, and let it be manifested by your speech, deeds, and friends that you are loyal to Jesus. Rejoice when you have the opportunity to manifest how glorious, full of salvation, and precious He is to you. Rejoice when men despise you for Christ's sake, and do not shrink back from persecution when you must suffer for the name of Christ. And if it would please the Lord to bring you to glory by calling you to be a martyr and blood-witness, do not refuse this crown, but rather receive it with joy.

Blessed are they who in preparation for, in celebration of, and in reflection upon, the Lord's Supper may conduct themselves in harmony with that which has been said. He whose conduct approximates this is also well off, for those who halt will, with Jacob, also arrive in Canaan. Sincerity of heart is pleasing to God and renders support in the exercise of faith.

Many are desirous for all these spiritual frames and complain that they do not have them. They indeed have great reason to complain; however, what is the cause of all this? They themselves are certainly to be blamed, for they are lax in seeking. It is too difficult a duty for them to be thus engaged in spite of darkness and spiritual dullness. He who does not work will not eat, he who does not pray will not receive, and he who does not seek will not find. In the realm of nature God grants temporal blessings only upon the use of the means; God deals likewise in the spiritual realm. Therefore if you desire these things, actively seek them. Frequently come before the Lord as you are: as sinful, lax, listless, and ignorant. Show Him that with your small measure of spiritual life, you are impotent to overcome the resistance of the old Adam—yes, you cannot even engage yourself to do so. Therefore, while holding before the Lord His promises, pray to Him for preceding grace, His Spirit, and for willingness and ability to seek—and the Lord will hear and give you grace. This desire to seek and this supplicating for the Spirit in order that you may be actively engaged are pleasing to the Lord. In your impotent seeking your soul will frequently come into a more lively frame, and you will thereby quiet your soul and receive more light and comfort. May the Lord, who is good, cause you to seek and to find!

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

The Life of Faith in Reference to the Promises

Some years ago this material was the substance of a letter to a godly merchant in the New Netherlands. It has subsequently been enlarged, has been printed several times, and is now appended to this work.

All felicity, full satisfaction, and enduring joy of man consists in having communion with God—such was Adam’s life prior to the fall. After the fall, man’s understanding has been darkened; he has become a stranger to the life of God, is deprived of the glory of God, and thus travels upon the broad way to destruction.

In His goodness God has revealed a way by which a condemnable sinner can be reconciled with, and enjoy God, this being his felicity, satisfaction, and joy. In this life, this is but in principle, but after death and the general resurrection of the dead, this will be enjoyed in perfection in the third heaven—in the paradise of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ is this way, being the one, eternal, living, and only wise God and the eternal Son of the eternal Father. He has assumed our own human nature out of the holy Virgin Mary and has united it to Himself in singleness of person. He is thus true and eternal God, and a perfectly holy man. He was ordained by the Father in the eternal Counsel of Peace—or in the eternal covenant of redemption—to be Surety and Savior. In having given Himself to that end, He as Surety has removed all the sins of all the elect and taken them upon Himself. By His suffering and death He satisfied the justice of God, thereby reconciling the elect with God. Furthermore, by His obedience in fulfilling the law, He has merited a perfect righteousness for them. He is “the way, the truth,

and the life,” and no man comes unto the Father, but by Him (John 14:6). Salvation is in none other, and He can save to the uttermost all those who come to God by Him.

God causes this Savior and Surety, being the only way unto salvation, to be proclaimed in various places in the world by means of the *gospel*, that is, *good news*. He makes it known to men and calls them; He urges everyone to desire this salvation—and for the obtaining of it, to receive this Savior as their Surety, and surrender to Him in order to be led by Him unto salvation. Is not a person wicked who insists on remaining in his wretched condition; who despises the salvation, eternal bliss, and joy in the perfect enjoyment of communion with God; who despises God, rejects the Surety, disdainfully rejects all friendly invitations, and thus goes lost forever—is he not frightfully wicked? On the contrary, is not he blessed who is acquainted with the necessity of, the full salvation in, and the friendly invitation to come to this Surety, Jesus Christ? Is not he blessed who delights in this salvation, desires this way, and becomes a partaker of it in this way?

A Serious Exhortation to the Unconverted to Consider Their State and Repent

Apply this now to yourself. If you are unconverted, you are as yet without Christ, without God, without the promises, and without hope unto salvation—that is, if you remain and die as such. Would that for once you would conduct yourself wisely, and that it would please the Lord to convert you, give you faith, and lead you unto salvation.

First, reflect with composure upon your blindness. However, how will one convince him who is born blind that he *is* blind, since he does not know what it is to see? You know in a natural sense that there is a God. However, do you know Him? Do you continually think upon Him as the lofty, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, holy, and righteous God? Do you know what it means to behold God’s face in righteousness? Are you acquainted with what a preciousness there is in being reconciled with God by this Surety, and how delightful it is when God reveals Himself to the soul, fills the soul with His love, and when the Lord Jesus kisses the soul with the kisses of His mouth? Are you acquainted with the satisfaction and joy the soul experiences in the union with and the enjoyment of God, and how the soul is warmed and set aflame with love toward God when she is irradiated by His love? Do you know of that pure, holy, liberated, contented, delightful, and satisfied state of soul which flows forth out of this blessed communion with God as

a reconciled Father in Christ? You may respond: “I understand the words and am acquainted with this matter in the natural realm; but I cannot imagine what the spiritual motions of the soul and God’s manifestations to the soul are. I am blind in this respect, and therefore I also can not desire it. However, I do know this: I wish to be satisfied and joyful, but I have no knowledge of anything other than in the things of the world. It does not grieve me that I miss God and have no desire to have God as my portion; I do not know Him.”

Secondly, are you not sinful within and without? Do you not live in all manner of sin of which nature teaches you that they are sin? Are not the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life attractive and delightful to you? Do you not find your life in them? Do not all of these set the faculties of your soul and the members of your body in motion in order to attain, enjoy, practice, find delight in, and satisfy yourself with them? Is not God outside your heart? Are not harm and shame the only things which bridle your lusts? What is your response to all this?

What is your opinion? Can the holy God be pleased with such a vile and abominable sinner as you are? Can God, the righteous Judge of all the earth, do anything else but do right? Is not His judgment according to truth and has He not said, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10)? Oh, if you would but perceive what the word *cursed* expresses as applied to yourself! It is to be despised, scorned, and rejected by God. It means to be deprived of all grace, help, comfort, and hope; it means to be without refuge and shelter. It is an unbearable and dreadful terror; it is a trembling and anxiety resulting from being filled with the wrath of God—all of this without any relief and rest. It means to be eternally cast away from God in the pool of damnation; that is, into the eternal fire where there is nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth and where the smoke of torment arises to all eternity. All of this will be accompanied by the most horrifying despair, since all hope for the future will be totally cut off. Behold, this is your condition, this you are worthy of, and this will come upon you if you do not make haste to flee to that Surety we have held before you.

First, do not deceive yourself by thinking, “God is gracious and merciful; therein is my hope.” Man, awake from the stupor imposed upon you by the devil and your darkened understanding! Are there not any people damned, and do not the majority of mankind go lost (Matt 7)?@ Where then is your imaginary mercy of God? It would not be an act of God’s mercy if the righteous Judge would forgive sins without punishing them to the full. Such mercy

would be despised in worldly judges. Rather, God's mercy consists in the gift of a Surety in whom He fully punishes the sins of believers, in granting a person faith in this Surety, and in regenerating, sanctifying, and leading such a person in that way to eternal felicity. Do you now perceive that your hope upon mercy is false, and that you would deceive yourself, since your hope is without foundation?

Secondly, also do not deceive yourself by thinking as follows: "If I believe that Christ has died for us, and if I do my best, repent, and endeavor to live a godly life; and if I pray that God would be gracious to me, I have a good hope that I shall be saved." This is the widest pathway to destruction, for all this is erroneous. Christ did not die for all men; He died for His elect only, to whom He gives true faith, the nature of which we shall soon discuss. What is the best that you can do, you who are blind and dead in sin? And you who are void of the principle of spiritual life, what repentance can proceed from you? Your feigned conversion and godliness is but a work of nature, consisting in abstinence from blatant evil and the performance of civil good; however, this is not conversion and godliness. The latter is a principle of spiritual life which proceeds from the soul's union with God in Christ, which manifests itself in spiritual deeds wrought in the soul by the almighty power of God.

Thirdly, also do not deceive yourself by thinking that you are converted simply because you have experienced sorrow, have been moved emotionally, have been terrified, believe that Christ is your Savior, and pray for the forgiveness of sins. Many have done this who are now already in hell. True sorrow, faith, and prayer are hidden matters for the unconverted; their focus is only on the natural. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You are thus entirely destitute; you are blind, dead in sins, condemnable, and all the foundations of your hope are nothing but deceit.

What now? There is yet hope for you, that is, if you but desire to be saved in the way which I shall propose to you. There is no counsel for those who are insensitive about their wretched condition, who will not hear of either of hell or heaven, and have neither desire nor fear. But poor man, awake! for you are at the very edge of hell—and behold, you are falling into it. Awake, awake, before it is too late! If not, then with horror we must see you sink away into eternal damnation.

An Exhortation to Concerned Souls

However, if there may be some concern and desire to be delivered from hell and to enjoy salvation eternally, give heed, and let such divine counsel be agreeable to you. The righteous and good

God has given His Son Jesus Christ—who is God and man—as Surety, who, by His suffering and death, has accomplished eternal reconciliation and redemption, and by His holy obedience has merited a perfect righteousness. As His servant, I offer this Surety to you in His Name—yes, you who read or hear this read, the God of heaven calls you to receive this Surety freely as your ransom and righteousness. This Jesus, who is good and true, invites you in a most friendly manner to receive Him and to surrender yourself fully to Him, assuring you that upon coming He will not cast you out, but will most certainly take you to Himself into eternal felicity. Should you not listen to such a God who calls, and to such a Jesus who extends such a friendly invitation? Shall this not move your heart? Do such offers then have no attraction for you? Shall eternal felicity and deliverance from hell not be matters of concern for you? How I wish that the Lord would illuminate your understanding, incline your will, and stir up all your affections to receive that Surety, to enter into that great covenant of grace and be saved! May the Lord Himself draw you powerfully and translate you out of yourself into Christ Jesus. May He grant you faith, regenerate you, grant you life in union with Christ, and may He also cause you to grow and increase in this life—for it is God who works in you both to will and to do.

First, to that end it is indeed necessary that you are acquainted with and perceive your wretched state, your wicked heart and previous sins, as well as the corruptions which continually manifest themselves. Do not yield to a sense of hopelessness, however, nor become discouraged, for the way unto life is not by way of a new covenant of works, but by the covenant of grace in which everything is given without price—the atonement of Christ being the only foundation—and all things are given to the praise of the glorious grace of God.

Secondly, one must not focus upon his corruptions for long periods of time in order thereby to sink even deeper into his misery and to be more brokenhearted; as if being more brokenhearted prior to conversion would make one more acceptable before God; as if it were a condition upon which you could, and without which you could not come to Christ; as if it were the basis for our liberty to receive Christ. Rather, broken-heartedness is only necessary to cause you to go out of yourself and to take refuge with Jesus. If this is brought about by sorrow over your sinful state, it makes no difference whether your sorrow and broken-heartedness are great or small. Their only purpose is to drive you, while yet unconverted, out to Jesus.

Thirdly, the reception of Christ by faith as one's ransom and righteousness seldom occurs without fits and starts. A repentant sinner sees and perceives, to a greater or lesser degree, his wretchedness. Even if he cannot reflect upon his deeds as such, there are indeed perceptions—albeit they are but faint—of the righteousness of God, which time and again hinder him, nearly causing him to lose courage. He knows Jesus as Surety and as the only way to obtain reconciliation and salvation; he knows what troubles him and what it is that drives him. Since he is and remains a great sinner, he is sometimes so in the dark as to whether he may come. Yet, he cannot find deliverance anywhere else and he thus turns to this way, hoping that the Lord will permit Himself to be entreated and to grant him Christ. At times he may have more light and perceive the offer, the calling, and the invitation; and this gives him liberty. Various spiritual motions intermingle here. At one time he turns to Jesus as one standing from afar, not being able to speak a word; he stands perplexed and at times a tear trickles down. At another time the soul is filled with yearning, saying, “Oh, that I could find Him and receive Him!” Then again she waits upon the Lord to give her some light, inner stirring, ability to approach, and some liberty; or the soul is able to persevere in prayer, weeping, and supplication in order to have Jesus as her portion. Then there are times when the soul has liberty to surrender herself to Jesus. She makes known to Him her desire and the uprightness of her intent, and she gives her heart to Him, albeit that she is yet concerned as to whether the Lord Jesus will be willing to receive it. At other times she believes the offer of grace with more clarity and she receives Him in all His fullness as He freely offers all this to her. There are many inner fluctuations between light and darkness, hope and discouragement, faith and unbelief, and temptation and holiness. By way of such fluctuations the soul becomes more and more acquainted with Jesus. Jesus is no longer unknown to her. There comes a grounded hope in her heart and at times there are some assurances. These quickly vanish, however; and while wrestling, she learns more and more to rely upon Jesus and to entrust her soul to Him.

Fourthly, it is during this strife and these exercises of faith that the Lord changes and regenerates the heart, and grants spiritual life to it. This life abhors the former life of sin, and has a desire, yearning, and love for holiness. And although spiritual life is, as yet, feeble and tender and corruption still is strong, it nevertheless does not die; instead, it surfaces time and again, and in the

continual battle between the flesh and the spirit it becomes stronger and stronger.

Believers Cannot Make Progress in Their Own Strength

A believer, a converted person, who now desires to increase in this life must carefully guard against any notions about his own strength. Instead, he must habitually endeavor to discern his impotence, for then he will be more dependent upon the Lord in every deed. He will then gratefully acknowledge every good thought, be kept from much falling into sin, avoid many temptations, and be steadfast in the ways of the Lord.

To that end it is necessary that one give attention to what God says about man in that respect. God says:

(1) That man is *dead in sins*. What can a dead person contribute to his own regeneration?

(2) That man is so *blind* that he “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). What can a man do and how can he perform anything of which he neither understands what it is nor how it ought to be?

(3) That man is so *wicked* that he will not come to Christ, will not permit Christ to gather him in, has no desire after the knowledge of the ways of the Lord, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually. What can be expected of such a man other than wickedness? Can such a man do anything that is good?

(4) That man is absolutely *incapable* of performing anything that is spiritual. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). It is as impossible for man to do good as it is for a leopard to change his spots. God says that it is He rather than man who transforms someone into a sheep of Christ.

(5) That only He *removes the stony heart and gives a new heart of flesh*, causing man to walk in the statutes of the Lord and to keep and do His judgments. An unconverted person can thus not do anything that is spiritual. Therefore, he who has received spiritual life does not have this of himself, but from God.

Yes, once God has converted someone, he still needs the preceding, supporting, and finishing influence of the Holy Spirit, for the Lord Jesus says to His disciples (already having been born again), “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Paul says to believers, “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.” Meditate frequently upon this and similar texts; consider them, while lifting the heart to God, to be declarations and pronouncements of the God of

truth, and say, “God says this concerning me; thus, this is how I am.” This must be lively within the heart, and in this frame one must do everything; in all things be dependent on the Lord, and give thanks to the Lord for every good inclination.

Furthermore, take note of your heart and deeds and observe:

(1) How impotent you are to do anything aright—to do it by faith, in union with Christ as one’s life and strength. You are impotent to comply with the law as being the will of God—incapable of doing so out of pure love, to the honor of God, and without inclination toward a seeking of self.

(2) Consider how the heart is repulsed by that which is spiritual, how difficult and troublesome it is for the unregenerate old nature to live in the presence of and continual communion with God, and how inclined it is to the world. It seems as if the old nature is naturally inclined to rest and delight in these thoughts. This is an indication that the old nature is here in its element and that spiritual life is thus supernatural, having been wrought, not by them, but by an almighty power.

(3) Take notice of the innumerable multitude of sins which continually issue forth from the heart in reference to so many different objects and in so many different ways—which occur either spontaneously or at the slightest external stimulus. How many sins manifest themselves when one begins to resist sin, and how one’s nature will rage against this! Yes, even when one opposes sin, sin will ignite and become lively; and sin, taking occasion by the commandment, will even work all manner of concupiscence.

(4) How strong is the attraction of sin! It prevails, contrary to reason, over one’s own judgment, his objective and intent, the goodness of God, and chastisements. Is there then any expectation and strength with you to mortify sin? How wrong it is, therefore, to be active in one’s own strength!

(5) When a person is overcome by manifold crosses, and they are very intense and of long duration, where then is the humility and the acknowledgement of the Lord’s sovereignty and justice? Where then is your faith that it is God’s hand—your acknowledgement of the providence of God—your faith that this all comes upon you by the love of God, to your benefit, that God has appointed both time and measure, and that there will be a deliverance to your benefit? Where is the willing surrender under the hand of the Father? How much fretfulness, grief, melancholy, rejection of one’s state, and inclinations toward despair arise in the heart! Does not all of this teach you your impotence?

(6) Furthermore, how incapable you are to make appropriate

use of your prosperity. Upon being delivered from a cross which either presses you down or imperils you, being granted one blessing after another, do you then readily acknowledge that the Lord has done this? Is your heart joyful in thanksgiving toward God, or is it a great effort to believe, even faintly, that God's hand was in it? Does it humble your soul? Do you consider yourself as unworthy of all these benefits, or do you consider it as having occurred spontaneously—as if it transpired by chance, and specific means were the cause of its execution?

How one will lift himself up in prosperity; how riches will become the city of his strength, and how he will secretly rest in what he possesses! What care is expended to preserve and multiply them! How great is the consternation and discouragement when it vanishes! Do you not perceive from all this how impotent you are to mortify sin, practice virtue as you ought, and to bear with adversity and prosperity correctly?

The Tendency of Both Unconverted and Converted to Rely upon Their Own Strength

An unconverted person, upon being convicted of sin and God's wrath upon him—and thus of his condemnable condition—undertakes everything in his own strength. He will repent, forsake his sinful life, and live virtuously; he then hopes that God will be gracious to him, and he prays to God for forgiveness. Poor man! He does not know what repentance is, for this does not consist in abstaining from evil and in doing what is good. Rather, it consists in a complete change of heart and life; that is, from darkness to light, from death to life, from being worldly-minded to being heavenly-minded, from being carnal to being spiritual, and from being sinful to being godly. All this is through union with Christ who by faith dwells in the heart and who exercises a life-giving influence in the soul. Nothing comes of all his intentions, for when his fear dissipates and his nature by renewal exerts itself, he is the same as he was before. And even if he were to remain consistent in all his actions, his nature has nevertheless not been changed, but there is only a change in the degree of natural virtuousness. The highest degree of such virtuousness is but the manifestation of the natural heart. It does not bring forth spiritual deeds—deeds proceeding from a spiritual heart. With all his virtuousness he will go lost if he is not regenerated by the Spirit of God.

When a person has received true spiritual life from God, and this life is yet feeble and the old nature still strong, this person will join together God's work and his own. He not only seeks for the

forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God in the blood of Christ, but he also prays for sanctification, thereby manifesting that he is impotent and is in need of God's help. However, according to his imagination, he himself must also be active. He thinks as follows: "If I were to wait so long until God would take the initiative and work all things within me, nothing would come of it." He therefore begins to work and with much determination resolves to do so. He perceives the dreadfulness of sin with such clarity, and is so enamored with holiness that it seems impossible to him to return to sin. He is determined and it will now take place. What is the basis for this courage? Is it the assurance of divine influence? No, it is his vivid intention to carry out what he has intended to do, and he thus concludes that he has strength within himself. If, however, this intent gradually disappears from his mind, if his determination dissipates, if the clarity of his view of the dreadfulness of sin and the desirability of spiritual life is obscured (which generally occurs very readily), and if the corrupt nature by renewal gains strength and he again falls into sin and becomes a captive of sin—then all lies in ruin. Such a person will then blame himself—however, in such a way as if he could have done better, rather than attributing it to his wickedness, unwillingness, and impotence. This, instead of lessening his guilt, greatly aggravates it, and is brought down even further. If he then tries once more, and the result is again the same, he will become discouraged and will begin at once to reject his spiritual state. This is a very evident sign that all his expectation was based upon his own strength. As long as a man is not drawn away from his own imagined strength and does not come into a frame in which he is conscious of his impotence, there will be little purity in his sanctification and he will make little progress.

Our Obligation to Use the Means in Spite of Our Impotence

Question: Must one then simply let go and refrain from action until God irresistibly intervenes and works everything within us? Is man nothing but a stock and a block which does not move itself, but can only be set in motion by external means?

Answer: First, an unconverted person cannot and will not do anything; and a converted person cannot do anything without Christ, for God must also work in him to will and to do as has been shown above. It is, however, the duty of both—both being convinced of this. An unconverted person has the illusion that his corruption is not such that he cannot repent when he wills. He imagines that he, indeed, is willing and that it is in his hands.

Secondly, if God chooses to convert such a person, He will then deal with him according to his nature; that is, in conformity to his rationality. God illuminates his understanding, affects his will in an immediate sense, inclines it toward Him, and causes him to be active himself by means of His influence. Furthermore, a converted person, besides having received spiritual life, is a new creature, a new man, and a hidden man of the heart. This life has its motions and the propensity to be active, according to whether it is weak or strong. In several respects there is a similarity here with natural life. In the natural realm, man is entirely dependent upon God, without whose influence and will he can neither breathe nor move; nevertheless, he is in actuality the formal cause of his actions. A person has the ability and strength to walk and to engage in various activities, but all men are not of equal strength. A man is able to stand up against a child, but a hundred children are not able to stand up against a man; this is likewise true in the spiritual realm. A converted person has spiritual life, and this life has its own motions and will endeavor to manifest itself albeit in dependency upon the influence of the Spirit of God. This life prevails and does not cease upon the conclusion of a spiritual act; it is not repeatedly given anew when a person becomes active, prays, and exercises faith, hope, and love—thereby suggesting that he would be dead in the intervals. Rather, these motions which repeat themselves time and again, proceed from this intrinsic life, be it by the common or extraordinary influence of God. When a spiritual man grows and increases, he not only grows as far as his actions are concerned, but also internally in the habitual frame of his spiritual life. If a man decreases and regresses, the inner disposition of his spiritual life also becomes weaker. This is not true in reference to one sinful deed, for a man who falls retains his strength; rather, it pertains to a more persistent pattern of living an increasingly sinful life. According to whether the propensity of this life is small or great, weak or strong, this man will either be more or less capable of resisting sin, and of practicing virtue either more or less purely. If a believer is but small in grace, he can only do the work of a child; the larger task is reserved for the young men and fathers. It is evidence of spiritual wisdom to know one's weakness and strength and to be active in circumstances consistent with the greater or lesser degree of his strength—doing so neither below nor above his level and always striving to grow.

A Christian must be faithful in regard to this spiritual life, so that it will not decline due to his carelessness and listlessness; rather, it ought to increase due to his diligence. By God's common

influence, one should frequently be able to do much more as far as this life is concerned. Exhortations are intended to revitalize us time and again. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18); “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13); that is, do not work in your own strength, but rather in dependence upon divine influence—which will time and again precede, and stir up and sustain you, so that your labor will not be in vain. “If ye then be risen with Christ (that is, if you have spiritual life within you, let this life be active), seek those things which are above” (Col 3:1). To that end it is necessary to exercise faith unto justification and by faith to be exercised with the promises.

True Holiness: A Fruit of Being Exercised with Justification

All true and pure holiness issues forth from being exercised with justification by faith, and therefore, more than anything else, one must earnestly endeavor to be exercised with this.

The basis for faith is the Word of God in general, and the calling in particular: the offer of and invitation to the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact must, first of all, be acknowledged as being certain, steadfast, and infallible—as having been revealed, offered, and promised by God who is true, immutable, and faithful. This is not to suggest that this is saving faith itself, but it is the foundation which must first be laid before one will be able to build thereon.

God declares that men by nature are children of wrath who are nothing but sin within and without, and thus are hateful, abominable, intolerable, and condemnable. God declares Himself to be the Judge of all the earth—a righteous Judge who will by no means clear the guilty, whose judgment is according to truth, and who will reward everyone according to his works. Therefore in order for man to be saved, the justice of God must be satisfied by the bearing of the punishment due upon the sinner and by the perfect fulfillment of God’s law—man having been created in conformity to this law and eternal felicity having been promised upon obedience. God, in His Word, reveals the wondrous way whereby these two matters have been executed and whereby the sinner can become a partaker of eternal felicity. God, out of purely free grace, solely out of love toward hateful sinners, according to His unsearchable wisdom, and by His omnipotence, has given His own eternal Son to be a Surety for the elect. He, who is very God and coessential with the Father and the Spirit, has assumed the human nature, taken upon Himself the sins of the elect, borne the punishment,

fulfilled the law, and thereby reconciled the elect with God and merited their right to eternal life. The Surety Jesus Christ, thus having become the ransom and righteousness of the elect, proclaims peace to you by means of the gospel. He invites, offers, and with various reasonings allures everyone—regardless of who he or she may be, and how great a sinner he or she may be—to be justified, sanctified, and glorified by Him, along with the sure promise that He will in nowise cast out him who comes unto Him. This must of necessity be believed, for He who is true says this. He who neither approves of this nor receives this as infallible truth upon which he may most certainly depend, dishonors God in a most dreadful manner and considers God to be a liar (1 John 5:10). Acknowledge then these evangelical truths, believe them, and rejoice that there is a Jesus and that this Jesus calls you in order to save you.

These divine revelations are the foundation upon which saving faith rests. Since all fullness is to be found in Jesus, and since this fullness is being offered to you personally by this good Jesus, receive Him then as your Jesus with a ready and willing mind, heartily surrender yourself to Him, and entrust your soul entirely to Him in order that by Him you may become a partaker of all the benefits of the covenant. The acts of choosing, receiving, surrendering, and entrusting constitute saving faith. The promises are applicable to a person who is thus engaged. “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:12); “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36); “Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him” (Ps 2:12).

God's Offer of Grace in Christ: The Basis for the Exercise of Faith

Many are in the dark concerning the exercise of faith and act confusedly in this respect. They make themselves the starting point; they turn to Jesus, pray for grace by the blood of Jesus, flee to Him, take hold of Him, and in this manner hope that He will as yet receive them and be moved to bestow grace upon them. In themselves these matters are good; however, the correct manner of conduct is lacking here. They seek to move Jesus, whereas they ought to know and believe that Jesus was willing, called them, and offered Himself, saying, “Whosoever will, and whosoever thirsteth, let him come.” This offer must be the basis for their liberty to receive Him, and men must make this offer the basis for their assurance—namely, that they, having received Him upon His offer, truly have the forgiveness of sins and are partakers of all the benefits of the covenant. Those who flee to Jesus apart from the

foundation of this offer, seldom attain assurance about their state, unless the Holy Spirit deals with them in an exceptional manner. This assurance will last no longer than the duration of the sweet consciousness of grace. When this dissipates, they again live in fear, and question their previous assurance and comfort. They think that the Lord Jesus is not willing to receive them, that they are too great a sinner, and that they spoil everything time and again. They question whether they are indeed capable of receiving Jesus; for their contrition is not of the right kind, and they know not if their desire is of the right kind, etc., as if contrition, desire, and hunger were conditions upon which one would be permitted to come. Instead, perplexity and hungering are only frames by which one is stirred up to seek Jesus. If you are therefore stirred up to turn away from yourself and to go to Jesus, approach Him upon the basis of the offer of grace; be not hindered by the objections mentioned before, and your goings will become more established.

The nature of faith is such that it does not remain with the receiving of Jesus, but presses on to justification and to a life of love and holiness by faith.

Justification is not a work of man, but of God as righteous Judge. Man comes before the bar of justice, not as he is in himself, for then he could only be condemned; instead, he comes as having the righteousness of the Surety Jesus Christ which the Judge imputes to believers, Christ having acquiesced in and having been willing to become Surety. He satisfied and merited everything in their place, and a believer receives Christ's ransom and righteousness on the basis of the offer. The believer thus has a perfect righteousness which can abide the judgment of God. While thus standing before the bar of divine justice, the believer is acquitted of guilt and punishment, and is granted a right to all the benefits of the covenant of grace, both in this and in the life to come. The pronouncement of this justifying sentence is made in the Word of God by means of all the promises made to believers. The believer seeks out these promises, being convinced that he believes in Jesus and that God has thus made these promises to him, declaring him to be an heir of all those benefits, such as: forgiveness of sins, freedom from curse and condemnation, having God as a reconciled Father, being a child of God, being an heir of God, being a fellow-heir of Jesus Christ in eternal glory, etc. The stronger that faith in Christ is, and the greater the measure of clarity is with which the promises made to believers are perceived and in a lively sense are received by faith and applied to the soul, the more clearly the believer will hear the pronouncement of the justifying sentence

by the righteous Judge, and the greater the measure of peace and joy will be. The efficacy of justification will, however, be tasted in a most lovely and sweet manner if the Holy Spirit causes the soul to discern her grace, applies the promises to the heart, and says to the soul, “I am thy salvation; thou art Mine; I have loved thee with an everlasting love.”

The Believer’s Need for Daily Justification

A believing soul is not satisfied with having received Jesus by faith only once, but she does this time and again, both when she has fallen into sin and endeavors to restore the disturbed peace, as well as outside of such a situation. She is desirous to live continually in union with Christ and to be continually in amazement about, and to rejoice in, the great work of redemption. She ascends to eternal election and then proceeds to the fall, to the promises of the future Messiah; she considers the types and proceeds to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus; she reflects upon His suffering and death—from the cradle to the cross; she contemplates upon His resurrection, ascension, His being crowned with glory, His intercession, His coming unto judgment, as well as eternal glory. In all this she observes how the Lord’s glory, righteousness, goodness, wisdom, truth, omnipotence, and other perfections of God shine forth, and she praises and glorifies God on that account.

She thus beholds the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and walks with Christ, being rooted and builded up in Him. And as Moses’ countenance shone due to his fellowship with God, she will likewise perceive that her soul will acquire a more habitual spiritual frame, and will be more capable of despising the world with all that belongs to it, denying self, and walking with a perfect heart in the ways of the Lord—both toward God and her neighbor. This frame and its result are of an entirely different nature than when one has the illusion of being reconciled to God and occupies himself with the speculation of God’s majesty and the insignificance of himself and all creatures. Such is but the work of nature, whereas the other is truly spiritual—also in the smallest degree. Therefore true holiness flows forth out of faith and justification.

The Need to Be Exercised with the Promises in Order to Grow in Grace

We have stated above that the growth of spiritual life also increases in consequence of faith’s activity in reference to the promises.

By way of various trials and sorrows, it pleases the only wise God to lead His elect, who have presently been regenerated, to the felicity which He has ordained for them and which Christ has merited. He does so at one time by bodily trials, then by spiritual

trials, and frequently by both. A bodily cross generally troubles the soul and causes corruptions (which lay upon the ground as dregs) to surface and to trouble her quiet and clear disposition. Just as strong legs are needed to hold up under prosperity, it is an equally great art to hold up under adversity; great grace is also needed for this. Adversity presses the soul down, robs her of a joyous and cheerful disposition, oppresses the heart, and even has an evil effect upon the body, which yields opportunity for and stirs up to the commission of many sins. Sorrow kills more people than one would anticipate, although it is not noticed. In adversity, both discouragement and despair are very near at hand. One frequently reasons as follows: “It is done, no deliverance can be expected, and my hope has perished.” If such a person then tries to cheer himself and becomes active, he will act as a young horse hitched before the wagon; it jumps forward, then it walks next to the trail, then it rears, then it stands still, but the yoke remains the same nevertheless. One is so unaccustomed to the cross in body or in soul that he does not know what to do. He seeks it in either this or that direction, but it is not to be found there, and the more he tosses about, the more confused he becomes. Such a person becomes sorrowful, doubts all previous grace and experience, views God as being provoked to wrath, and as an avenger. He will not be able to take refuge to the Lord. God hides Himself. Such a person is unstable and without footing; he will sin more and more, and the cross will become heavier and heavier. He will seek for diversion, attempting to shake off the cross, but instead it oppresses more and more—just as is true for a deer which has been shot and carries the arrow with it while fleeing. Thus, a person walks upon the treadmill, so to speak, and after much walking, is still in the same place.

Cross-bearing and the Believer's Use of the Promises

It is therefore necessary to know how one ought to behave himself while bearing a cross in order that he may be sanctified thereby—for this is God's objective when He visits His children with a cross. He chastises for our profit so that we may be partakers of His holiness; and believers indeed become partakers thereof if they bear their cross well. For even if for the present the cross may not seem joyous, but rather seems to be grievous, it will nevertheless afterwards yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby. Therefore, since the cross cannot be avoided and be cast away, one must set himself to it—there being no other way to heaven—and take up the cross willingly, therewith to follow Christ and bear it well. The cross will then be sweet

and light even if it may press tears from our eyes. One will then possess his soul in quiet patience and have sinful passions under control. He will then experience the comforts and the help of the Lord, gain much advantage from the cross, and thank the Lord that He has led him in this way. However, the great question is: How will one bear the cross in order that he may be sanctified thereby? To this I answer: *by faith in the promises.*

In order that God's children would not succumb due to the multitude and variety of bodily and spiritual afflictions, but be sanctified thereby, the Lord has made many promises to them whereby a believer must be exercised in order to be comforted and strengthened. David found much strength in the promises: "Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy word hath quickened me" (Ps 119:49-50). Every believer will likewise be revived by the promises when he makes use of them. Their hands have eyes; that is, they believe what they see. They delight in possession, in immediate deliverance when the cross but begins to show its teeth; then they are comforted and deem God to be good. To be led further into the cross, however, and to remain there for a long time, so that one neither sees an opening anywhere nor a means of deliverance—then to remain steadfast in faith, and to bear the cross courageously (persevering in the ways of the Lord while having a lively hope of eternal glory), that is work for mature men—work that requires effort. The child of God must strive for this, so that in the way of many exercises he may attain to such a propensity. He who wishes to go to heaven must count on being surrounded by crosses from all sides. If heaven is not worth all this effort to you, then cease in your pursuits and live for the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Love the world, get your share of what it has to offer,⁴¹ and be assured that you will have to endure the final outcome, that is, eternal destruction. However, do you have love for God? Do you desire to be reconciled with Him and continually live in fellowship with Him? Do you desire to enjoy in Him, through Christ, peace which passes all understanding, and live in humility, meekness, and submission? Is it all your delight, in willing obedience, to live a life pleasing to the Lord? Is it your choice that the Lord be your only and all-sufficient portion, and to delight yourself in the Lord? Do you have eternal life as your objective, and do you lay hold on it? Therefore choose

⁴¹ This is a paraphrase of the Dutch idiomatic expression, "neemt er uw deel en deeg af."

then also the way of the cross, the way of temptations, dark providences, and many perplexities, since that is the Lord's way with His children whom He leads to glory. You must also go the way which Christ has gone. Let all your endeavor not be how to avoid or cast off the cross, but rather, how you may bear it courageously and be comforted in it—yes, bear it joyously. You will do so when you exercise yourself with the promises—then, if not deliverance, the divine consolations will be most precious to you.

How the Promises Are to Be Used

In order to make good use of these promises, four matters must be considered by way of preface: 1) who makes the promises, 2) to whom they are made, 3) the specific promises that are made and their nature, and 4) the confirmation that the promises will neither yield comfort nor strength unless the Holy Spirit Himself applies them to the soul.

First, it is not a matter of indifference as to who the person is who promises. The promises of someone who promises more than he can give, who may become incapacitated, and who is able to change his intent are of little value. Such is true for all human promises. When God promises something, however, one not only may *deem* it to be sure, certain, and infallible, but he is also *obliged* to do so. Otherwise, one will dishonor God dreadfully, since he then deems Him to be a liar. God is sovereign and He may either promise or not promise, or He may promise the one thing to this person and not to the other. God's goodness is wondrous and He promises great things to His children. God is omnipotent and He can execute all things without any impediment. God is true and faithful, and therefore He neither can nor will change, and He will certainly perform His promise. Sooner would heaven and earth be turned upside down before one of His good words would fall to the ground. When exercising one's self with a promise, one must consider God to be thus in the lifting up of his heart and with full approbation and assurance. If he does not do this, the promise will yield little comfort and exercise; doing this, however, adds emphasis to the promise. Therefore with uplifted heart, let this time and again be your practice.

Secondly, when considering a promise, one must carefully note to whom the promise is made. To appropriate promises to oneself without having a foundation for doing so is great foolishness and imagination; this will deceive the soul unto her destruction. One must therefore consider the promises in their context. With each promise, one will find a description of the characteristics of the

persons to whom they are made. It will then be necessary to examine one's self as to whether these characteristics are found within. If yes, then one must come to the express conclusion: "This promise has been made to me by the great, omnipotent, good, and immutable God, and this promise will therefore most certainly be fulfilled in me. I thus conduct myself accordingly with certainty as if I already had the matter." In this manner, one will attain to assurance and glorify God as being true.

Thirdly, since the way to heaven is encompassed by many tribulations, believers would have to spend their life in much misery—yes, due to them, would succumb in the way—if it were not that God, in His goodness, had provided for such circumstances by making many glorious promises to them. This is not only true in a general sense, but also as it pertains to various circumstances and inconveniences—so that, being comforted by these promises, they would persevere all the more courageously in all difficulties. He who, in reading the Bible, has accumulated numerous promises to be readily available upon becoming subject to a trial has a great advantage. The Holy Spirit, in granting inner comfort, customarily uses Scripture passages which He clearly and powerfully impresses upon the heart, be it during sleep or during waking hours. They can be such texts to which you have paid no attention—yes, which you did not know were in the Bible and which you subsequently find to your amazement. Such inner comforts brought about by Scripture passages are generally more efficacious and are rooted more deeply in the heart. Therefore read your Bible frequently, and accustom yourself to find a promise or an example for every occasion, and you will experience that evil will neither grieve you, cause your faith to waver, nor cause you to be in despair and to be discouraged.

Fourthly, even though God has made such glorious promises to His children, which they in faith must apply to themselves and thus support and comfort themselves, they frequently are of little effect when internal temptations are intense and external difficulties overwhelming. Then it is as if there is not one single promise in the Bible. If they find one, they cannot perceive that they have the characteristics of those to whom the promises have been made, and thus they do not consider them to be applicable to themselves. And, if they cannot deny it, they nevertheless have no effect—either because the matter is not fulfilled for them, or because they focus so intensely upon the circumstances that they cannot quiet their heart in order to take note attentively of the promise. It can also be due to having become fretful, sorrowful, and of a gainsaying disposition, or because they are swooning, and due to discouragement,

are as dead and have become insensitive. “But a wounded spirit who can bear?” (Prov 18:14). Therefore in order that the promises be efficacious, it is needful that the Holy Spirit Himself bring them to mind and reveal that these promises have been made to them, since they have these characteristics. He must furthermore cause them to see the glory of the promises and their certainty, and comfort them thereby.

A godly widow once told me that at one time a heavy cross came upon her. In despair, she opened the Bible and in doing so read Matt 6. This had such an effect upon her heart that she took the cross upon her with joy. She folded the page where that chapter was and thought: “I now have sufficient matter to comfort myself. I now know from where I shall derive my strength if, in the future, I shall encounter another cross.” Such a cross came and she diligently sought out Matt 6, but could not find in it what she had previously found. Why was this so? The Holy Spirit at that moment neither used this means nor applied it to her as He did previously. May the Lord send you the Holy Spirit as a Comforter. May He, time and again, bring the promises to mind and reveal to you that you have those characteristics, in consequence of which the promises have been made to you. May He impress the certainty and glory of them upon your heart so that by His light you may be encouraged to persevere in this dark providence!

Having said this by way of preface, a few words will be sufficient to show you the manner in which you must deal with the promises in order to use them to your benefit.

First, seek out a promise which is applicable to your situation. Consider this promise as having been made by the God of truth to His children, and that it will be fulfilled with more certainty than certainty itself. Consider that the behavior of His children (whatever it may be) will not cause God to change and nullify His promises since this given promise has been made in an absolute sense—as is true for all the promises of the covenant of grace. Their fulfillment is not contingent upon any condition from man’s side, even though there are such promises regarding temporal things (as, for example, in Isa 1:19-20).

Secondly, consider carefully the characteristics of those to whom the promise is made; they are either expressed in the immediate context of the promise or in the condition. Compare your condition with this in the presence of the Lord, and let the Lord and your conscience be the judge as to whether these matters are in you.

Thirdly, immediately look unto the Lord Jesus—be it that you

are currently in a frame in which faith is in exercise and you enjoy intimate union with Jesus, or be it that to a greater or lesser extent you are in need of renewing the act of faith—and thus take notice that all promises are yea and amen in Him; that the right to these promises has been merited by Jesus; and that a believer (be he strong or weak) is an heir of them all, and thus also of such and such a promise in particular.

Fourthly, then turn to yourself and to the promises, and consider them as having been made to you—yes, made to you by the immutable God, and that they will be fulfilled for you more certainly than certainty itself. This is the kernel of the matter. However, how rarely one engages himself in this way!

Fifthly, therefore, depend on and adjust your circumstances to this, and rejoice as if you had the matter already, saying, “My God will give it to me at a time when it is most beneficial for me, and with this divine wisdom I am satisfied.” Comfort yourself with this when the promise pertains to cross-bearing, and be exercised with it when it pertains to illumination, spiritual revelations, and strength for sanctification. Keep this promise in view, present it to the Lord, remind Him of the promises, continually lay hold of this promise, and in laying hold of the promise be prayerfully exercised with this while taking hold of the Lord’s strength. Rest upon it with quiet assurance and use all means which the Lord has ordained for the acquisition of such matters. When God promises the outcome, He is also pleased to give the means, and will cause men to use them when the time of the fulfillment of the promises has come. The fulfillment of the promises does not depend on the means, but the means are dependent upon the fulfillment of the promises.

Sixthly, therefore wait patiently for fulfillment and be neither impatient nor sorrowful, for that issues forth from unbelief in the promises of the God of truth and dishonors Him, or is due to a lack of submission to His wisdom. God is glorified both in His veracity and fatherly wisdom when one is quiet and nevertheless actively waits upon Him. Therefore, “though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab 2:3).

It is in this manner that one is exercised with the promises.

Specific Promises for Specific Circumstances

In order to illustrate, I shall present some cases to you and join one or two promises to each.

First, if a cross pertaining to temporal things fills you with concern, and either oppresses or threatens you and your soul is troubled—for temporal afflictions can indeed cause the soul to be shaken to

a great degree, not only impeding the functioning of spiritual life, but also very much weaken it—then focus upon these and similar promises: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Ps 34:19-20); “Be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5); “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13).

Secondly, do you perceive the burden of sin, its bitterness, the disquietude of the conscience, and do you dread God’s wrath, as well as death and damnation? Flee to Jesus and receive Him as your ransom and righteousness. Consider the way of God in justification: Man is freely justified by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus—and in such a frame turn to the promises. “... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. ... If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord” (Jer 31:34, 37); “... I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me” (Jer 33:8); “For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive” (Ps 86:5); “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy” (Mic 7:18). Say therefore, “God will fulfil these promises for me, and then all will be well.”

Thirdly, does your faith waver? Is there no strength to receive the Lord Jesus? Does light, peace, or assurance not follow upon this abstruse and faint transaction with Him? Do you frequently think, “How shall I do and how shall I be saved? Shall I then never truly believe in Jesus? Will He never draw me to Himself, and shall I never find reconciliation? My soul is overwhelmed. Oh, that He would take the initiative; oh, that I could find Him!” Consider the following promises: “A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench” (Matt 12:20); “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength” (Isa 40:11,29). Behold, there is your condition and there are the promises; be exercised with them.

Fourthly, perhaps you complain about darkness, saying: “Oh, how delightful is the light—to see the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus—to be acquainted with all the benefits of the covenant of

grace in their magnitude, beauty, and sweetness—to contemplate the great work of redemption from beginning to end with continual admiration—to reflect upon the deep humiliation of the Lord Jesus and all the blessedness to be found therein; and to have an immediate view of Jesus crowned with honor and glory—*that* is heaven upon earth! I have indeed seen something of this, but at that time failed to acknowledge it because I had too great a desire for clearer light; however, if I had that now, how I would rejoice! But the sun has gone down. I still know that Jesus is the altogether lovely One, but I do not see it, and my affections are not stirred up by a view of Him. I am completely in the dark, and I see neither God, Christ, grace within me, nor the preciousness of the gospel. When I engage in prayer, it is as if I call upon an unknown God. If I desire to go to Jesus, He hides Himself and I cannot get a view of Him. If I pray for something, I cannot get a view of the matters; I do indeed enumerate them, but my affections relative to them are not stirred up and it is therefore as if I did not desire them from God. It is not merely a heavy cloud which is passing between me and the Sun of Righteousness, but it is a pitch-dark night. Oh, that the glorious Morning Star would arise for me, and that the day would come that I would be as in former days! My desire and prayer are and will remain: ‘O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me’@ (Ps 43:3); however, my situation remains the same.” You must know that the Lord occasionally illuminates certain individuals in an immediate and extraordinary manner. If you complain about a lack of light, your desire is indeed good, but this desire must be tempered by submission, since not only is this the Lord’s doing, but He also reserves the actual beholding for eternity. The Word of God is the light by which we must now walk. Furthermore, a believer can also be in darkness, not only as concerns judgmental knowledge but also regarding spiritual knowledge; that is, in the beholding of the spiritual nature of the truths revealed and to be enamored by them. If this is the problem, you must take refuge to the promises and be exercised with them as was stated above.

Take notice of these and similar promises:

- (1) “Light is sown for the righteous” (Ps 97:10-11)—and light will therefore arise in due season;
- (2) “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound” (Ps 89:15). This refers to the voice of the Lord Jesus speaking in the gospel, as well as to those whose pleasure and delight it is to hear, receive, and give heed to this voice;

(3) “They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance” (Ps 89:15);

(4) “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness” (Ps 112:3-4);

(5) “But unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise” (Mal 4:2);

(6) “And he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21);

(7) “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not” (Isa 42:16). Therefore believe also these promises.

Fifthly, are you in a barren and dead condition? Does it seem that all life and feeling have departed? Do you speak as follows?—“There is neither a solution nor is there any hope for me, for I have no feeling for anything. Sins no longer upset me, threats do not frighten me, promises do not move me; I do not fear hell, and I have no desire for heaven. When I read the Word, I do not benefit from it and my thoughts flit from one thing to the next. I cannot pray, for my thoughts wander and while I am on my knees I become more sinful than before I pray; I would almost fall asleep, and I have nothing to bring before the Lord, for I do not desire anything. Occasionally I think, ‘Do I have a soul and do I believe in its immortality?’ Yes, such bewildering thoughts arise in me that I do not dare to name them. I am insensitive to all this and I give up, for there is no grace for me to all eternity. This has lasted so long that all my hope has departed. It is finished; God has departed from me and I from God.” Poor, lost sheep! Your condition is miserable enough, but your words are more desperate in nature than your condition is. Give me an answer upon the following questions:

Are you truly satisfied to be in that condition, or does your soul languish? Are you oppressed and miserable when you think upon God, even though you forget about yourself when you are among people and appear to be in good spirits in your conversation? Do you have what you desire? Are you satisfied? You will have to answer, “No, but what good does that do?” Would the world and its enticements be able to satisfy you if you could have everything according to your wishes? You will answer, “I think not.” Why are you then continually so oppressed by your sensitive insensitivity as if you had consumption? Has Jesus departed? Has the Comforter that should comfort your soul departed far from you? Is there no communion with God; is there no way by which you may approach; is there neither life, seeking, nor finding? Perhaps you will answer, “I do perceive this, but the feeling is gone.” Let me ask you, “Would it be your desire that the Lord would take the initiative with

your soul and reveal Himself to your soul as your God? Is it your desire that the Lord Jesus would make Himself known to you as your ransom and your righteousness? Do you desire that the Lord would say to you, 'I am Thy salvation; thou art Mine and thy sins are forgiven thee; I shall nevertheless save thee'? Is it your desire that the Lord would revive your faith, hope, and love, and quicken you in prayer, thanksgiving, doing battle against sin, and sanctification? Would you then be delighted and be in your element?" If you answer: "Yes, that is it; but what good does it do me, for I do not have it? I cannot work for it and I shall not attain to this anyhow, and I therefore give up with a sigh." Do you think that such a frame can proceed from the natural man? Do you not perceive the operation of the Spirit in this? If you were to detect this frame in someone else, you would say to such a person: "Be of good courage, for your insensitivity issues forth from the excessive extent and duration of this painful experience as well as from discouragement; the Lord will indeed return to you." This I also say to you, for it is still true for you, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Ps 73:25).

Once more, do you still have within you some knowledge of the Holy Spirit and His operations? Are you still acquainted with the frame of a soul who believes, wrestles, prays, cleaves, weeps, hopes, and in uprightness walks wholeheartedly before the countenance of God? Compare this to the knowledge, religious activity, virtuousness, and language of one whose activity does not flow out of union with the Lord Jesus unto justification, and who thus is still in the state of nature. Do you know the difference and do you desire the first, knowing it to be precious according to truth, and pure? I ask you: "Is the natural man indeed capable of making such a distinction with either approbation or rejection—with either love or aversion? Is not this ability a certain evidence of spiritual light and life?" Take careful notice of the following texts: "He shall give you another Comforter ... even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16-17); "... the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from Him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:4-5).

Furthermore, is there not the choice between Jesus and His cause on the one hand, and the world with either its counterfeit virtues or its vices on the other hand? Where is your heart? Is your heart fond of believers because they love Jesus and are loved by Jesus, or are you fond of charming the men of the world? In whose

company do you desire to be? Must you not answer, “That difference is too great; my heart is fond of Jesus, His cause, and His children”? Is this proverb then no longer true, “Birds of a feather flock together?”⁴² Let your heart take note of 1 John 3:14, where we read, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

Lastly, are there then no intermissions? Is not your heart occasionally softened; do you not occasionally pray, weep, and look upward to heaven whether there is grace and Spirit for you? Are you not occasionally enabled to receive Jesus, and do you not occasionally have some comfort and a lively hope? Is not this then evidence that there is life within? Therefore have courage, and once more lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees. To that end consider the following (and similar) promises, and be exercised with them in the manner pointed out to you above. “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa 57:15). This is followed by God’s dealings with the promise to one who is entirely bewildered and hard-hearted, “For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him.” Did this bring about repentance and restoration? No; they were hardened even more. “... and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart” (Isa 57:16-17). What follows upon this? Was it total rejection and banishment of which they were worthy? No, the contrary is true. “I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him” (Isa 57:18-19). What unsearchable goodness this is! Add to this the following: “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” (Isa 54:6-7); “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires” (Isa 54:11). These are

⁴² The Dutch proverb reads as follows: “Gelijk bemint gelijk, en haat wat hem is ongelijk.” The literal translation of this is: “Like loves like, and hates what is not like him.”

unconditional, certain, and glorious promises. “Are the consolations of God small with thee?” (Job 15:11).

Sixthly, do you mourn—not mourning in the manner of the previous case when one languishes due to insensitivity and desires to mourn in a heartfelt and grievous manner, but is your soul encompassed with anxiety, fear, and trembling—one time due to certain circumstances and then again due to many trials which overcome body and soul simultaneously? Does the Lord keep Himself estranged? Does He remain quiet, and does He hide Himself, so to speak, behind a cloud so that no prayer can penetrate? Does He not answer your cries? Does He reject your soul and has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Is there no rest in your soul and has peace departed far from you? Is Jesus absent, and is your soul troubled because your Beloved has departed? Does your soul melt as you think of former times when you were able to pray, weep, wait, yearn, and long; when you were able to lean upon Him in such a delightful manner, when you lost yourself in mutual love and requested everyone neither to disturb nor awake your Love until it would please Him; when He kissed you with the kisses of His mouth, His left hand was under your head, He embraced you with His right hand, you were sick with love, and found delight under the shadow of His favor? Do you miss all this? Have numerous sinful and grievous afflictions come in their place? Is your life consumed by sorrow and your years with sighing? Come, and attentively give ear to the promises. “For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul” (Jer 31:25); “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me ... to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:1-3); “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matt 5:4).

Seventhly, has it pleased the Lord to allow Satan freedom to do battle against you, buffet you, shoot his fiery darts at you, torment you with insinuations and frightening thoughts, and turn you so to speak upside down? Does your own heart bring forth unbelieving thoughts? Is your soul terrified by the wrath of God, by the fear of death, or by other unfounded fears that one thing or the other will come to pass? Attentively consider these promises and endeavor to attain to, and have a quiet soul,

(1) In reference to the assaults of Satan: “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20); “And the

Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee” (Zech 3:2).

(2) In reference to the wrath of God: “In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee ... so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee” (Isa 54:8-9).

(3) In reference to the fear of death: “And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:15); “... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:54-57). Unfounded fears relative to what may come to pass are to be considered as birds which fly overhead. Do not act as a prophet, for you do not know what will come to pass; direct your way according to the Word of God; sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.

Eighthly, are you entirely destitute of everything, void of all spiritual good, and do you grieve over this emptiness? Man cannot live unless he has something in which he can find his delight. To possess a soul which cannot find delight within itself, and then not to have nor expect anything from without which could fill such an empty, weeping soul, is unbearable and as a hell. The things of the world cannot satisfy the soul. Yes, the inordinate desire for worldly goods even grieves the souls of godly persons. The soul must have Jesus as her ransom and righteousness, God as her Father, living communion with God, and the sweet influences of the illuminating, comforting and sanctifying graces of the Holy Ghost—in one word, the possession and enjoyment of all the benefits of the covenant of grace. The empty soul greatly yearns for this and painfully perceives that which is lacking. There is an intense hunger and thirst; the soul perishes for hunger, becomes feeble, and faints. She cries out for spiritual bread and invigorating water; she succumbs by reason of her longing, but does not obtain what she longs for. She seeks but does not find; prays but does not receive—poor, starving soul! Hear the promise and strengthen yourself with this until the soul be filled, for she will be filled. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt 5:6); “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa 55:1); “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the

water of life freely” (Rev 21:6); “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink” (John 7:37).

Ninthly, are you conscious of the power of corruption? Do the lusts of the flesh war against the soul? Are you losing the battle? Do vain imaginations and sinful stirrings of the heart have the upper hand? Does your most besetting sin manifest itself strongly, take you captive, penetrate, and rage furiously? Does it make you despair? Do you think that in your entire lifetime you will not be able to overcome, since your soul is wounded time and again? Does sin rob you of all your liberty before God, and of all your desire and spiritual life? How must you persevere? Consider the following promises: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:26-27); “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer 31:33); “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:31); “Let the weak say, I am strong” (Joel 3:10); “... for the Lord ... hath made them as His goodly horse in the battle” (Zech 10:5); “And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the Lord is with them, and the riders on horses shall be confounded” (Zech 10:5).

The Use of the Promises in Cross-bearing and unto Sanctification

These and similar promises have a twofold use. They comfort so that believers with courage and joy may willingly take all manner of crosses upon them, bear them with ease, and assure themselves of an advantageous and glorious outcome. They also have a sanctifying effect, since by faith in the promises one continually lives in the presence of the Lord, acknowledges Him as omnipotent, good, reconciled in Christ Jesus, and true. With quiet trust one depends upon Him and remains steadfast in all that transpires, as seeing Him who is invisible. This is the fountain of pure holiness, and we thus become partakers of the divine nature through the promises. Therefore, whatever your condition may be, take hold of a promise, appropriate this to yourself as having been made to you by the God of truth, present it before the Lord and with humility and boldness beseech Him in Christ Jesus for the fulfillment of this His promise. Then remain focused upon these promises and be exercised

with them. Let them be your strength in the battle, since you will most certainly obtain what is promised.

God may possibly have decreed a long period of time between the initial moment when the desire concerning a certain matter arose in your heart and the moment of fulfillment. Abraham had the promise that he would have a son from Sarah; the fulfillment was so long in coming, however, that it was no longer probable. What a long time span there was ere David received the kingdom! Zacharias had long before prayed for a son in his youth and his prayer was heard in his old age. We must thus not always expect the promised matter as soon as the promise comes to mind, nor should we become discouraged if it is not fulfilled immediately; instead, patient waiting is necessary at such a time.

The Benefits of Waiting Patiently for the Fulfillment of the Promises

It is much more beneficial to wait patiently upon the postponed fulfillment of promises than to receive the promised matter immediately, for this will bring the soul into a holy frame and teach her to exercise many virtues. Among them are the following:

(1) One is not always capable of receiving the promised matter; rather, the Lord by way of postponement prepares the soul to be able to receive and make use of the promised matter properly. Similarly, one first cleanses and prepares a vessel before putting a delightful beverage in it, so that it will not leak out of a crack or assimilate the peculiar taste of the vessel. Such preparation is already the process of being sanctified.

(2) Postponement teaches one to believe without seeing and to acknowledge God as being truthful, even though He does not fulfill the promise as yet. This is a holy frame and is at such a time more beneficial to you than the promised matter itself. Yes, at times the promised matter itself is given, although in a different manner than you had imagined.

(3) Postponement teaches one to know and acknowledge God as being sovereign and only wise, who makes all things beautiful in His time. To be thus exercised is holiness and God-glorifying.

(4) Postponement will humble you, causing you to see your unworthiness and to understand that God will not give it to you for your sake. It will cause you to say: "I am not worthy of the least mercy; I am not worthy that God would make the least promise to me, a worm. Since, however, He has promised such great matters to me, should I then not rejoice and humbly anticipate them?"

(5) Postponement causes one to yearn for the Lord; it causes one to wait, to be quiet, and to be content with the present. It

causes one to rejoice in the promise as if he possessed the matter already, considering Him to be faithful who has promised it, and glorifying Him in doing so. Are such spiritual frames not holy? Would you not prefer that God would postpone the fulfillment of the promises somewhat in order to attain to such frames, rather than that God would immediately give the promises without them?

(6) Postponement makes the soul more grateful when the desired matter arrives, causing the soul to rejoice all the more and to preserve it more carefully. Therefore be neither sorrowful nor discouraged. Do not cast everything away when the Lord postpones the fulfillment of the promise. Rather, endeavor in this way to attain the above-mentioned spiritual frame, and to be sanctified thereby. To be exercised both with and relative to the promises, and to wait for their fulfillment, causes the soul to be drawn away from worldly things, keeps her engaged in transaction with God, and—without noticing this—brings the soul into a more spiritual frame. Such a sanctified condition will spontaneously and without much effort engender various virtues. You will rest in the Lord, rejoice in Him, thank Him, acknowledge Him, and glorify Him in all His perfections in Christ Jesus. Those that honor Him He will honor. “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass” (Ps 37:4-5); “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps 27:14).

Observing the Time and Manner of Fulfillment

It does not suffice to focus only on the promises, to appropriate them in Christ, and to wait patiently upon the fulfillment. Rather, it is also very necessary and beneficial that you take careful notice when and in which manner a promise is fulfilled, and then subsequently bring to remembrance the previous fulfillment of the promise. Yes, you should record the fulfillment of each promise, along with its specific circumstances, so that you may have a record of them—a record which one ought to read frequently. David gives us an example by saying, “And forget not all His benefits” (Ps 103:2). Hezekiah remembered the fulfillment of the promises. “What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and Himself hath done it” (Isa 38:15). Moses recorded the precise moment of fulfillment: “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt” (Exod 12:41). Joshua reminded Israel of this: “And the Lord gave them rest

round about, according to all that He swore unto their fathers ... there failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (Josh 21:44-45). This must convict us of our negligence.

When the godly are in great need or have a strong desire because of other difficulties, their prayers and seeking are heartfelt. They will then bring general and specific promises before the Lord and strengthen themselves with them. When God fulfills these promises, however, they may momentarily give thanks, but little notice is given to the fulfillment of that promise and it is much less remembered. It is one thing to acknowledge that our prayers have been answered and another thing to give heed to the fulfillment of God’s promises—the first acknowledges the goodness of God, whereas the latter His veracity.

As far as answers to our prayers are concerned, one must not only note the answers to these prayers—which we shall discuss comprehensively in a subsequent volume—but one must also note the fulfillment of the promises. Take, for example, the following two promises: “And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, “ (Ps 50:15); “And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do” (John 14:13). A believer in taking hold of the Lord on the basis of these promises (as pertaining to his present need and desire), is enlivened by praying believingly and assures himself of the fulfillment of these promises in subjection to the will of God. When God grants the desired matter, then there is an answer to prayer as well as the fulfillment of the promise; the believer must therefore note and remember both. If one were to take note of the fulfillment each time and record this in a register—together with a description of the trial, the strong desire, earnest prayers, the making use of the promises, and furthermore add to this the Lord’s fulfillment of these promises—it would frequently cause us to sink away in amazement and give us special freedom to request the promised benefits of the Lord. It would strengthen us in an extraordinary measure to trust in God and with what assurance one would expect the fulfillment of the general and special promises!

The Misapplication of Promises

Question: It will be beneficial to answer the following question: *Is it not possible to apply a promise wrongly to one’s self?*

Answer: There are no promises for the unconverted in the Bible. They deceive themselves, regardless of what promises they may appropriate to themselves. These will not be fulfilled, for they are “without Christ, being ... strangers from the covenants of promise,

having no hope” (Eph 2:12). Only believers are the “heirs of promise” (Heb 6:17). All the benefits of the covenant of grace are for them and will most certainly be given them. If they are exceptionally desirous for a given spiritual matter, then they, in the name of Christ, may not only in a heartfelt manner request this of God in prayer, but they may also consider those promises of God which pertain to the matter in question as having been made to them—which is also true when a general promise is applied to this matter. They may humbly remind God of this, earnestly pray for fulfillment, and remain assured that this promise will indeed be fulfilled for them, while subjecting themselves to the will of God as far as time, measure, and manner is concerned. A believing supplicant cannot deceive himself in this.

It is somewhat different in regard to desires pertaining to bodily matters. The godly also have the promises of this present life. God also promises to support them in the bearing of their cross, in deliverance to their benefit, and that they will be provided for as far as food and clothing are concerned. They, in subjection to God’s will, may and must strengthen themselves with these promises and expect their fulfillment insofar as it is needful and beneficial unto salvation, for it is His way to lead the elect to glory in a way of many tribulations.

A believer may have inordinate desires for a specific temporal matter of which he has no need in his station of life—be it either that this matter at first suddenly comes to mind, or that, due to circumstances it gradually takes hold of him. The excessive desire for this matter prevents submission and causes him to imagine that he will either be delivered or obtain a matter which he desires excessively, although it has not been promised by God but he has promised himself. It can happen that a Scripture passage will suddenly come to mind, be it during waking or sleeping hours, appearing to be a revelation or promise of God to us. One might then apply certain Scripture passages of which one knows quite well that the promises they contain were made specifically to certain individuals such as Abraham, David, or others—and then made under different and specific circumstances. Due to our strong desire, however, we appropriate them to ourselves as if they had been made by God to us by way of special application, and as if we may draw a conclusion therefrom in reference to our inordinate desire. One is strengthened in this opinion due to perceiving strong motions of the heart toward God, in love and in a lively acknowledgement of His goodness. One has intimate communion with God, is able to pray and exercise faith in Christ, and finds

himself in a godly frame, be it with or without reference to the desired matter. Yes, one does not desire this matter if it is not according to the will of God; and one is quiet and in subjection. The matter resurfaces, however, and it is as if God gives renewed assurance, and in a lively manner holds His omnipotence before them. This causes such persons to be ensnared for years and very much impedes them in being at liberty as far as their condition and walk is concerned. The outcome is that the matter is not obtained and one must come to the conclusion that he has wrongly applied a promise to himself due to an excessive desire for a given matter.

Question: It must be asked here how such a wrong notion can engender love, hope, and faith in communion with God; or would this be imaginary as well?

Answer: No, this spiritual frame of the soul in a believer, and the exercises issuing forth from this, are not imaginary but are in truth. They are according to the Word, unto God, and through Christ. They do not issue forth from an erroneous notion, but from the spiritual life of the soul which was enlivened by a lively faith in God's goodness, truth, and omnipotence, although the situation to which it was applied was erroneous. God will at times allow such errors to be to the advantage of believers—not by virtue of the error itself, but according to His good hand over them. "All things work together for good" (Rom 8:28). It is not always necessary that a person have a special promise in order to be assured of the fulfillment of the promises. He may and must, however, also hold before himself the general promises, take hold of them, and relate the fulfillment of the promises to them when the Lord causes him earnestly to pray for a matter and to wrestle with such promises as: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet 5:6); "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Ps 145:19); "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps 81:10). These can be impressed upon the heart in such a lively manner—being applied to a special need or desire—that one receives the strong assurance that God will do it and give it, so that he is strengthened by it and encouraged to take hold of it. The Lord will then also grant our desire—be it immediately, some time thereafter, or by the giving of a different solution. Since this fulfillment nevertheless relates to our desire and wrestling with the promises, one must then consider it to be a fulfillment of the promises.

One can also go too far in this, however. It can be that the passions are stirred too much, either as far as the time is concerned

(desiring the matter too readily), or as far as measure and manner are concerned, so that one cannot subject himself to the wise government of God. Yes, with some beginning Christians, it is as if the time, measure, and manner were but extenuating circumstances; they wish to take hold of the promises according to their perception, desires, and prayers. This is foolishness, for it would be as if a farmer were to desire the seed to spring forth as soon as he sowed it—as if he would harvest the wheat before it was ripe. A wise and more advanced Christian is more concerned about the wise and sovereign will of God than about the fulfillment of his desires. In such a frame he prays, believes the promises, and submissively waits for their fulfillment. To be submissive is not the same as renouncing, devaluating, or nearly abandoning the promises. Rather, it is an enlargement of the promise, since it will be fulfilled in a better and more beneficial way than if our passionate desires were fulfilled. How often there is perplexity upon receiving one's desire, as was true for Israel upon receiving the quails! How frequently we must thank the Lord for not giving us our desire, subsequently perceiving that it would not have been good for us! Therefore, believe the promises, expect their fulfillment, and joyfully leave the time, measure, and manner to the Lord. You will then trust as a child and be established. Take the following text to heart: "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" (Ps 107:43).

The Christian's Obligation to Walk Godly Among Men

It is not sufficient to lead a godly life in isolation, but a Christian must manifest himself to the world and within the church. He will thus glorify God in his station, be of benefit to his neighbor, and adorn the church.

Man has an innate inclination toward fellowship, but grace is necessary to make proper use of such associations among people. Some believers (I am not discussing the unconverted here) have too little association with people, be it that they are overwhelmed with domestic affairs, or that they are listless, and, so to speak, have lost all vigor due to the feebleness of their languishing spiritual life. It can also be their experience that they do not behave themselves among men as they ought, and generally come home with an uneasy conscience; or that they continually want to be engaged in spiritual meditation, thus manifesting that at best they desire to live for themselves, having no concern for the honor of God, the glory of the church, and the salvation of souls. Such persons are generally rewarded with darkness, a weakening of

habitual grace, and bondage to sin. They will often deviate toward a religion which is of a more natural kind (although they think it to be more spiritual), which either is due to true spiritual life being darkened in them or because they do not possess it at all.

Others spend too much time with people, neglect their calling, run from the one to the other, know not where to spend their time, and thus become lazy, engage in gossiping, and do nothing. Instead of edifying and being edified, they neither edify themselves nor others, but cause reproach to come upon the church and themselves.

It is God's command that we intermingle with other people. "Let your light so shine before men" (Matt 5:16); "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles" (1 Pet 2:12). It is the duty of a Christian to confess Jesus and to give expression to the life of Jesus in our walk. It is our duty to gain interest with our talent, to be instrumental in the conversion of people, and not only to be interested in our own advantage. We must be able to say, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me" (Isa 8:18). We should be like sheep which come up from the washing, whereof everyone bears twins, and among whom none is barren. How else, except by having contact with people, could the church be multiplied and built up? How else could the light, holiness, and excellency of the church become manifest unless people intermingle with others? However, to that end we must take special care that our conversation be consistent with our Christianity.

It is therefore, first of all, necessary that you have and maintain a soul which is pure and undefiled, fully devoted to God, and finds her existence in communion with God. You will then—as was true for Nehemiah—be able to speak with men while simultaneously praying unto God (Neh 2:4-5). It is with such intent that you must leave the home, and in order to preserve such a condition within, you must pray each time when going out. He who in the solitude of his home is not exercised in continually turning to God, walking with a perfect heart, or acknowledging the Lord in all his ways; who in believing union with the Lord Jesus does not strive to cleanse the heart from world-conformity, vanity, cleaving to sinful lusts, and a continual thinking upon vain imaginations; and who does not continually exercise himself to be of a spiritual disposition—such a person, when in the company of and engaged in conversation with others, will not be fit to maintain this good disposition which as yet he has, although he be beset with the corruptions mentioned before. The good frame of heart will readily vanish and you will not have within yourself a fountain bringing forth all manner of spiritual matters to your personal benefit and

that of your neighbor. Instead, you will frequently speak of spiritual matters for the sake of conversation, doing so, however, without inner warmth and without causing the hearts of others to burn within them. Yes, you will even become engaged in worldly conversation, and upon arriving home your spiritual frame will have vanished and you will have a restless conscience. Therefore, you must especially endeavor to have a pure heart. Everyone must do so according to the measure of grace which he has received, be it that one is either a child in Christ or more advanced. You must not be silent about spiritual matters merely because you are but a child and without great gifts. On the contrary, the language of a child is often charming. Also little ones have received a small talent with which they must seek to gain interest.

Secondly, you must deliberately seek to be free from both the love and fear of man, so that you thereby neither stoop to their level, nor are prevented to either speak or be silent in a manner as befits a follower of Christ. You must especially endeavor to strive to maintain the soul's disposition of seeking secret fellowship with God. It is difficult to search out how subtly the love and fear of man will affect the heart. In solitude you may consider yourself to be free from being in bondage to man, perceiving their insignificance, and knowing that they can neither speak nor move outside of the determinate counsel of God. You know by experience that you cannot depend on man, and yet the love and fear of man so easily creeps in. What is the cause of this? It is self-love and a desire to be esteemed and honored. This begets the fear that you will not conduct yourself wisely enough, as well as a desire to be well-liked. Oh, much that is good is spoiled by this idol, and how much edification is prevented in this way!

Thirdly, it must be our only objective either to edify—according to the measure of grace we may have (however small it may be)—or to be edified. To that end it is necessary that you yourself select certain individuals (who are the most suitable subjects for our gifts) for the purpose of instructing them, leading them to Christ, rebuking and exhorting them—or else persons by whom we ourselves can make the most progress. Experience will guide you in this. If you are in the company of others, be it by appointment or accidentally, or if you are alone with a certain individual, you must take careful note of everyone's behavior in order that you may refrain from that which is undesirable in them, and learn that which is attractive and pleasant in them. If you are in the presence of a wise and spiritual man, you ought to be silent when he speaks; however, if he is silent, you must then give him the opportunity to

speak. If you are in the presence of an ignorant man, you must give him some instruction; if he is weak, you must strengthen him; if he lives in sin, you must exhort and rebuke him; and if he mourns, you must comfort him. Thus, you will experience that you yourself will first and foremost benefit from your speaking. If you are in the presence of those who are like-minded, in sweet love and mutual familiarity you must speak together of spiritual matters, thus strengthening and stirring up one another (Rom 1:11-12).

Fourthly, if you are in the presence of an unconverted person or with people who espouse an erroneous religion, you must (without affectation and pride, and nonverbally) by your manner of speech and the subject matter of your conversation convey that every righteous person is more excellent than his neighbor, that the righteous are of a more excellent spirit, and that there is a distance between them as great as there is between light and darkness, life and death, and the children of God and the children of the world. Along with such a disposition one must manifest humility, self-denial, common love, modesty, and obligingness, so that in parting from them (you must not be there long—it is not safe there) you will leave behind some conviction in their heart. I am not suggesting that you must always speak of spiritual matters; a wise person will know both time and manner. A Christian may also speak of worldly and civil matters; but then he must be on guard not to do so in a vain manner, but all conversation must be moral, dignified, and in moderation.

Fifthly, wherever you are, see to it that in all things you conduct yourself properly, that is, not gruffly but in a friendly manner, not being silent while only listening to be a judge. We should be talkative, but not verbose, and not engage in gossip. We should be humble, wise, and dignified, and in all things let the Lord Jesus be our example.

May the Lord lead you in this sweet and holy pathway, cause you to progress in it, and at last translate you into eternal glory—there to live in perfect union with God, and to be satisfied with joy and purity. There strife, faith, and hope will come to an end, and nothing but love will prevail. Amen.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

A Warning Exhortation Against Pietists, Quietists, and All Who in a Similar Manner Have Deviated to a Natural and Spiritless Religion Under the Guise of Spirituality

It pleases the Lord to glorify Himself upon earth by separating unto Himself, from all other men, His *own people*—His congregation or church. It furthermore pleases Him to unite them by a mutual spiritual bond, give them His Holy Word, and let them shine as lights in a dark world. It even pleases Him to dwell among them with His gracious and blessed presence to reveal His perfections in the face of Jesus Christ, to enable them to persevere against all the devices and violent assaults of the devil and the world, and at last, to translate them into His eternal glory.

The truth which has been entrusted to His church has many enemies. These enemies will either attempt to eradicate the church by external violence, or they will seek to obscure the truth by introducing numerous erroneous doctrines. False doctrines relate either to matters of faith and confession, or to the practice of life—to either the truth or the practice of it. Such is the distinction which is generally made, but in essence they are all contrary to the truth. Erroneous doctrine results in erroneous practice and erroneous practice is intermingled with erroneous doctrine. If you observe someone who errs in either aspect, you may readily consider him to be in error in both areas. One must therefore be as careful and particular relative to the one as well as to the other, and be on guard against the one as well as the other.

God has brought the gospel to the heathen and has established

His church among them, but there now seems to be a rapid return to heathendom. Ignorance covers the countenance of the church. All wisdom is now defined in relation to the knowledge of natural sciences and to eloquence. With the *Epicureans* men consider worldly pleasure to be their heaven and felicity. The motto is: Eat and drink, and joyfully indulge yourself, for after death there is no pleasure.⁴³ Or with the *Stoics* one considers absence of feeling to be happiness; that is, to be quiet and satisfied as a result of the impossibility of going contrary to their fabricated *fatum* (or eternal order), which must therefore be allowed to run its course. Others follow the example of religious pagans, some of whom, without knowing Christ, strive to cease from doing evil, and endeavor to do that which is good. Other religious pagans occupy themselves with meditating and speculating about God, finding their delight and religious practice therein.

Many so-called Christians follow the latter, for they have a natural impression of God, considering man's felicity to consist in the knowledge of and communion with God. Since such persons are ignorant of beholding God in truth as well as having true communion with God in Christ, considering this to be too lofty, difficult, impossible, and unattainable, they deviate to natural speculation, imagining this to be extraordinarily elevated and spiritual in nature.

Various Forms of Natural Spirituality Identified

Among those who espouse blind popery—whose religion does not differ much from paganism—there have always been those who have rejected creature-worship and who have written much about *internal* religion, elevating this as highly as their natural intellect would permit them. These persons are referred to as *mystical writers* (that is, *hidden writers*) since the general public did not achieve such a level of contemplation, such elevation of spirit having been concealed from them. Today many are very fond of the word *mystical*, as if it implies a high level of spirituality.

We do not particularly consider *Johannes Tauler* to be among them. Although he has presented many matters in a spiritual and soul-moving manner, they are intermingled with fanaticism and gross errors. We also do not consider *Thomas à Kempis* to be among them, having written that excellent treatise *The Imitation of Christ* in three volumes. The fourth volume is not authored by him; it is

⁴³ This is the translation of the Dutch rhyme: "Eet en drinkt, en speelt met vreugd, want na den dood is geen geneugt."

idolatrous and has been added by someone else. However, both *Tauler* and *à Kempis* have little to say about the Lord Jesus as being the ransom and righteousness of sinners—about how He, by a true faith, must be used unto justification and in approaching unto God, beholding in His countenance the glory of God, and practicing true holiness as originating in Him and in union with Him. Readers must note this about both authors, keeping this in mind when they read them. They will then be able to benefit from their writings.

After the time of the Reformation many strayed further from the truth than the very popery from which they had departed. Many old heresies surfaced, adorned with a new garment—each having its own followers. Such has also been the case with practical religion. Numerous imaginations originating in empty minds, natural speculations, deceptions of Satan, dreams, and zealotry go under the name of mysticism. These differ so much in their views, and are so far removed from the genuine practice of godliness—both within and outside of popery—that it would grieve me and the reader to even write or read anything about it. In Germany *Jacob Boehme* has the most followers, and in England the *Quakers* have arisen. The latter are called by this name because they begin to quake when they, in an elated state, think of God and divine matters (this occasionally may happen to those who are genuinely godly due to being in awe of God), intimating that they are then receiving the Holy Spirit. Their numerous fanatical practices are common knowledge.

Some years ago *De Geestelijke Leidsman* (The Spiritual Guide) by Michael de Molinos (a Spaniard) was published, in which he rejected all external exercises of religion and proposed that one need only be in a quiet and introverted frame God-ward in order to be irradiated by Him. He delineated three levels of meditation. The *first* consisted in a seeking of emotional frames, or reflections engendering these sweet and emotional frames—this he rejected. The *second* level he referred to as rational reflection, the intellect being engaged in reflecting upon God—seeking to know, approve of, and practice the truth. This was for him also too crude and too inferior. The *third* level was the elimination of all external activity, including the activity of the intellect and any spiritual elation. This would consist in being totally divorced from self, being elevated above all things, being fully united with God, and in passive reflection to lose one's self fully in God, thus worshiping Him in pure love. This is how far the illusions and vain speculations of the natural man—who is void of the Spirit and ignorant of God—can go. Since he excluded all external and spiritual motions and promoted quietness in both areas, his followers,

many of whom are to be found among Papists and various sects, are called *Quietists*, that is, *those who are quiet or at rest*.

Some years after Molinos, François de Salignac de Lamoignon Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, published *De Verklaring van de Grondstellingen der Heiligen, of het Inwendige (Geestelijk) Leven* (The Exposition of the Fundamental Propositions of the Saints, or, Inner [Spiritual] Life). It is truly not a spiritual book. Fabricated spiritual matters—which are neither to be found in Holy Writ, nor in the practice of the saints—are elevated in a natural manner to as high a level as natural reflection can possibly bring them. He is of the same mold as Molinos and the previous mystical writers among the Papists. They teach a love (or lovelessness), a beholding of God and union with God to consist in some nonessential fancy contrary to the Word of God. This Word teaches us to behold God in the face of Christ as He reveals Himself in the work of redemption. As such God is known and believed by the truly regenerate and true believers. This renders them joy in, and love for, God, causing them to glorify God.

The difference between the self-denial, love, beholding of God, etc., of the mystics and of the truly godly consists in this: The mystics comprehend, say, and do everything according to their natural intellect, fantasy, and imagination, doing so without the Spirit. They do not make use of the Lord Jesus (that is, as a ransom, and righteousness unto justification and peace), as being the only way of approach unto God, and unto true and genuine sanctification. Such exercises and this way are hidden from them. Those, however, who are truly godly, regenerate, and who truly believe, live by faith and not by sight. In all things they make use of the Lord Jesus. They come to the Father by Him, accustom themselves to behold God in the face of Jesus Christ, do everything as in the presence of God, and walk before God's countenance in humility, fear, love, and obedience. These are the old paths. From this you can observe that the difference between the mystics and the truly godly is as the difference between imagination and truth; between being natural and without the Spirit and being led by the Spirit; between worldly and heavenly; between seeking an unknown God and serving the true God; and between being engaged without, and contrary to, the Holy Scriptures (dabbling with invisible things), and living according to the written Word of God. A truly godly person remains humble and serves God in Spirit and truth, and is thus kept from the temptation of entertaining high-minded and fabricated imaginations.

Pietism Identified and Defined

Some years ago there was a sizeable movement among the Lutherans

in Germany toward religiosity. Of some we believe that it was in truth, but with the majority it was but an illusion. This counterfeit religiosity has in some places also affected those of Reformed persuasion. People of the world, due to observing that many of them turned to a godly lifestyle, called them *Pietists*, thinking to offend them in this way. Instead, they, being ungodly, actually condemned themselves in doing so, and placed a crown upon the head of the truly godly whom they intended to offend—for to be a *Pietist* means to be a godly person.

In desiring to warn everyone against the *Pietists* and to give some direction in this respect, we do not have the truly godly in mind at all. Far, far be this from me! May the Lord bless them and give them more light to see the Lutheran error and to turn away from it. Rather, I have in view those who stimulate various fictitious notions and errors, such as *mystics*, *Quietists*, *heretics*, *fanatics*, *David-Jorists*, *Boehmists*, *Quakers*, and all such individuals who in our day are known as *Pietists*.

Every heretic has something whereby the godly are rebuked and convinced of their neglect. There is something which makes them attractive and which causes a godly but unstable person to vacillate, being desirous for those delightful matters which they hear being proposed. The most attractive aspects presented by these people are 1) the contemplation upon God and how to practice this continually, 2) speaking of the denial of self, and 3) the delightfulness of love. When these matters are presented in a most charming manner, they will find entrance into the hearts of those who are naturally pious and of those who are truly godly. They perceive that to know God, to walk in the light of His countenance, and to be united with God constitutes felicity. They perceive that self-love is still so deeply rooted in their hearts, causing them so much sorrow. It is their whole desire to be delivered from this. They perceive that love is the purest, sweetest, most necessary and most holy of the graces. When they hear these matters presented in an excellent and most eloquent manner, they come, so to speak, in a state of ecstasy and there is an inclination of the heart to believe that these speakers possess these matters. This causes them to be tossed back and forth as to whether they should join themselves to them. However, the thorn hidden in their speaking is that the speaker both speaks and understands everything in a natural manner—that is, void of the Spirit—whereas you conceive of it in a spiritual sense. By his speaking, he would draw you away from this spiritual understanding and the desire to enjoy and do that which is spiritual—drawing you away to a natural and unspiritual

understanding and activity, and at the same time into other errors which he initially conceals.

Do not expect me to enumerate and refute all their errors both in doctrine and practice. That is an impossible task, since almost everyone espouses a different sentiment. What the one says is denied by the other. Rather, I shall state and defend some propositions whereby the errors will be evident and whereby a believer, holding fast to those truths, will be delivered from their temptations.

PROPOSITION 1

A Christian must have a great love for the truth; all splendid pretense void of love for the truth is deceit.

First, the truth is the way of salvation as revealed by God in His Word. Whatever God has revealed about Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, regeneration, saving faith, true holiness, and the manner in which God wishes to be served—all that is truth. “... Thy word is truth” (John 17:17); “... after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13).

There is no other way unto salvation but one. He who misses this one way, will go lost; one cannot be saved with all religions. Whatever is contrary to this truth is a lie and from the devil, who “abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Secondly, God has given this truth to His one and only church in order to preserve, proclaim, and confess it. “... the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15); “... because that unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2).

Thirdly, this truth is the seed of regeneration; that is, it is the means whereby man is drawn out of darkness into marvelous light. “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth” (James 1:18); “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23). He who therefore neither knows nor has the truth cannot be regenerated. If he is not regenerated, however, all his speaking about spiritual things is but the work of nature and he is entirely devoid of the truth.

Fourthly, the truth is the only means whereby saving faith is to be obtained. Saving faith is the extrinsic exercise—a going out of self—of a soul perplexed by sin and judgment, and of a soul who yearns for reconciliation, holiness, and communion with God. It is

the going out of the heart after the Lord Jesus, He being the ransom and the righteousness of God. She receives Him, surrenders to Him, entrusts herself to Him, and lives and grows in Him. This faith is founded on the truth; without this truth there is no faith. "... how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God ... that is, the word of faith" (Rom 10:14,17,8).

Fifthly, the truth is the means, fountain, and rule from which holiness issues forth and according to which it must be regulated. Holiness is the loving observance of truth. "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph 4:14-15). The Lord Jesus when praying for holiness for His own, beseeches that it may come about by the truth. "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). If the heart is to be purified, it must occur by means of the truth. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Pet 1:22). He who lives in sin is a slave and servant of sin. He who is set free from sin is set free by the truth—a truth comprehended and known well. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). To live holily is to walk in the truth. "... even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 3-4). Someone who neither knows nor has the truth cannot be holy. Whatever he manifests is but the natural work of an unconverted person. Every step which deviates from the truth is impure, and causes impurity in the way of holiness.

Sixthly, God demands from believers that they will do everything in their power to protect the truth and to engage in battle on its behalf so that nothing of the truth is lost or obscured. A spiritual warrior must himself be girded with the truth. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth" (Eph 6:14). Being thus armed, he must keep an eye on the truth, not permitting that anyone infringe upon it in any point. "... it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3); "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12). We must follow the example of the apostle Paul who said, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Cor 13:8). Whenever anyone would undermine the truth, he would immediately stand ready. "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an

hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal 2:5). If we love the truth, we shall hate all that is opposed to the truth, however insignificant it may be—for one error does not remain isolated, but multiplies beyond what one could imagine. “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines” (Song 2:15); “I hate every false way” (Ps 119:104).

One cannot trifle with the truth. It is too precious a gift from God and God takes notice of how we deal with it. If you love the truth in a heartfelt and genuine manner, the Lord will give more light. If, however, you are cold, listless, indifferent, and careless toward the truth, you must expect the wrath and judgment of God. Impress upon your heart 2 Thess 2:10-12, “... because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth.” Therefore, from now on do not expend so little energy toward the truth.

Eighthly, not only is it contrary to God’s will to have fellowship with error, but also with those who espouse error. The church is a garden enclosed (Song 4:12). It is separated from all other men, whatever religion they may espouse. If heretics arise in her midst, they must be cast out. “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. I know thy works ... and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants” (Rev 2:6,20).

Thus, every member must be on guard against intermingling with those who espouse false doctrine. Hear what the command is: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:14-15,17). If you stand in awe of God’s majesty, if you tremble at His Word, and if the truth is precious to you, be on guard against false doctrine, false teachers, and for men who are mired in error, however attractive they may appear to be. Let your heart be governed by the exhortation of the apostle: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 1:10);

that is, have no fellowship with him and avoid him so that you will not be drawn away from the truth by him in the least. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:17-18).

How necessary it is to carefully heed this proposition! Compare yourself to this. Do you have such a tender love for the truth? Is it that precious to you? Do you joyfully give thanks to God for it? Do you live according to it? Do you engage in battle on its behalf? Do you indeed abhor all error and those who espouse it? Are you fearful and concerned about associating with such persons? If such is the case with you, then you are not in danger of being misled by the elevated language of the Pietists, for you will immediately perceive whether they have and promote either the truth or error, and whether they have love for the truth.

This will become evident when you will have directed them away from their lofty language to the foundational truths of religion. You will experience that in this respect they are either ignorant and therefore not willing to discuss it, or that they espouse several errors—the one this error and the other that error—and you will have sufficient grounds to depart from them out of love for the truth. You will perceive that all their lofty language is not from the Spirit, but rather, proceeds from the natural mind. When you examine their practice, you will perceive that they have no love for the truth, because they maintain equal fellowship with Papists, Socinians, Anabaptists, etc., and are unconcerned about their association with people from various religions. They thus unite the truth and the lie, light and darkness. If they do not say so—as many do—they nevertheless show by their practice that one must tolerate each other’s sentiment, must neither judge each other about this nor defend it, but must rather practice love and more love. Is this not tantamount to rejecting, despising, and not loving God’s truth, and to be opposed to the truth contrary to God’s command as stated above? A person with whom we are not personally acquainted can be known from the company he keeps; therefore, depart from and forsake all such whose deeds are the fruit of nature and who engage in elevated discourses, since they have not even reached the first step. You who are spiritual ought not to be shaken by their speaking of spiritual matters which is void of the Spirit and which conceals the rejection of the truth.

You of little faith—who also have but little knowledge of the

truth, for which you are to be rebuked—be on your guard, for you are in the greatest danger. You have a desire for spirituality, to know God, to have communion with Him, and to walk in love. You grieve that you are still so far from this. When you hear such individuals speak of those elevated matters, you become enamored due to the spiritual principle within you. You are torn as to whether you should follow them, neither seeing the hidden thorn nor the ultimate outcome of such religion—not perceiving that it is all but a natural speculation about God and interacting with God. All of this is contrary to Scripture and is not the way and manner in which God leads His children. Remain faithful to the Word, seek God in Christ in all simplicity of heart, and be satisfied with the measure of grace which God gives you. Their practice would draw you away from that which is truly spiritual to the realm of the natural. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

PROPOSITION 2

A Christian must have great love and esteem for the church.

Who can reflect upon the church without being ignited in love toward her? Of all that is found upon earth, she excels in glory, purity, and excellency. What would the world be without the church other than Sodom? Yes, the world would not exist if there were no church. The church is “... the joy of the whole earth” (Ps 48:2) and “... a praise in the earth” (Isa 62:7). It is the chief joy of God’s children—yes, it exceeds all that is joyful. “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Ps 137:5-6). All David’s love, joy, care, and desire were focused upon the church. When he was driven away from her, he said, “My tears have been my meat day and night” (Ps 42:3); “Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech” (Ps 120:5). His only desire upon earth was to be where the church was. “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Ps 27:4). He rejoiced exceedingly when this was his portion. “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem” (Ps 122:1-2).

May such a disposition of heart and such feelings for the church also be ours, for the church is the congregation of *the living God* (Rom 9:26). The world is divided into many kingdoms and each

has its king—the one more glorious and mightier than the other. The church is also a kingdom which is indeed in the world but not of the world, for it is the kingdom of heaven. God Himself is its King: “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us” (Isa 33:22). The Lord Jesus—the Lord of glory, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords—is their King. “Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion” (Ps 2:6).

God Himself has chosen the church out of all nations in order that she would be His property—in contrast with the nations of the world: “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). God Himself gathers this people together: “This people have I formed for Myself” (Isa 43:21); “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). God Himself keeps a very close watch over her: “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day” (Isa 27:3); “For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about” (Zech 2:8). Let the enemies freely devise and use all their devices and force against the church, but “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). Woe to him who opposes the church of God, for “... he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye” (Zech 2:8).

Who would not have the highest esteem for that church which has God and the Lord Jesus as King? How can one claim to fear and love God and love the church—His children—and not have esteem for her? “Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1).

Consider carefully who are to be found within her walls and you will then love the church. They are the saints of the Most High: “But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom” (Dan 7:18). They are “the saints that are in the earth, and ... the excellent” (Ps 16:3). They are the elect and those who are purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. “... the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

They are those of whom it is said, “... for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev 5:9). They are the precious daughters of Zion who are glorious within, the children of God, the heirs of eternal life, cherished by God, the Lord Jesus, and true believers, as well as those who are justified and sanctified. Of them the apostle says, “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye

are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). They are those whom God calls ηβ_ψχπ%ξ (*hephzi-bah*), that is, “... the Lord delighteth in thee” (Isa 62:4). It is the church whose walls are called *salvation* and whose gates are called *praise* (Isa 60:18). If your heart is to have love and esteem for something, it must be the church. If you do not love the brethren, you certainly do not love God—regardless of what you may say.

All that is glorious is to be found in the church. God dwells there in an extraordinary manner: “God is in the midst of her” (Ps 46:5). The church is therefore called ξμ# ηωξψ (Jehovah Shammah), “The Lord is there” (Ezek 48:35). The Lord Jesus is present in His church and He Himself says of her, “These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (Rev 2:1). The Lord, by granting her radiant glory, makes His church glorious both internally and externally. “The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold” (Ps 45:13); “And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God” (Ezek 16:14). How Jacob stood in awe due to the presence of God in Bethel! (Gen 28:16-17), as well as Moses when the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush (Exod 3:4,6). Who then would not stand in awe of the church where the Lord is present? Even the unconverted had great respect for her. “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them” (Acts 5:13). How much more should believers have high esteem for the church!

Take notice of the blessings and benefits which God bestows upon the church, and you will then love her—they are beyond comprehension. “Truly God is good to Israel” (Ps 73:1). Paul expresses this by the words “all” and “spiritual”: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3).

(1) There the Sun of Righteousness shines forth under whose wings there is healing (Mal 4:2). The church is irradiated with light which is heavenly, begets joy, warms the heart, renders fruitful, and guides in the way. “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee” (Isa 60:1-2). That light will show the way in such a clear and efficacious manner that even “fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8). “They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding” (Isa 29:24).

(2) There the Lord Jesus is given unto justification and sanctification.

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech 13:1); “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (Isa 33:24).

(3) There the Holy Spirit is poured out upon its inhabitants. “Neither will I hide My face any more from them: for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel” (Ezek 39:29). The Spirit guides them into all truth (John 16:13). “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14).

(4) There God gives shepherds who lead them. “And I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). These shepherds give heed to everyone’s conduct, and if there is someone who departs from the right way, they immediately make work of this and call out to them, “This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa 30:21).

(5) It is there that God refreshes and rejoices His own. “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High” (Ps 46:4); “... all my springs are in Thee” (Ps 87:7). There is safety and protection so that not one sheep goes lost: “... for upon all the glory shall be a defence” (Isa 4:5). Therefore those who are perplexed and in despair flee to the church to take refuge there. “The Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall trust in it” (Isa 14:32). I wish to state it comprehensively: “For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Ps 133:3).

Add to this the delightful and beneficial activity of the church.

(1) There men sing the praises of the Lord. “... and in His temple doth every one speak of His glory” (Ps 29:9). There men serve the Lord with gladness and come before His presence with singing (Ps 100:2).

(2) There men worship the Lord in humility and holy awe; there men bow toward the palace of His holiness (Ps 5:7), and there are the “suppliants” (Zeph 3:10). “O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Ps 96:9).

(3) There the Lord is confessed and there men exclaim: “The Lord is God! The Lord Jesus is the only and complete Savior, and God’s Word is the truth.” There men exclaim, “Lo, this is our God” (Isa 25:9); there men offer “the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15). There every knee bows at the name of Jesus and every tongue confesses that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11). The apostle says concerning the church, “But

ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

(4) The church, shining forth with truth, holiness, her confession of the Lord Jesus, and her endeavors to make Him known, is the place where everyone may find refuge to serve God. “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths” (Isa 2:3).

(5) The church endeavors to be instrumental in the conversion of many souls. Who has ever been converted and who will ever be converted, except by the instrumentality of the mother, the church? “But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal 4:26). Relative to this it is said of the church: “And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest Himself shall establish her” (Ps 87:5).

(6) It is there that love is exercised both toward God and our neighbor. The congregation of Thessalonica so excelled in this that the apostle said, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (1 Thess 4:9).

(7) There the weak are strengthened, the mourning comforted, the ignorant instructed, the wayfaring returned, and the slothful are stirred up. There men encourage each other while engaged in spiritual warfare, take the other by the hand, give them holy examples, and follow them.

Thus the church shines forth with holiness, by which the house of the Lord is adorned. Of the saints it is said, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness” (Ps 110:3). Her appearance is thus “as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6:10). And even if the church is feeble in all things, she, nevertheless, possesses all things in truth; the measure does not change the quality. Silver which is covered with soot does not therefore lose its value but remains more precious than shining tin. Wheat does not lose its essential and nourishing qualities due to being mixed with much chaff on the threshing floor.

He who considers all this simultaneously, viewing the church from every dimension with a spiritual eye and heart, will not only be ignited with love for the congregation and, with ecstasy, stand in awe of the glory of the church, but he will also be provoked to holy wrath against all those who would dare to undertake anything which is detrimental to the church. The above will give sufficient reasons to

be on guard against the delusions of the Pietists. They exert every effort to ruin the church—if this were possible. They reject the church, church order, the divine commission of ministers, the ministry of the Word, the sacraments, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven. They thus make themselves guilty of the abominable sin of despising the congregation of God. “... or despise ye the church of God” (1 Cor 11:22). He who despises the church of God despises God Himself and the riches of His goodness, and will not escape the judgment of God. Even though the one Pietist espouses this and another person again different heresies and errors, all of them holding to opinions of their own, they agree in this respect that their religion consists in stripping themselves as being nothing (in reference to God, that is), and in the contemplation upon an imaginary and fabricated God. They ascend in this as far as their natural perception will enable them, which to such darkened individuals appears as wondrous light and as being wondrously spiritual. Occasionally they come together to listen to someone speak of these matters.

Their religion furthermore consists in manifesting an indiscriminate love for people of various sects—even as far as the wallet is concerned. He who has no love for the church has no love for God. He who is engaged in battling the church is battling God and will endure His judgment. Take heed therefore that your salvation be dear to you and stay away from this sort of people, lest you be a partaker in battling the church of God. Attentively consider Deut 13:1-3, where God warns against such prophets who perform a miracle and who—upon having gained esteem due to the coming about of this miracle—then give counsel to serve other gods. The text says that God will then try them to see whether their heart is perfect before Him. This is applicable here, for they make a great display of spirituality and thereby gain entrance with the upright. They thus lead them away from the church and from true religion. Therefore you must, first of all, keep in mind what their objective is, and from that perspective judge their fair speeches. However, do not permit yourself to be ensnared by these fair speeches, nor to be tempted to the commission of the dreadful sin of leaving the church and engaging in battle against her. “He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt 12:30).

PROPOSITION 3

The Holy Scriptures are the only rule for doctrine and life.

In the first proposition we have demonstrated how precious and lovely the truth is, and that he who loves the truth, hating all who

deviate therefrom, will withdraw himself from all who depart from the truth—and thus also from the *Pietists*. In the second proposition we have discussed the esteem and love which all lovers of the church have for the people or congregation of God from which the *Pietists* are separated. To this we shall now add the preciousness and loveliness of *the Word of God*, in which all saving truth is comprehended, upon which the church is built, and which God has given to the church for the purpose of preserving and spreading it. This the *Pietists* either reject or minimize.

God has caused the way of salvation (there being but one, which is hidden from the natural man) to be recorded so that His people would have a steadfast rule of doctrine and life, and be protected against the deceits of Satan. Satan brings forth much smoke and vapor from the pit of hell in order to obscure the truth and at times changes himself into an angel of light; that is, he imitates that which is of a most spiritual nature and causes it to be performed in a natural manner without the Spirit and without Christ. God has furthermore given such a record in order that the church be protected against the deceits of men who make use of craftiness, causing people to err in a subtle manner. He has also done so in order that everyone would be protected against his own heart which carries within it the seed of all heresy and error. This way of salvation, having thus been recorded, has been entrusted to the church in order that she would preserve it in its purity, transmit it from generation to generation and from nation to nation, proclaiming it everywhere unto the conversion of men, to lead the converted to the church, and to govern the faith and life of the members of the church.

The Word of God is the foundation upon which the church is built (Eph 2:19-20), the insignia of the true church, the nourishment of the church, the only rule of faith and life, and the sword against the enemies who err and battle against the truth—it is everything to the church. There is no church without the Word and there is no Word without the church.

As far as we are concerned, all esteem for and efficacy of the Word is contingent upon our acknowledgement of it being from God. It is contingent upon the fact that we receive it “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13). It is truly the Word of the God of truth. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16); “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet 1:21). The Spirit who has inspired the Word and causes believers to perceive, taste, and

experience those matters contained in the Word, assures them of the divinity of that Word. He does this not only by means of its inherent evidences of divinity, but also by way of immediate operation in their hearts. “And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit (*who speaks in the Word*) is truth” (1 John 5:6). Therefore with what reverence we ought to hear and read the Word! Isaiah therefore begins his prophecy with these words: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken” (Isa 1:2). With what an obedient heart we ought to hear and read the Word, saying, “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33)!

Since the Holy Scriptures have been inspired by the God of truth who cannot lie, and by the Holy Spirit of truth who leads into all truth, all that has been recorded in the Holy Scriptures is truth. All of Scripture is certain, sure, and infallible. We may depend on it—and without reservation, vacillation, and in the full assurance of faith may rely upon it: “... the word of truth ... Thy law is the truth ... all Thy commandments are faithful” (Ps 119:43,142, 86). The Lord Jesus testifies of this: “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The apostle refers to it as “the word of the truth of the gospel” (Col 1:5). He who rejects the Word and does not believe it, rejects God and does not believe God, but rather (which is dreadful) considers God to be a liar. “He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son” (1 John 5:10). Man, who with haughtiness of spirit does not receive the Word of God as being spoken by God—and thus as being true and infallible—will derive no benefit therefrom. “... for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16); “... but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb 4:2).

In the Word, God reveals heavenly mysteries to His church; that is, the entire work of redemption by the Mediator Jesus Christ, and the manner whereby man is led to this redemption—and then through the Mediator unto God. He also reveals the manner in which the Holy Spirit operates in the heart of the converted for illumination, comfort, sanctification, and eternal felicity, as well as the purpose for which He has given His Word. Therefore it is called, “... the gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13); “... the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16); “... the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15); “... the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

Nature is ignorant of such a way of salvation; neither angel nor man could have devised it. It is a mystery which can only be known

by divine revelation. Concerning its power and motions, it can only be made known by the Holy Spirit who works in souls by means of the Word. In reference to this the Lord Jesus says, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt 13:11); and Paul states: "According to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom 16:25-26).

Even though a natural man reads and hears of the mysteries of the Word of God, he does not understand them unless God by His Spirit makes them known to his soul by immediate revelation. Those who are wise and prudent in natural matters think highly of the quickness of their intellect. They think that if anyone ought to understand mysteries, it ought to be them; they should be able to comprehend them; they are, nevertheless, blind as bats when it comes to spiritual matters. The apostle says concerning them: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). The apostle Jude (not Iscariot) says of the natural man who does not have the Spirit: "But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves" (Jude 10). Since they do not understand the spiritual mysteries, but view them in an external sense and in a natural manner, they despise them as illusions and matters of no worth. Since their reason cannot penetrate to the pith of these truths, they therefore reject them and thus exclude themselves from heaven. The *Pietists* lack this spiritual light. They have natural light concerning God's majesty and the insignificance of the creature. They perceive that man's felicity consists in the beholding of God; and by means of the Holy Scriptures their natural light becomes increasingly clear. Since these persons do not understand the spiritual mysteries they occupy themselves with a natural beholding of God, imagining that their natural perceptions are wondrously spiritual, and far exceed the Word and that of those who are truly illuminated. Yet such perceptions are nothing but fabrications and illusions which deprive them of salvation.

Not only do the Holy Scriptures contain mysteries, but they also contain all mysteries which God wills His children to know, and which are needful for their spiritual functioning here and the

enjoyment of felicity hereafter. Therefore, to teach spiritual matters or spiritual exercises which have neither been revealed nor prescribed in God's Word is deceit. The apostle says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8). There is nothing lacking in the Word—neither small nor great, low nor high. "The law of the Lord is perfect" (Ps 19:7). He who either adds to or subtracts from it shall have no part in all the promises recorded in the Word. Rather, all the curses which are declared in the Word will come upon them (Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19). Fear therefore and tremble; closely adhere to the Word, and seek both to understand and practice its spiritual meaning. The Word of God is "able to make thee wise unto salvation ... and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim 3:15-17). One cannot desire anything beyond this; he who fabricates something else accuses God's Word of being deficient. God demands nothing beyond this; he who demands, seeks, and does something apart from Scripture cannot please God with his will-worship. "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name" (John 20:31).

The Holy Scriptures are the only rule for doctrine and life. He who wishes to live godly and desires to be saved must regulate his intellect, will, affections, words, deeds, and entire religion according to this Word. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20); "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word" (Ps 119:6,9); "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet 4:11). Therefore—whoever you may be—if you love godliness and salvation, if you have esteem and reverence for God, you ought also to have respect and esteem for the revealed will of God which, by the goodness of God, has been given to us unto salvation. Let this Word be your only rule and do as David, who testified concerning himself, "I have chosen the way of truth: Thy judgments have I laid before me" (Ps 119:30); "O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (vs. 97); "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart" (vs. 111); "I have inclined mine heart to perform Thy statutes alway, even unto the end" (vs. 112). Observe therefore

God's commandment and follow the example of the saints and you will walk surely. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy" (Gal 6:16).

If the Word of God is so precious to you, if you love it so, and if you make it your rule for faith and life, you will be immune to the delusion of the *Pietists*. If you are taken in and shaken by their speech—having the appearance of spirituality—and you turn to the Word of God, you will immediately perceive that it is not according to the Word, that the Word of God does not speak in that fashion, and that God does not lead His children in such a manner; the Word of God will be a shield to you.

When you encounter them, you must investigate first of all what knowledge of, esteem for, and study they make of the Word. You will then perceive that some reject it entirely, ignore it, and will not respond to your investigation. Others will perceive it as a primer, from which little ones and beginners derive benefit; they contend that one must ascend beyond the Word and engage in more elevated contemplations. However, they will either deny or be silent about the fact that the Word has been inspired by God and has been appointed to be the only and eternal rule—which you may interpret as a denial. Others, who do not perceive the spirituality of the Word with their natural eyes, will deem it to be of little value and will view it as a dead letter, having neither spirit nor life. They maintain that those who hold to the Word will never become spiritual. Others, in order not to give the appearance of casting aside the Word, and your being frightened by them, will make use of it in their conversation and will quote such Scripture passages which speak of light, beholding, and spirituality. Investigate them more carefully, however, as to whether they believe the Word of God to be inspired in its entirety, and whether they acknowledge it as the only rule for faith and life. You will then experience that things are not in order here. Investigate furthermore if, when they use the Holy Scriptures, they understand the true meaning and spirituality of the truth. You will then discover that they are spiritually blind, and a proof for this will be that they do not wish to be examined concerning this, unless they perceive that they have a person before them with little knowledge, and over whose eyes they can readily pull the wool.

You thus have sufficient reason to reject them, and to consider all their doings to be but natural (which they truly are), thinking of this passage: "Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?" (Jer 8:9). If, however, you do not have esteem and love for the Word of the living God as was stated

above, all warnings to you are in vain. Then you are vulnerable for all manner of delusions which present themselves under the guise of spirituality, and for being led about by all wind of doctrine. For you there is no counsel—and how will you be saved? If you insist on being in error, and you rebuff all warnings, then go your way—but know that you have been warned.

PROPOSITION 4

Regeneration is the originating cause of spiritual life, and of all spiritual thoughts and deeds.

Everything functions in harmony with its originating cause and according to its nature. Man also functions according to his internal principle—be it that he is in the state of nature or that he lives by the Holy Spirit. A natural man functions in a natural manner with reference to natural and spiritual matters, and a spiritual man functions in a spiritual manner in reference to both. This distinction cannot be comprehended by a natural man, since he does not understand that which is spiritual. The truth of this matter is taught by the Holy Scriptures. “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil” (Luke 6:45); “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5).

One must not be of the opinion that all natural men indulge in ungodliness. No, in an external sense they live a life which is beyond reproach. Some take notice of their heart; they examine themselves at night as to how they spent the day—what sins they have committed, and what virtues they have either performed or neglected. They have God before their eyes and give heed to the Spirit and His motions, thinking that He deals with them as they deal with Him. They know that all their happiness and felicity is to be found in communion with God and they continually engage in reflecting upon God. Pagan writings bear abundant testimony to this, doing so with expressions which are capable of bringing a soul into ecstasy and of quickening them Godward, and to godliness. Nevertheless, it is nothing but the work of nature, which cannot please God, cannot yield delight to one who is truly godly, and cannot render salvation to one who is thus engaged. Even though it appears to be spiritual, it is nevertheless not worthy of being called spiritual. It is nothing but darkness and pollution when a spiritual person compares it to the spiritual beholding of God and

true life in God. You may respond as follows: “What is lacking? I would think that I am living in a heavenly fashion when I am thus engaged in beholding God, giving heed to my heart, daily examining myself, and thus increasing in virtuousness. What is lacking here?” Spirit, life—yes, everything is lacking. Natural men can also be religious. “... I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. ... Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:22-23). If heathen who do not have the Word of God can be that religious, this is much more true for the unconverted who are externally illuminated by the Word. You must therefore not immediately consider to be spiritual what appears to be spiritual—for there is a natural and a spiritual piety.

All men, as they are born, and as they grow up in such a condition, are dead and blind as far as the spiritual is concerned—and this is also true for all their deeds. “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). That is the condition of man prior to regeneration, even when he is at his best. “... who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1); “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.” (Eph 4:18). This ignorance, even in those externally illuminated, is so great that, although they imagine themselves to have greater light than those who are truly converted, they can neither have a correct understanding of spiritual matters nor perceive them in their essential nature. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Therefore, you cannot conclude from someone’s external behavior, nor from the fact that someone speaks of elevated and spiritual matters, that a man has Spirit and life. From the deeds themselves, you cannot come to a conclusion about someone’s spiritual state. You must rather judge someone’s deeds by his regenerated nature and state. The very same words and the very same deeds which a converted person speaks and does can also be spoken and performed by an unconverted person. With the one, however, it is spiritual and proceeds from a living principle; with the other it proceeds from a natural principle. The difference is as great as between dreams or illusions and reality, and between paintings and living persons.

Therefore, man, being dead and blind, and producing such motions and deeds as mentioned above by means of that natural principle, must be born again if he is to become seeing, living, and

spiritual in his dispositions and deeds. This is an absolute truth to which there is no exception. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3,5). This is so universally true that not one man will come into heaven unless he first be changed and regenerated. There is not one example to the contrary. “... and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 18:31). He who does not impress this truth deeply upon his heart, nor seeks for regeneration, will not be saved. He who rejects this Word of God will be rejected by God, and we reject him after the first or second admonition, deeming him to be a heathen.

However, the point in question is this: What is regeneration and what change does it bring about in man? Whatever the converted do or refrain from doing can likewise be true for the unconverted—yes, an Abimelech remains standing where a David falls. Many pagans have so excelled in conquering their corruptions and in practicing virtue that they put many of the regenerate to shame. He who reads Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Antonius, Epictus, and other pagan writers will stand amazed.

Regeneration does also not consist in losing sight of yourself; it does not consist in abstaining from aiming at or seeking prosperity and salvation, or your joy and delight for yourself, and instead lose yourself in nothing else but the beholding of God alone. It does not consist in the reflection upon and beholding of God, in sinking away in God, and in continually bringing yourself in the presence of God. All of that can also be the work of nature; pagans, idolatrous Papists, and other proponents of error do likewise.

It does not consist in the increase of natural light and virtuousness, as if man would be regenerated were light to exceed darkness or virtuousness sin. For,

(1) growth is of the same nature as the principle from which it originates. The principle of light and virtuousness is natural, and thus also the increase in both—regardless of how far it may go.

(2) The natural man, however illuminated, virtuous, humble, and exalted he may be in his beholding of God, is and remains a fool (Rom 1:22), without God and without hope (Eph 2:12), and blind (Eph 4:18; 1 Cor 2:14). Thus, regeneration does not consist in the increase of the matters mentioned.

(3) If this were so, man would not need to be regenerated; however, he does stand in need of this. Growth is the continuation of a principle which already exists, and not the receiving of a

principle of life which did not exist previously. Regeneration is, however, the generation of a principle of a life which did not exist previously, and thus a translation from one state—death, into another state—life.

(4) Regeneration proceeds from the Holy Spirit by means of the gospel; it causes a person to behold God in the face of Jesus Christ, generates spiritual life by union with Christ, and culminates in felicity. None of these things are true for natural light and virtuousness, and they thus differ in their essential nature.

Regeneration is a complete change of man wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Word. This change is both internal and external. It is from death to life, from natural to spiritual, from an earthly disposition to a heavenly disposition, from self and all creatures to Christ, and through Him to God. Regeneration begins in the heart and in the innermost recesses of the soul. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26). The heart encompasses the intellect, will, and affections.

(1) *The intellect*, being enveloped in darkness prior to this, is illuminated and receives enlightened eyes (Eph 1:18). Observe this in 2 Cor 4:6, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” He who has been illuminated now sees things differently from before and views what he has observed before from a different perspective. That which previously was pure in his eyes is now polluted; that which appeared to be light is now only darkness. The illuminated soul now perceives that none can behold God except as He reveals Himself in Christ in the work of redemption, and that by such beholding, man is sanctified, made joyful, and is saved.

(2) *The will*—which previously followed the blind intellect and delighted in that which was hateful, perceiving it to be delightful—now hates what it formerly delighted in, and now delights in that which it formerly hated. All its desire is now Godward—not outside of Christ, but in Christ. Its love is now toward the Lord’s will as revealed in His Word. “I will love Thee, O Lord” (Ps 18:1); “O how love I Thy law!” (Ps 119:97).

(3) *The affections* are inclined toward different matters and in an entirely different manner. The disposition of heart now being spiritual, the inclinations and desires are now also spiritual, and there is a desire to be filled and satisfied with spiritual matters. “... be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2).

The heart having thus been changed, the manifestations of the

heart have also been changed. The regenerated soul despises whatever does not now proceed from this changed heart. It has a heartfelt hatred for sin and flees from it. It wholeheartedly seeks God, grieves in a heartfelt manner about the absence of God, wholeheartedly delights itself in God, and serves God; it is all done wholeheartedly. "... doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:6); "I will love Thee, O Lord" (Ps 18:1). This changed heart brings forth different thoughts and has a holy objective in all that it does. It flees from sin and the world and exercises virtue; it endeavors to be conformed to Christ in all things, desiring that the life of Jesus be manifest in our mortal bodies. In one word, a regenerated man is an entirely different person. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

However, regeneration generally does not come about so easily. There are many fears and sorrows, and there are wrestlings to be reconciled with God, to believe in Christ as one's ransom and righteousness, and to obtain a new heart and a new life. Since regeneration will always be imperfect here, the warfare between flesh and spirit, according to the testimony of the apostle, will also not cease. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal 5:17).

When someone comes under conviction and receives a desire toward God, he will then initially be in danger of striving for great things. Since natural religion is easier—having the cooperation of nature (true regeneration being contrary to man's nature)—he will very readily be drawn away to Pietism, which is nothing else but a natural religion. He will thus be in danger of remaining in a natural state and of perishing. Therefore, if you desire to be saved, strive for your regeneration in the manner which we have briefly presented to you. Consider your sinful and condemnable condition and the blessed state of the regenerate. Take note of your impotence and keep your eye fixed on Christ. Let the Word of God be the subject of your meditation and keep company with those who are truly godly, so that the Holy Spirit may convert you by way of these means. If a change comes about, remain humble and increase in that very way; this will cause you to walk with certainty and steadfastness, and you will be safeguarded against the delusion of the Pietists.

When you are in the company of these people (however, I counsel you to avoid them and to stay with the church and the godly in the church), do not be taken back by highly elevated

matters which have a great appearance of spirituality and thus are very attractive to beginning Christians. If, however, you ask them to speak about regeneration, you will find them to be ignorant in that respect or to be entirely in error. This will be sufficient for you to see that all their activity is but natural and thus draws away from true holiness and communion with God, and consequently from salvation itself. And if there is someone among them who was truly a partaker of the principle of regeneration prior to joining with them, and thus is able to speak soundly about this, do not allow yourself to be deceived along with him who is deceived. The principle of his life is indeed true and he will be saved, but the hay, straw, and stubble which he has built upon it will be burned. Regeneration is imperfect and we must therefore not follow them in all that they do; they also still sin. They, possessing a spiritual principle, can nevertheless yield somewhat to their nature which is yet in them, and thus can practice self-denial and behold God in a natural sense. This will cause them to be a Christian of small stature where true growth is absent. Therefore, take heed.

PROPOSITION 5

A Christian continually avails himself of faith.

As closely as Adam resembled God's holy character prior to the fall, and as intimately as he lived in union with God, so contrariwise is man to the character of God after the fall, and so far is man separated from God and estranged from the life of God due to the ignorance within him and the hardening of his heart. God is light and he is darkness; God is holy and he is nothing but sin within and without. Man's heart is a pool of all sorts of hateful monstrosities, and all sorts of vain, impure, proud, hateful, and envious thoughts. If anyone could see his heart by heavenly light, it would even be more abhorrent to him, for all vile and corrupt words proceed from that evil heart. Even the best among men possess a smell and taste of the vessel from which they come. Man is completely subverted in all his deeds, has so totally departed from God's law, and is fully opposed to this law in all his actions, manners, purposes, and objectives. Although the one may refrain himself more than the other, and in an external and natural manner may do something which appears to be right, yet in and of itself it is abominable filthiness and agrees with the description of man in Rom 3:11-19. It all testifies: Away with such a monstrosity! Everyone can conclude from this that man in his natural state

can neither live in communion with a holy God nor find delight in beholding Him.

Yes, what is more, since man is so abominable within and without, God is therefore against him. God's holiness is against him, necessitating the casting away of this venomous vermin. There is God's majesty to crush him, God's love to hate him, God's goodness to ruin him, God's justice to condemn him, and God's omnipotence to destroy this monstrosity. God's heart, God's face, God's hand—yes, all that is God—is against him. Since his soul cannot die and his body will be resurrected after death, he will be forever subject to the unbearable wrath of God. Oh, how dreadful it will be to fall into the hands of a living God! And since God is against him, also all that which is in heaven and upon earth is against him. The angels, sun, moon, stars, stormy winds, water, fire, man, and beast—yes, everything is against him. Nowhere is there a hiding place for him, nor is there help or refuge. Do you think that such vermin would have the audacity to come into heaven and to crawl up to the throne to have communion with God and to delight itself in beholding God? Will the sinner have fellowship with God, will God delight in him, and will God reveal Himself to him?

Man is inclined to think that God is equally gracious and good at all times, so that he always may and can come to God as frequently as he wishes; and that he can always occupy himself with spiritual reflections and contemplations of God if he but turns away from sin and the world, and in all simplicity and sincerity turns to God and is desirous to live virtuously. Such a person is ignorant about either a reconciled or unreconciled state. He is ignorant of the fact that God, the Judge of heaven and earth, cannot forgive sin unless guilt be atoned for and punishment be borne—there being no way of approach unto God without it. The religious activity of such is but imaginary and a work of nature. Neither the person who has such illusions nor his work can please God. Even if this way may seem right to him, his ways are nevertheless the ways of death which will end in eternal ruin.

In order for anyone to approach unto God, there is an absolute necessity that the justice of God be satisfied by the bearing of the punishment of which the sinner was worthy. Furthermore, there must be perfect holiness so that he can abide in the righteous judgment of God and there be justified—for God's judgment is according to truth. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? He will by no means clear the guilty. The Lord is an avenger of His adversaries and He reserveth wrath for His enemies (Nah 1:2).

He had threatened: “The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt die.” The immovable law of God is: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). Those who are under the law are subject to the curse. There will be indignation and wrath, and tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil. In the last day it will therefore be said to those on the left hand, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!” Impress this upon your heart and behold your former foolishness in daring to approach unto God (or better—imagining yourself to approach) without reconciliation. Seek first to be reconciled with God, who is thus against you, as was previously stated. If not, then all your spirituality, meditation, humility, and reflections are vain and will not be able to save you from hell. But how will you be reconciled? As we have shown, you will not attain to this by some imaginary grace of God. You will also not attain to this by prayer or supplication, suffering, repentance, abstinence from evil, and the performance of good. Rather, it must occur by way of a Surety who fully bears your punishment and satisfies the law on your behalf, and thus reconciles you to God and makes you righteous before God. All creatures are silent here, and no help is to be found by anyone. However, God Himself has sent a Surety into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. He, being very God and very man, has taken upon Himself the sins of the elect, has fully borne their punishment, has placed Himself under the law, has reconciled with God those who by nature are enemies of God, and has brought them to God, having merited peace and all salvation. Salvation is in none other. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through Him, and it has pleased God that all fullness should dwell in Him. He can save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. This is the way.

But how will this Savior become someone’s portion? What counsel can be given here? This was impossible for man, as he could not come to the knowledge of this Savior. And even if he would know Him, what basis would he have to think that He would be willing to be his Savior, and what would he have and what could he do to persuade Him to be willing to be his Savior? However, behold the wondrous goodness of God—God offers this Savior to him. Whosoever will may come and receive Him, and He promises that he who comes will not be cast out—doing so very lovingly by advancing many inducements for doing so. He does so without price and without requiring anything from a condemnable sinner as a condition upon which this Savior is offered. This is the basis upon which one may freely come to Christ. However, many do not

know Christ, nor make any effort to know Him—and even if they had some knowledge of Him, they desire neither Him nor His benefits. They choose the world and their lusts above Him. Others are moved indeed and do have some desires, but do not know how Jesus can become their portion. They pray and seek in such a manner as if Jesus could be moved by their praying and seeking. They want to bring something along: a contrite and holy heart, and a very desirous heart. They thus always remain in the same unrest and uncertainty. Instead, they must begin with this offer of God, who is true, unchangeable, and good. However, the difficulty which many create is this: “I do not know whether God offers Jesus to me.” Are you not a human being? Do you not hear the voice of God in His Word? Does not God say, “Whosoever will let him come?” Is not unbelief a rejection of the Lord Jesus and an act of contempt toward His friendly invitation? Is not this tantamount to esteeming God to be a liar, and is not this a sin? Will not the unbelievers receive a greater judgment? Then He is indeed offered to you.

In order for someone to be a partaker of this Savior, he must respond to this offer, go to Christ, receive Him, and entrust himself entirely to Him. This act of faith is not the cause of a person becoming a partaker of Jesus, but only the means. Therefore, whether faith is weak or strong, whether it is exercised with clarity or be it in darkness, whether it is exercised with much ease or much strife, is not of the essence, but rather, whether it is done in truth with the heart.

This is indeed quickly said, but not so readily done. When it pleases God to convert someone, He first convinces him of sin, of being without God, of the wrath of God, and of his condemnableness. This is a painful realization. He is weary of his condition, desires to be delivered from it, and can no longer tolerate being in this sinful condition; rather, he must be holy, obey God in love, and serve Him with humility and fear. He does not know what to do and seeks for help, which, however, he does not find. The distress of his heart is far-reaching, more in one than in another, and of longer duration with the one than the other. God’s justice presses such sinners down, and their sin and insignificance cause them to be discouraged, thinking that God will not look down upon such persons.

God reveals to them the Surety and Mediator Jesus Christ in His suffering and death, etc., makes known to them the offer, the calling, and the friendly invitation. They choose this way with their entire heart, for through Him they wish to be reconciled with God and in Him they desire to come before the bar of divine justice.

They would fearlessly dare to rely on this if Jesus would only receive them and be their Jesus. They encourage themselves by the offer, and turn themselves to Him; they yearn, crave, and long for Him; they converse and transact with the Lord Jesus; they pray, weep, wrestle, receive more liberty, receive Him, and entrust themselves entirely to Him. His offer, goodness, and faithfulness are the support of their soul, and they thus put their trust entirely in Him, entrusting their soul unto Him for justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification. In this manner the Lord Jesus becomes theirs, and they become His. At times they may feel this with assurance, at times by way of the reflex act of faith, and at times with quiet hope. At other times they are readily confused, in darkness, and in doubt, and must begin again with the same task. Many continue to wrestle in this manner their entire lifetime and fluctuate between ups and downs. Others, however, attain to an assured state by way of many wrestlings, and spiritually engage themselves as children of God.

One ought not to be satisfied with having believed once or several times, as if this were a matter which has now been finalized. Rather, one exercises faith as long as he lives. This is true 1) for those who doubt their state time and again, and in exercising faith become assured once more, and 2) for those who are established in an assured state. The latter do so not to reestablish their state, but rather to live in communion with Jesus, which cannot occur except by the exercise of faith. They also come into many trials in which they need faith for their support. They cannot be delivered from these trials except by the exercise of faith, which enables them to overcome the difficulties.

Believers are not yet perfect, but frequently still offend and fall into sin. Their soul is injured and becomes restless, not only because of external sins, but also due to inner motions which the little ones in grace do not perceive as yet; for the more light increases, the more the dust particles can be seen. There are the corrupt frames of the heart, the yearnings of nature, the lusts of the flesh, and vain thoughts. Even though they are not shaken thereby as far as their state is concerned (although this does befall those who are strong in faith), this nevertheless wounds and grieves them; they are ashamed and abhor themselves, and their peace is disturbed. Therefore, time and again they flee to that fountain and wash themselves by faith in the blood of Christ, until, being justified by faith, they again obtain peace and once more approach with liberty, crying out: "Abba, Father!"

God does try them by the hiding of His countenance, the

beholding of which is their life. It becomes dark and dead within and the enemies assault from every side. This causes them to be greatly shaken and their heart is far removed from peace, all of which necessitates the exercise of faith. They take refuge to their Jesus, find shelter there, and maintain their hold. They rely upon His unchangeable faithfulness and take the shield of faith to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. They are indeed tossed to and fro, but they yet cling to Jesus, who is their hope, help, and comfort. Not seeing, they nevertheless believe that God is and will remain their God by way of the eternal reconciliation which He has accomplished. A ship, equipped with good anchors and ropes and having a good anchor ground, may indeed be tossed by the waves of a storm but will nevertheless remain at its location. Likewise, the Lord Jesus is their anchor in all tribulations; and thus by faith they endure the storms until their darkensses dissipate and they are once more refreshed by sweet quietude.

Even if they do not encounter extraordinary events by which faith is assaulted, Christ dwells by faith in their hearts and they exercise faith in order to live continually in communion with Him. The soul then sweetly leans upon Jesus while telling Him the delight and joy she finds in Him. She tells Him that she entrusts everything to Him and that she is without fear and concern, since He is her Jesus and she is His property—being the object of His love and of His faithfulness, who will lead her by His counsel and take her to Himself into glory. She thus takes refuge to Him and abides in His shadow. Even if she does not always taste the sweetness of His communion, she nevertheless believes that she is a partaker of Him and relies upon Him with an assured confidence. A believing soul always goes to the Father by way of her Jesus. She cannot be in the immediate presence of God and occupy herself with beholding God as the All-in-all, and herself as nothing at all. That is too lofty and too unfamiliar for her. This is not to suggest that she is always engaged God-ward by expressly receiving Jesus by faith unto her reconciliation; rather, she approaches unto God in a believing disposition. Each time Christ comes in between and she beholds God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Faith is the beginning point of whatever believers undertake. Faith is the soul of their activity and permeates everything. By faith they take hold of His strength and thereby are active as though it were their strength. By faith they overcome the world, are united with the fullness of Christ, and become partakers of all His benefits. This enables them to endure the poverty and tribulations of the world with ease, and it is this which causes all the beauty of the

world to become despicable to them. This enables them to laugh in spite of all the cruel faces and threatenings of worldly men. By faith they resist the devil, since it unites them with Him who has bruised the head of the devil. By faith their heart is purified, for it unites them with their Jesus in love. Love unites their will with His will and has no other desire than to do His pleasure, to be pleasing to Him, and to be holy as He is holy.

From this you can perceive that a Christian continually exercises faith in all things. If you are not as yet upon this pathway, then you are still not a Christian; then you are miserable. Pray for faith, for it is a gift of God, and use the means whereby God works faith: the reading and hearing of the Word of God, and having fellowship with believers. May the Lord look upon you in mercy.

If you are upon this way and exercise faith in the manner here delineated, see to it that you persevere in the same way. Do not ever depart from this way, for it will safely bring you to the end of your faith—the salvation of your soul. You will be safeguarded against the errors of the Labadists, Pietists, and all others who are in error as far as the practice of godliness is concerned.

There are people who are under conviction and have greatly endeavored to believe, but have not attained thereto. When such come in the company of those who err, they are immediately set free from all such delay, as they call it (in reference to them it indeed ought to be labeled as such). In one moment they believe and are strong in faith—that is, in their opinion. In reality it is a deviation and departure from the way of faith, however, and a turning to a natural religion. Be on guard for such individuals.

Others have a notion of how faith operates, approve of it, observe the blessed state of a believer, and are thus of the illusion that they are believing.

There are also those who at one time have received Jesus as their Savior. This task having been accomplished, they might as well proceed to perfection and pursue more lofty things. Poor people—as if it were possible to grow, apart from Christ; as if we could live, except by faith and the continual, actual beholding of Christ and being in union with Him; and as if we could bear fruit without continually drawing sap and nourishment from Christ! He who conducts himself in such (or even stranger) fashion, let him be convinced of his error and turn to Christ, in order to make use of Him continually unto justification and sanctification, so that he might be saved. And if you are aware of persons who conduct themselves in such a foolish manner, have pity upon them and, if possible, correct them. If they do not wish to hear you, depart from

them and do not intermingle with them. If someone is upright in the exercise of faith, but yet small in grace, let that which has been said be as a beacon. Let him flee from all who do not enter upon this way of faith and who with a great show of spirituality fail to encounter Jesus.

PROPOSITION 6

All of man's felicity, here and hereafter, consists in communion with and the beholding of God.

God did not only create man as a rational being, but also as a creature capable of recognizing Him. In the beginning God adorned that propensity with His image; that is, with pure heavenly light, righteousness, and holiness, enabling man to behold God, to live in communion with Him, thus rendering man fit for God's further revelation of Himself to him.

However, after the fall God has withdrawn Himself from man, concealed from him His glorious, delightful satisfying perfections, and denied man communion and union with Him. Yes, man is an object of His righteous wrath and thus while separated from God, lives in aversion toward God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." All the excellent faculties of the soul such as intellect, will, and affections, and whatever is in him, have been fully distorted in a most hateful manner. Instead of being focused upon God, they are opposed to Him, being focused upon the visible in order to satisfy man's empty soul therewith. Man is therefore referred to in Scripture as *αθεοῦ* (*atheos*), that is, without God, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:18).

But God, in His infinite goodness, has had compassion upon a small portion of the human race, giving them His Son Jesus Christ as a Surety, who by His suffering and death *has reconciled them with God*, and *has made peace* by the blood of His cross. He, the Just One, has suffered for the unjust, *that He might bring them to God*. He regenerates them, gives them faith, and by faith, *access into this grace* by Christ. These have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb 10:19).

It must particularly be noted that God reveals Himself to His reconciled children who presently believe in Him, and thus not to the world—not to unconverted and natural men.

I repeat, God reveals Himself to His reconciled people who presently and in reality do believe; to them He grants union with

Himself in love. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him” (Ps 25:14); “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father” (John 6:46); “... neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt 11:27). Since God has appointed them to be the recipients of salvation and all felicity consists in the beholding of and having communion with God, He reveals Himself for that purpose to them. “... Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt 11:25). This is the most excellent promise: “I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him” (John 14:23); “We will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). Their seeing of God agrees with the manner in which God reveals Himself from His side. “And hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true” (1 John 5:20); “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18); “For God ... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Such is the activity and the exercise of the godly: “I have set the Lord always before me” (Ps 16:8); “... they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance” (Ps 89:15); “My meditation of Him shall be sweet” (Ps 104:34); “How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! ... when I awake, I am still with Thee” (Ps 139:17-18). This is sufficient to conclude that the beholding of God is reserved for God’s children only. This hidden manna, this white stone, and this new name knows no one except he who receives it. God does not reveal Himself to the world; that is, to the unconverted, to natural men, to those who do not have the Spirit. This is evident in John 14:22,17, “Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world ... the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him.”

No one comes to the Father but through Christ (John 14:6). The unconverted, however, are without Christ, and thus they cannot come to the Father. Furthermore, there is such a difference and contrast between God and the natural man that it is impossible that God would unite Himself with him and reveal Himself to him in a familiar manner. How would a man who is dead in sins and trespasses, is blind, has a darkened understanding, is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance which is in him, and who lacks ability—how would such a man be able to come to Christ and through Him unto God? Since God is not willing to reveal Himself to the unconverted and since the unconverted

cannot ascend unto God, there remains an infinite separation. Therefore, whatever the natural man writes or speaks concerning reflecting upon, beholding of, and being united to God in love, is nothing more than an illusion.

Although a natural man cannot ascend to the right knowledge and beholding of God, and since God does not reveal Himself to such, he nevertheless knows from nature that God is, and that his felicity consists in communion with God. This is further reinforced by the natural knowledge of the Word of God. As a result, many have engaged themselves in beholding God, so that the beholding of God and the discussion thereof is no evidence of spirituality.

I repeat, many unconverted do engage themselves in beholding God by means of their natural light, or by means of their knowledge of the Word of God.

(1) This is very evident among the heathen, who speak concerning this in their writings, doing so with such lofty expressions that a Christian must be amazed and astonished about it.

(2) This is also evident among the popish mystics and thinkers. They are obviously idolaters, for they worship a piece of bread as their God. They pray to angels and deceased persons and render religious honor to images. They destroy the atonement of the Lord Jesus by their abominable mass and in other ways. They wish to be justified by their own works, and thereby merit heaven. They acknowledge the antichrist to be their head and hate true believers. They are persecutors of the church of the Lord Jesus; and they, either by their contribution or by having pleasure in this, are guilty of the blood of the martyrs, and are thus much more abominable than the heathen and others who function only in the realm of the natural. They write and speak much about divine meditations, doing so with expressions which are as lofty as their imagination can devise—yes, their words even exceed imagination, and if they cannot understand them, others may understand them. If they cannot, they may be amazed about these incomprehensible expressions.

(3) This is also evident among many others (not of the popish religion) who also engage themselves in meditation and reflection about divine things. It is evident that they neither have a knowledge of nor a love for the truth. They neither have a love for the Word of God nor do they establish it as their only rule for doctrine, thoughts, and life. There is no love for the church (from which they depart), and there is neither love for nor union with the truly godly. They can unite themselves with all manner of devoted people, but cannot tolerate the truly godly who rebuke them by means of their light. They are unacquainted with the nature of true

conversion. This is also true for saving faith, they being total strangers of its exercise. (We do not have in mind those who are not guilty of this; they must not be affected by this.) In a haughty manner they speak about great things, about being drawn up, about ascending above themselves and above all creatures—yes, dreadful though it be, above God Himself. The language of Balaam is heard among them: “The man whose eyes are open ... which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance” (Num 24:3-4).

From that which has been said, it is very evident that unconverted persons also engage themselves in beholding God. You therefore ought not to be immediately inclined to think that those who speak thus—that is, who in a charming manner speak of extraordinary illumination—are true recipients of grace and are truly spiritual. The blind can also speak of light, the unspiritual of the spiritual, and those who are alienated from God about communion with God, and the loveless about love—doing so not feignedly, but from a heart that thinks to have and speak the truth. You must therefore investigate whether that which they say about beholding God is truly spiritual. Follow the advice of the apostle John: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

In order not to be hastily inclined by word or spirit, attentively take note of what has been said thus far: There is a twofold beholding of God—a *natural* and a *spiritual*.

(1) The *natural* beholding of God is practiced by the unconverted; the *spiritual* beholding of God by those who are true recipients of grace, have truly been regenerated, and truly believe.

(2) The *natural* beholding of God occurs by the light of nature and the external illumination of the Word, by one’s own spirit, imagination, and mental powers, and by the drawing of rational conclusions; the *spiritual* beholding of God occurs by the illumination of the Holy Spirit who has drawn believers out of darkness into His marvelous light.

(3) The *natural* beholding of God *has God as its object as He reveals Himself in nature* as the eternal, exalted, and glorious One, etc. In the *spiritual* beholding of God a person *beholds Him in the face of Jesus Christ*; that is, in the manifestation of all the perfections of God in the work of redemption. In such spiritual beholding He reveals Himself at times in an immediate sense as their reconciled God and Father, doing so occasionally with such light, glory, sweetness, and bliss that it cannot be expressed, and at other times

with such expressions as: “I, God, am your God; I am your salvation; I have loved thee with an everlasting love; thou art Mine.”

(4) The *natural* beholding of God leaves a man alienated from God; the separation remains. The illusion of being united with God is but a union according to their own imagination, for true union occurs only by way of faith—something they do not possess. The *spiritual* beholding of God brings the soul near to God—yes, unites her with God as belonging to Him. “... that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21). Oh, blessed unity! Oh, blessed appropriation!

(5) The *natural* beholding of God leaves man unchanged, that is, in the state of nature—even though through the knowledge of God they may flee from the excessive pollutions of the world. The *spiritual* beholding of God causes the soul to become increasingly a partaker of the divine nature, and to become holy as He is holy. By the Spirit of the Lord, the soul is transformed through such beholding—in harmony with the object being beheld—from glory to glory. See to it that you do not immediately deem all beholding of God to be spiritual in nature.

It is evident from the nature of their reflection, that the beholding by God of such persons—which in reality consists more in elevated words than in substance—is the result of natural illumination and imagination. Such beholding varies greatly according to everyone’s physical constitution, inclinations, and power of imagination. What follows represents the common manner in which this transpires; if someone is not exercised in the manner as we shall now delineate, he should know that we do not have him in view.

(1) Some, as they undertake such reflection, meditate upon what they know about God in a natural sense, and have read or heard of God. They do not consider at that moment that they have read or heard this. While thus meditating, they ascend from one thing to the next, having conceptions about God in accordance with what their heart and imagination suggest. They then think about what they imagine, and all that is engendered by such thoughts. God must then be as such reflections project Him to be, and in this manner God has then revealed Himself to the soul. It is immaterial whether such thoughts of God are suitable and in harmony with the Holy Scriptures; this revelation is sufficient assurance for them that it is true and spiritual.

(2) Some will mentally withdraw from all creatures, themselves, and God. They are occupied with nothing except with expelling those mental objects which present themselves time and again. They thus endeavor to be without thoughts, as if nothing existed, and they thus enter and sink away into thick darkness. If a ray of

light then falls upon their mind in this thick darkness, without the discovery of anything objective, they consider this to be of the Spirit. They allow themselves to be illuminated and guided by this light, and as this light increases, God is unveiled to them as being such and such. This they observe passively—as being the recipient of it, allowing themselves to be illuminated thereby. The soul is thus ignited in love and receives such motions and stirrings, until they again come to themselves and desist for the time being.

(3) Some, having a desire to approach unto God and to behold Him, divest themselves of all reason, memory, affections, and even of those thoughts which initially ignited the inclination to contemplate upon God as having served their purpose. Having thus been emptied of everything, the soul turns to God, considering Him to be her God, and continually thinks: “Oh God, Thou art my God, and I am Thine.” The soul then listens to what God will subsequently reveal of Himself, and thus, in an infatuated manner, focuses upon God as being present. Here she reposes, tastes more than she sees, worships, exults, is in subjection, and exercises love. The only things missing here are the Spirit, spiritual life, the exercises of faith, the going to God through Christ, and the beholding of God in the face of Christ. Since these things are absent, they are all the work and imaginations of a person’s own doing. They are but natural exercises and thus of no value.

(4) Some remain quiet and in a disposition wherein which they are turned unto God, and do nothing but wait upon the Spirit. If nothing comes to mind, then they again proceed, being well satisfied. If something occurs to them, they deem this to be of the Spirit; then this is truth, and is more certain and infallible than the Word of God which they consider to be but a dead letter, a primer for beginners, and of no benefit whatsoever. If the thought which occurs to them gives direction to do or not to do something, it is considered to be the leading of the Spirit and they give heed to it. They do not pray, speak, or do anything unless they are motivated by such an idea coming to mind; they thus, quietly and with delight, live on. When they are stirred up by an idea which occurred to them, they depend on this, irrespective of whether it either agrees with or is contrary to God’s Word. This they do not investigate; it is a matter of indifference to them. They are thus carried away by their own spirit to abominable practices from which even the natural man recoils. This is borne out by the witness of those whom God in His goodness has converted from the error of their ways, and is also taught by daily experience. Some go further than that and play prophet. When thoughts about

future events occur to their empty minds, they are deemed to be revelations which will either occur or not occur. Poor, misguided people! They desire to seek God and to do His pleasure, but completely miss the way itself. With all their ideas and the adamant passion of their own spirit they perish.

It behooves all Christians to live in the presence of God, to examine themselves as to what is the good will of God in which He delights, to esteem the Word of God as the revealed will of God and as an infallible rule, and continually to give heed to the leading of the Spirit. It behooves them to give careful heed to their well-illuminated conscience and to be desirous not to act contrary to it. To follow one's own spirit and ideas, however, as if they were from the Holy Spirit, is to run to one's own destruction.

In order to be safeguarded against such fanaticism, we must keep the following in mind:

(1) Man has his own spirit; there are many seducing spirits, and the evil spirit can transform himself into an angel of light. He, with the intent to deceive, can give thoughts which are essentially good, but stir man up to use them in an erroneous manner. We must therefore give heed and know by which spirit we are being moved.

(2) The Holy Spirit convinces man of sin and causes him to grieve, be perplexed, and in many ways be troubled about his sin.

(3) The man who is conquered by the Holy Spirit will be regenerated and translated from darkness to light, from death to life, and from being earthly minded to being heavenly minded.

(4) The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of faith who brings God's children to Christ, causing them to receive Jesus by a true faith as their ransom and righteousness.

(5) The Holy Spirit unites His children and keeps them united to the church, for by one Spirit are they all baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13).

(6) The Holy Spirit leads believers in all things according to the Word of God; He leads them into all truth. The Word of God is truth, however, and the only rule by which we shall not err. By that Word He regenerates, sanctifies, leads, and comforts them.

Know then with certainty that where these matters are not found, there God's Spirit is not present. Be assured that whatever is deemed to be spiritual but which does not harmonize with the above, is nothing but illusionary and are seductions of a man's own spirit. Regardless of how greatly one may boast of spirituality, be instructed and warned. Know that the Holy Spirit is given only to the children of God and that only those who are led by the Spirit do indeed have the Spirit of Christ. The natural man, however,

does not have the Spirit (Jude 19); the world cannot receive the Spirit; it neither sees nor knows Him.

It is evident to the truly godly, when considering these ways of beholding God, that they are all but a natural work. This can especially be concluded from the fact that such persons consider the greatest mark of spirituality to be the measure by which a person is stripped of himself and loses sight of himself so completely as if he did not exist. This is not due to a shameful view of their sins, but the result of comparing themselves to God, or it is without reason, or because of the opinion that thus it must be. This is foolish spirituality, which is nothing but the fruit of nature! Why do you delight yourself in such contemplation wherein you utterly lose sight of yourself and do not think about yourself? Is not self your focus in this and do you not deem this to be your salvation? Why then do you engage in this? You neither need to nor are able to do it by virtue of it being God's will, as it is certainly of no benefit to Him. You thus do it for your own sake, since this reflection upon your nothingness is your delight. Therefore, while thinking that you do not have yourself in view at all, and to be rid of self completely, you are nevertheless seeking yourself. Only if such exclusion and deprecation of self were spiritual in nature (while in reality it is natural and sinful), it would not be a sinful seeking of self, but rather a holy seeking of self.

There can be either a sinful or a holy seeking of self. A sinful seeking of self is when one seeks honor, esteem, love, respect, advantage, etc. in order that all men and everything would end in them. A *holy* seeking of self is to promote one's own physical welfare for the purpose of being fit to serve God in whatever capacity that may be. In our seeking after God, it is not sinful to have the welfare of your soul, and thus light, life, love, joy, delight, and salvation in view. Rather, it is evidence of being engaged spiritually in the right way. This is a holy seeking of self, for:

First, God has created this spiritual seeking of self within man. Did not Adam need to be careful to refrain from eating of the forbidden tree in view of the threat, "The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"? Did he not have to be in fear of losing his blessed state? Was he not obligated to seek his felicity in communion with God?

Secondly, God commands His children to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). This they must therefore strive for.

Thirdly, God continually confronts man with threats in order to

save him with fear (Jude 23). Observe this in Luke 13:3, "... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Fourthly, God uses many inducements to persuade man to seek his own salvation. "Come unto Me ... and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you. ... For My yoke is easy" (Matt 11:28-30).

Fifthly, if man should not seek himself and his own well-being, it would be a matter of indifference to him how he fared according to body and soul; and being thus indifferent, all prayers would cease. Then there would be nothing for him to desire or request. God, however, wills that "in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil 4:6). Then all thanksgiving for received benefits would also cease; God, however, wills that we give thanks in everything (1 Thess 5:18), "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12).

It is evident from all this that spirituality does not consist in disregarding our welfare, utterly deprecating ourself, utterly losing sight of ourself as far as salvation is concerned, and excluding ourself from everything. Rather, this is a fabricated religion which is contrary to God's commandment, serving no other purpose but the satisfaction of the flesh and our own imagination.

Objection #1: Ought not God be the focus of all things and ought not all things end in God? By seeking self, however, man makes himself the focus and ends in self.

Answer: When a godly person focuses upon himself in spiritual matters, he acts according to the command and will of God. It would be impossible for him to end in himself and to remain focused on his felicity only, for that is not the highest level of his felicity. Being a recipient of grace, however, and while enjoying the goodness of God, he will time and again turn to God as the cause of his salvation. He will thus end in Him, thank Him, give honor and glory to Him, and praise Him, because by reason of His essence all praise must be unto Him, He being worthy thereof. The more pure the manner is in which a spiritual person ends in glorifying God, the more felicity he will enjoy; and the more felicity he enjoys, the more he will end in God. This is not to suggest that he contributes something to God, but rather, that the benefit is man's. Thus, having his felicity in view and ending in God must go together; the godly person cannot seek the one without exercising the other. As all the godly end in God upon receiving and enjoying the benefits of God, they (especially the fathers in Christ) likewise have the glory of God in view when they begin to undertake something.

Objection #2: A Christian must deny himself (Matt 16:24), not seek himself (1 Cor 10:24), is nothing (Gal 6:3), and must be lowly of heart (Matt 11:29). Therefore, man must remain outside of everything and neither seek nor have himself in mind in anything.

Answer: There is a threefold self. First, there is a *sinful self*; that is, pride, maliciousness, vengefulness, envy, miserliness, immorality, and all the sinful lusts of the heart, along with the deeds which issue forth therefrom, whereby he seeks to satisfy his lusts and to attain to the fulfillment of his desire. These a Christian must not seek, but he must abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. He must mortify and crucify them.

Secondly, there is also a *natural self*; that is, to desire and seek all that pertains to the welfare of the body, such as food, drink, sleep, clothing, housing, goods, peaceful association with people, and whatever else pertains to human existence. One may and must seek these things, for no one has ever hated his flesh, but rather, cherishes it. However, a Christian does not set his heart upon them and it is his objective to serve God in the use of these things. He is resigned to the divine dispensation, and he must be satisfied with either much or little, since these are not his portion. If, however, these matters run counter to the Lord Jesus, His cause, the truth, and godliness, and one is obligated to abstain from one or the other thing, then a Christian will readily deny himself, willingly let go of everything, view the disappearance of his goods with joy, and not even hold his life dear. This is the denial which Christ requires.

Thirdly, there is a *spiritual self*; that is, the desire for the salvation and welfare of our soul, consisting in reconciliation with God through the blood of Christ, union with God, and a life in the enjoyment of His fellowship, love, light, and holiness—and thus eternal glory. A Christian may not deny himself these spiritual things. He must always seek them with all his might. It is the life of the soul, the will of God, the command of God, and it pleases God. To neither seek nor pursue this is sin. Man, in having fellowship with and beholding God, may not utterly put self aside and keep himself entirely outside of this. Rather, he must strive for and seek to find pleasure in spiritual delight, joy, love, and holiness.

Matt 16:24 refers to the natural self; 1 Cor 10:24 refers to the sinful self; Gal 6:3 speaks of such people who have great thoughts of themselves, despise others, and who in the meantime either have no grace, or have but a very small measure.

Let us consider Matt 11:29. Humility does not exclude self; instead, it does relate to self, for it acknowledges what a person is and what graces and benefits are his. He does not boast of this,

since he acknowledges that he does not have them of himself, but that they have been granted to him of God by reason of His goodness alone. He sees his sinfulness and that he is therefore not worthy of anything. He sees virtues and capabilities in other persons which he does not have, and thus exalts them above himself. Having the Lord Jesus as his example, he knows that this lowly and yet noble disposition as a Christian, is pleasing to God. He therefore seeks to walk humbly with his God as a weaned child and in a becoming disposition—one of submission and being obliged toward man. It is hereby very evident that the exclusion of self in beholding God is a sign of something that purely proceeds from nature, is of one's own choosing, and is a sinful act toward the majestic and holy God.

Matters Which Trouble the Humble Christian

There are three things which cause the godly to be troubled more than anything else. It first of all troubles them that those who speak of these lofty contemplations also speak of their union with God, of belonging to God, and that in such contemplation they view God as their God. Secondly, such persons, in an exceptional manner, are able to speak of love for God and of sinking away in the love of God, and, so to speak, being consumed by it. Thirdly, there are some who speak of the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus in a most extraordinary manner. These three matters, they think, are indeed spiritual and evidences of extraordinary grace. Who would not be enamored by these matters? Who would not desire always to hear this discussed? My response to this is that it cannot but be that a truly gracious person, when hearing others speak of beholding God, of belonging to God, of love to God, and of the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus, will find love and desire stirring within to be in such a condition. This is due to their acquaintance with these matters in their spiritual nature, and they thus perceive them as such when they hear them being discussed. If those who speak thus would know and possess these matters in their true, spiritual nature, far be it from us to warn them in any way; rather, we would embrace them in love. Since we know, however, that these three matters can issue forth from natural illumination and can be expressed by persons who neither possess true grace nor derive these lofty views from a love for the truth, the Word, the church of the Lord Jesus, conversion, and the exercise of true saving faith, we must of necessity demonstrate how the unconverted can be occupied with these three matters.

As far as the first matter is concerned, it is common knowledge

that temporal believers, those who are externally religious in the state of nature—yes, even heathens—view God as their God and call Him their God. Everyone knows this. Why is it that those who occupy themselves in contemplating upon God would also not be able to do so? However, just because they imagine this to be so, does not therefore imply that this is indeed the case. God is only the God of true believers who, through Christ, having received His ransom and righteousness, come to God for reconciliation. Those who are therefore strangers of this way, and do not come in truth unto God in this way, do not have God as their portion. God is not their God, and their imaginations are vain and without foundation. They have never seen and felt the separation between God and themselves due to sin, the wrath of God toward the sinner, and the righteousness of God as Judge who will by no means clear the guilty. They are strangers of receiving Christ by faith. How then could God be their portion? Or else they view God as a God of all men, or of all who turn to Him and seek Him, although not in the only way, which is Christ. Or they may not have any reasons in view and just imagine all this. In this illusion they proceed to be amazed, to be delighted in, and to rejoice in God as He is, in the fact that this God is their God, and in all that this God is for them. These are great matters indeed. Many who thus contemplate upon God, however, endeavor to rid themselves of all spiritual motions which pertain to themselves, be divorced from self, and neither think of self nor reflect upon themselves. They only wish to contemplate upon God, be illuminated by Him, and be drawn up on high, into glory, and into eternity. Yes, though it be dreadful to say, they even endeavor to ascend above God in their reflections. Who would then be offended by the claim of such persons that God is their portion and that He is their God?

Secondly, their love for God is consistent with the manner in which He is their portion. Man has a loving nature, and if he finds or imagines a desirable object, his love goes out toward it. The imagination can have a remarkable effect here, for vain man can imagine something or somebody which or whom he has never seen. He dwells upon this with his thoughts; he delights himself in imaginary conversation, and rejoices in love, as if it were in truth. When a natural man focuses his thoughts upon God, he can also have natural inclinations of love toward God. When in addition he reflects upon the perfections of God—be it through the light of nature or external illumination of the Word—a love issues forth which is not of a spiritual, but of a natural sort. This love is commensurate with their knowledge. It is thus that the heathen

delight in God. It is in this manner that idolaters and those who have strayed from saving truth speak of the love of God, the wondrous motions of love, and the kiss of love upon awakening. And thus, by all the motions of natural love which one man can have toward another, they ascend unto God, so that the nature of love does not change, but only the object. They thus dishonor God with their so-called love for Him.

Objection: Are not all natural men haters of God? “Let them also that hate Him flee before Him” (Ps 68:1); “... haters of God” (Rom 1:30); “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). Since many who meditate upon God delight in Him in doing so, is this not proof that they are spiritually illuminated and truly regenerate? “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19); “But if any man love God, the same is known of Him” (1 Cor 8:3).

Answer: Not all that bears the name of love is love. There is a love which is natural and a love which is holy. Natural men—such as the heathen and all the unconverted—have natural love, this being of the same nature as he from whom it proceeds; however, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). From this natural love we can only conclude that such people are in the state of nature, and not at all that they are spiritual and regenerate. We completely agree that a natural man in beholding the perfections of God as He reveals Himself in nature in His majesty, glory, power, and goodness, etc., can with his natural heart love God in a natural manner. Pagans and other unconverted men have loved Him in this manner. Those who love God in such situations, can hate Him in other respects, demonstrating this by the rejection of His Word, by not receiving His Son, and in hating and persecuting His children. Those who thus meditate upon God in a natural sense are able to associate with all manner of men, but they detest God’s children who truly manifest the image of God. They hate the light because it exposes them, and because they are rebuked by the light in true believers. They show that they hate God by being unwilling to live according to His laws, instead desiring to live according to their own imaginations. They hate His rebukes, and their entire life demonstrates that they do not delight in God.

If we compare this natural love with the purely spiritual love of God in Christ Jesus—which we shall briefly discuss further on—then we shall perceive that the smallest spark and the tiniest ray of this love is incomparably superior and more pure than all the pretended love of such who meditate upon God, regardless of how they adorn it with beautiful words. The difference is not only one of

degree, but of very essence. Oh, how far does this divine spark—that heavenly fire—excel all those dead coals!

The third matter pertains to the extraordinary manner in which they speak of the glory and beauty of the Lord Jesus. Should it come as a surprise that someone who has the Scriptures, who reads godly literature describing the Lord Jesus in His beauty and glory, and who furthermore has an eloquent tongue, can speak in a most excellent manner about Jesus? Does someone therefore know Jesus Himself? Is this proof that he himself experientially beholds and relishes the Lord Jesus? He who draws conclusions merely on the basis of such eloquent speech is naive, and too little skilled in the matters of Christianity. Take time to observe a person who speaks thus as far as his sentiments are concerned, the company he keeps, his love to the godly in the church, and in reference to the first five propositions of this chapter. You will readily perceive how you must judge such a person. Take particular note, however, of how he speaks concerning the manner in which the soul is led to Jesus as Surety, how the soul is exercised in receiving the Lord Jesus as his ransom and righteousness, as well as its engagement in spiritual wrestlings. You will then perceive that all this lofty speech only relates to the Lord Jesus as King, or as an example for imitation, but not as High Priest in order to find reconciliation and peace with God in His atonement, doing so by a continual and frequently repeated exercise of faith, which is the marrow and essence of true Christianity.

Some little children in Christ, who are easily driven about by every wind of doctrine, hearing someone speak eloquently about lofty reflections and not being conscious of the thorn hidden in it, become enamored with such a condition as a result of the spiritual life and light which is within them. They may also engage in meditation upon God as the Pietists do; that is, in a natural manner—however, with different results.

(1) Some, when they begin, perceive inner strife and have an aversion for this way, although a heartfelt desire for the matter itself remains. They condemn themselves for such resistance and aversion, being of the opinion that this is engendered by their corrupt nature—thinking that it is but laziness and a lack of spirituality. They resume and strive all the more earnestly, but the resistance and aversion remain and increase. Having thus wrestled for some time, they begin to see that their objective—to behold God—is indeed good and spiritual, but that the method is but a natural one, so that this resistance and aversion were not sinful, but an activity of the regenerated nature. They perceive that there

is a spiritual way to walk in the light of God's countenance. They thus escape this snare and desist from pursuing this natural method.

(2) Others, having the principle of spiritual life, are careless as far as preserving and strengthening it. They are inclined to err in seeking to be someone special. They, when perceiving the appearance of spirituality in such lofty reflections, pursue this method recklessly. When God gives them over to themselves, they err by pursuing their fantasy and natural imaginations—and thus, upon that good foundation which is within them they build wood, hay, and stubble, which will be burned. They will nevertheless be saved since the gifts of God's grace are without repentance. In the meantime, they make themselves guilty of giving offense and are at times the cause of the damnation of other people who, not possessing grace, have followed them in this work of nature due to the esteem they have for them. It only occurs very rarely that such persons are exercised again in a unadulterated manner and come to the simplicity which is in Christ, since pride—which comes naturally to those who pretend to have such lofty reflections—has also overtaken their heart. Since those that are truly converted can fall and err greatly, we must therefore be careful in judging the deeds of the godly, as not all that they do is good. We may not imitate them just because they are godly, but only inasmuch as they are followers of Christ and walk according to the Word of God. “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments” (Ps 119:6).

The Spiritual Beholding of God

Truly spiritual persons do not make a distinction between meditation and beholding: they are both considered to be human activities. He does make a distinction, however, between the activity of the soul in meditating upon divine things, and the extraordinary revelations of God to the soul engaged in such meditation upon divine things, which the soul—upon receiving them—acknowledges, feels and tastes.

A believer, however much he may humble himself, will never arrive at beholding God as a result of the measure in which he waits, longs, exerts himself, and lifts up his heart. His duty is to meditate so that he may gain more and more insight into what he knows of God by means of the Word, faith, and experience—in order that he may delight himself in, rejoice in, and adore God, while bowing down before Him to worship Him reverently. He must endeavor to acquaint himself with God, become holier by virtue of having fellowship with Him, and serve God in a manner more pleasing to Him.

Objection: All of this is self-love and therefore must be rejected.

Answer: This sort of self-love is holy, commanded by God, pleasing to Him, and a proof of the spirituality of the meditation. Sinful self-love—which manifests itself in the seeking of esteem, honor, love, respect, to be served by others, and to cause all things to end in self—is hated, despised, and avoided by the person who meditates in a godly manner. In seeking his own spiritual welfare in spiritual meditation, he does not end in self, but rather acknowledges all things to be from God and through God. In love and joy he returns all this again to God, giving Him the honor and glory.

Occasionally God, according to His promise (John 14:21,23), meets such who meditate spiritually with extraordinary and more immediate revelations of Himself, and causes them to behold God in more immediate proximity, and to taste who He is and what He is to them in Christ Jesus. This, however, He does not do to all, but only to some, and even that is *a rare hour of short duration*. To heed, behold, and adore such a revelation, and to be ravished with love toward this blessed God may be referred to in some sense as beholding God, and as a foretaste of eternity. There one will no longer live by faith, but in beholding. Since God does not reveal Himself to the world and the unconverted, and since they cannot attain to a seeing and beholding of God by their own activity, all their speaking of such beholding, and all their beholding of God is nothing but fantasy, is not in truth, and only a reflection of their thoughts upon the illusions of their own making.

A believer, who engages himself in meditation upon divine things and seeking fellowship with God, withdraws himself from all things and considers there to be no one but God and himself. He acknowledges himself as a creature of God, as having an immortal soul, and as having been created with a human nature in Adam, excelling in holiness and glory. He also acknowledges that in all things he is miserably distorted, deformed, and abominable—being sinful within and without. He occasionally will focus upon his condition in order to gain a deeper insight about himself and thus acknowledge himself to be unworthy that God would look upon him, or would bestow any grace or benefits upon him. He acknowledges himself to be entirely unfit and unworthy to approach unto this majestic and holy God, although he cannot enjoy light, life, peace, rest, satisfaction, and felicity except in communion with God.

While thus maintaining this humble frame, he turns his eye to the Mediator, wholeheartedly approving of this holy way to come and to be permitted to approach unto God through Him. At times he has dealings with the Mediator, not as a beginner in grace, but as one who renews his interest in Jesus—although some who are

of little faith do receive Jesus as if it were the first time, being fearful that they have neither truly received Him as yet nor are true partakers of Him. However, he frequently views Jesus as his Jesus by reason of his believing disposition, and as the way by and in which he may now approach unto God.

While turning unto God in this condition, he perceives that there is a great diversity in approaching unto Him. At times God hides Himself to such an extent and there comes such darkness upon him that he does not perceive anything of God and at times must desist, since there is only an increase in darkness, and temptations present themselves which he, at that moment, must flee. At times it is God's good pleasure to try him and to prepare him for greater things. At other times he himself is the cause of this, having lifted up his soul too highly, having exerted himself too strongly, having been too irreverent, and having had expectations which were too high.

At other times it is not so dark, but God maintains a distance, refuses to be approached in a familiar manner, stands afar, and remains silent as if He neither knew nor saw him. The one who wishes to approach unto God wrestles at this point. He prays and supplicates, presents himself to the Lord Jesus as being his ransom and righteousness, and thus humbly presses on. Alternately he holds before the Lord his sonship, God's eternal love to him, the covenant of grace, and the promises. This wrestling makes him tender and causes him to weep. One moment he is discouraged and then again he lifts himself up. It may happen that he must depart again in this condition, thinking that he has sought in vain. His faith may even come under assault, whereas he nevertheless has much reason for joy and thanksgiving, since God did accommodate him, albeit secretly. It frequently refreshes him that he was able to pour out his heart before the Lord, and he wishes that he would be able to enjoy such a time once again.

At other times it was his intent to come boldly to the throne of grace and to enter in by the blood of Jesus. At the very outset he is held up, however, and it is as if God casts him away and in anger refuses him access to Himself. This causes him to be perplexed. He can neither depart nor approach, and this rejection and the anger of his God are bitter to him. What must he do? He searches his heart as to its condition, whether it is in the proper frame to approach unto God. He reflects upon his former ways, seeking for the cause why God encounters him so harshly. If he detects sin and a careless walk, he will justify God in His dealings with him; he will humble himself, make confession, wash himself in the blood of Jesus, and thus endeavor to approach unto God. If God then nevertheless

refuses, he departs mournfully—not sorrowfully, but as a subdued child who has spoiled it. He will quietly and passively submit himself and say, “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him” (Mic 7:9). If, however, the Lord allows Himself to be entreated, removes His anger, and gives him free access to Himself—even though not with the same familiarity and intimacy—oh, how he then rejoices! Humbly and tremblingly he approaches unto the Lord and His goodness. The more humble he remains and the more childlike the disposition is which he maintains, the more light and comfort he may at times receive.

Sometimes those who come to the Lord are received by Him in a friendly manner—yes, He runs, so to speak, to meet them and manifests His goodness, so that they are at a loss with the Lord’s goodness, saying, “Why does this happen to me? Why is the Lord so good to a worm—to me, a sinful man? Why does the Lord answer before I call and why does He say, ‘Here am I?’ while I am yet speaking?” Yes, the Lord may even go beyond that and say, “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.” He may say, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? Ask of Me for yourself, your family, and for others and I shall give it to you.” The Lord may presently give so many and such holy desires, while enabling them to express these desires with such a childlike and humble disposition, that at times there is more a lack of time and a succumbing of bodily strength than a lack of desires and answers. He believes these promises, takes hold of them, and may shortly thereafter become aware of the fulfillment of the promises in response to these desires.

It is thus that he, who but endeavored at first to have an encounter with God, may be held up at the very outset, so that he cannot even attain to meditation upon the matter he had intended to meditate upon. How blessed and beneficial it is to be held up in such a manner!

As God does not always manifest Himself in the same manner to those who engage in meditation upon divine things, they likewise are not always in the same condition when they approach unto Him. They generally do not choose the matter about which they wish to have dealings with God; they leave that to the direction of the Spirit and follow Him to the matter to which He directs them. If they do not perceive such a special direction, they generally come before the Lord in the condition in which they are, and reflect upon that matter which is nearest to their heart.

Conditions in Which the Soul May Be in her Approach unto God

It may be that the soul is melancholy, restless, and in bondage

without knowing of any special reason for this, or the soul may be empty and missing communion with God. To have a soul; to know that God alone is her satisfaction, rest, peace, and joy; to have tasted that it is good to be near unto God, and then to be forsaken; to be far from God, and to have no heart to seek earnestly—all this not only causes her to grieve, but this sorrow shoots down deep roots, engendering melancholy, restlessness, and despondency, so that it seems as if the soul cannot be cheered up by anything. In this frame the soul approaches unto God and presents herself to the Lord as she is. She can neither pray much nor advance many arguments from her side or God's side. She quietly waits upon God and, while lifting up the heart unto God, brings to mind God's common dealings in filling the empty, comforting those that mourn, and strengthening those that are weak, saying, "If it would please Thee, Thou art also able to do this to me. Oh, do so to me and revive me!" She thus remains in the presence of God and searches whether she can detect an attribute of God which is applicable to her circumstances. If something comes to mind, she will focus her thoughts upon this perfection to detect whether this is efficacious to her comfort. She turns to the Word of God to find a promise applicable to herself. If she finds one, she will bring it to the Lord, making an urgent appeal to the veracity and goodness of God, while engaging herself in reflecting upon those perfections with application to her own condition. Sometimes there arises light in the darkness for her and her mourning soul is refreshed. At other times nothing transpires, however, and with a sigh or quiet tear she must depart sorrowfully, sometimes believing that God will refresh her at His time and that He nevertheless is and will remain her Father.

Some may be encumbered by worldly concerns in which they neither may nor can refrain from being involved, such as a difficult occupation practiced among ungodly men, or as may be the case with a woman who must care for many children, who can hardly find time to be alone. Even if a person does find a moment, the soul, due to all these concerns, is so confused and so far from God that she cannot attain to calmness and quietness. Sometimes the conscience accuses one of not continually exercising his calling as being in the presence of the Lord, of not sufficiently planning to have time alone (which he indeed would have been able to find), and of having been spiritually lazy. In this condition the soul also presents herself before the Lord, being desirous for God. She does not dare to expect a great measure of light and a special manifestation, but she is in a humble frame and frequently knows not what

to do except weep in a heartfelt manner, being prompted by desire on the one side, and due to lack of time and her neglect on the other side. She brings to mind how God is so good, being found of them that sought Him not, as the One who answers before one calls, as He who at times—while one is speaking—says, “Here am I,” and as He who is sovereign in His ministration and at times allows Himself to be found readily by those who have little time or qualifications to seek Him with much perseverance. In looking back she perceives that the Lord has previously, on occasion, manifested Himself quickly and unexpectedly. While thus being engaged, she brings to mind God in His perfections and dealings, and delights herself more in beholding God Himself than to do so in reference to herself, even though one cannot perceive anything of the presence of God. It can also have a reciprocal effect upon the soul to her comfort; and even if she, being overwhelmed with temporal concerns, cannot perceive much light and comfort during her short time in the closet, she nevertheless rejoices in the fact that she has sought the Lord. The little crumbs of grace comfort the soul.

A bodily cross can press down so much that a soul is, so to speak, buried by it. If then no means arise by which she may be relieved or delivered from it, such a soul can sometimes become discouraged, sometimes sorrowful, or at other times entertains bewildering thoughts about God and her own condition. If one were able to bear this cross without sinning, it would be no cross. However, the sinful motions of the heart, as well as sinful words and deeds, double the cross and are the thorn in it. Since she nevertheless has faith in Christ, possesses spiritual life, and considers all her felicity to consist in having communion with God, she therefore turns to God, in order to be engaged in godly meditation in His presence. In coming unto God, however, it is difficult for the soul to rid herself of the anxiety caused by the cross as it presses down and threatens. But she presents herself to the Lord as she is, humbles herself about her sin in not bearing the cross well, seeks reconciliation in the blood of Christ, and lifts up her heart to the providence of God. Considering that the cross has come to her from God’s fatherly hand for her benefit, she humbles herself under the mighty hand of God, and meditates upon the gracious character of God manifested in His careful supervision over His people and her, over the promises pertaining to the hearing of prayer, and the omnipotence of God. In this manner she may be delivered from her inner anxiety, and find peace and quietude. The cross becomes small and light to her; she takes it upon her as if it were a feather and delights herself in beholding the Lord’s all-sufficiency. She

chooses the Lord as her only and all-sufficient portion, rests in this, and may at times return to her cross with contentment.

The soul may also be in a sinful condition. The corruption of the heart may manifest itself; she cannot resist vain thoughts; the lusts of the flesh are exceptionally strong and hold her captive; besetting sins are lively—be it due to disposition, physical condition, or incidents which she either desires, cannot avoid, or may not avoid—and she has little strength against them. She is then perplexed by this; sin is a heavy burden and she is bowed down by it. There is no peace; communion with God has been disturbed, God hides Himself, and faith is assaulted. What now? Any personal initiative does not result in progress; to stay away from God causes more regression. The soul dares not approach unto God due to being too sinful; and to remain in this condition is equivalent to dying continually, whereas there is life and faith in the soul. She makes the resolution to approach unto God, being convinced of her sincerity—not only to be delivered from guilt and punishment, but also from corruption and all the sin which proceeds from this. Such a soul then presents herself to the Lord as sinful and as miserable as she is, together with her grief related to this and her desire to be delivered from it. She meditates upon the free grace of God, that God neither considers anyone's virtue (which is not naturally present anyway), nor sin, but is gracious because He wills to be gracious to her, and is merciful to whomever He wills. While meditating, she will focus upon the depth of this free grace, approve of it with her whole heart, be enamored with it, and adore it. From this she proceeds to eternal and sovereign election, to eternal love, and while reflecting upon herself and the grace which the soul perceives to be in herself, she is astonished and sinks away in adoration. "I, I sinful man have been known! I have been loved by Thee! I have been eternally appointed to be a recipient of salvation! To Thee, to Thee alone, oh Lord, be the glory for Thy free grace and for Thy unsearchable love for humanity." From this she proceeds to the Mediator Jesus Christ. In meditating upon Him she can find neither beginning nor end due to the manifestation of all the perfections of God, such as love, righteousness, wisdom, omnipotence, mercy, etc. She acknowledges this holy way as the way whereby the sinner is reconciled with God and which gives her liberty to approach unto God. This way she approves of. She becomes enamored with it and chooses it for herself. She observes in this way the fullness of the satisfaction and is absorbed by the unsearchableness of this way. She meditates upon the immutability of God, that God remains the same in His purpose

and love toward the elect, even though they, time and again, spoil everything before Him. Christ's satisfaction cannot be abolished; the covenant of grace is unbreakable; God remains faithful, and always restores His own. When the soul in a negative frame occupies herself with such meditations, she will experience a wondrous change. The conscience perceives peace with God through the blood of Jesus, the estrangement is transformed into intimacy, and the soul—being washed and cleansed—goes her way rejoicing.

Occasionally the soul of a godly person has a desire for holiness which is more than ordinary. She is enamored with self-denial as far as honor, esteem, the love of men, comfort, earthly delight, and the riches or goods of this world are concerned. She does this neither for self nor for the rest and welfare of the soul, but for the Lord's sake, doing so to the degree and in those circumstances in which the Lord requires such from her. She is enamored with being continually in the presence of God, as well as with obeying, fearing, loving, and walking humbly with God. She greatly desires humility and meekness of heart, as well as wisdom, love, forbearance, and friendly dignity. She furthermore yearns for the image of her Jesus, and to give expression to His life in her life. She does not desire this in an earthly, lifeless, and natural manner as the unconverted do. Rather, she desires that this be so in a living and truly spiritual manner in union with the Lord Jesus by faith—and through Him with God—and by the influence of the Lord's Spirit to the glory of her God, the honor of the church, and the salvation and stirring up of other people. With this desire she comes before the Lord and continues to focus upon His holiness. While continually cleaving to Christ, however, a view of God's holiness causes her to sink away in shame due to her insignificance and sinfulness, saying with Job, "Now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). With Isaiah she may cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). She nevertheless, being in Christ, continues in her beholding of this pure holiness, and allows herself to be illuminated and enlivened by this holiness; in that respect she becomes holier and holier. This is according to the testimony of the apostle: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). Thus, the soul who is enamored with holiness acquaints herself with the Lord, cleaves to Him as seeing the invisible, and continually focuses upon the exhortation: "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

If the soul has no special matters to bring before the Lord and

the Lord does not lead her into special matters, she makes a choice herself. She then beholds the Lord in the work of redemption and considers which perfections manifest themselves in the face of Jesus Christ. She will begin with eternal election and the Counsel of Peace, proceeding to the fall, the first gospel declaration, the ceremonies which depict Christ, and the prophecies and promises. She proceeds to the incarnation of Christ and follows Him in His life, preaching, miracles, suffering, and death—thus from the cradle to the cross, each time making application to herself.

At times the soul beholds the Lord's perfections in the work of creation and meditates upon them in an orderly and attentive fashion. Sometimes she occupies herself by meditating upon the providence of the Lord, and learns from this to rightly know God's sovereignty, wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, so that all the power, evil, and goodness of the creature disappears. She views God as being the only one who is operative, executing all things irresistibly according to His purpose and good pleasure. Then again, the soul who attentively meditates selects other matter for reflection and thus acquaints herself with the Lord. The heart thus increases its steadfast confidence in the Lord, loves Him, fears Him, serves Him, and due to continual fellowship with God, the soul begins to shine forth as the countenance of Moses did when he had communed with God for forty days upon the mountain.

The Lord can also lead a longing soul to a more immediate beholding of Himself, at which time she neither brings before the Lord her conditions, nor is occupied with the works of God—be it in nature or in grace. Instead, she immediately approaches unto God, be it in a general sense or as far as each individual perfection is concerned. This is not done in a barren and lifeless manner by merely beholding and acknowledging them. Rather, the Lord occasionally permits her to taste the efficacy and salvation to be found, and at times gives her a foretaste of the beholding of God in heaven. The soul who beholds God in a lively and spiritual manner always cleaves to Christ, and in that frame she beholds God's all-sufficiency, goodness, love, holiness, sovereignty, majesty, glory, and omnipotence, doing all this while considering that this God is her God and that He is her all. This brings forth adoration, joy, love, and praise. In thus beholding God, the soul maintains a humble, quiet, and approving frame that is void of earthly concerns—and also is believing, meditating, going out in love, characterized by intimate communion, dependent, desirous for counsel, and making use of His strength and benefits as her own.

We have dealt extensively with the beholding of God in chapters

3 [Vol. 1, p. 83] and 26. [p. ###87] It is essential that what we have stated there be read in conjunction with this; it is a significant element of this subject matter. Add to this also what is recorded in chapters 56: *The Glorification of God*, 57: *Love to God*, 58: *Love to Christ*, [Vol. 3, p. 243] 83: *Love for One's Neighbor*, and 84: *Humility*. [Vol. 4, p. 67] We would have added those matters here, had we not dealt with them in those chapters. It is not fitting to deal with the same subject matter twice in one book, and we therefore direct the reader to those chapters. If someone desires an example of holy meditations for the purpose of being instructed by them, he ought to read *De Trappen des Geestelijken Levens* (The Steps of Spiritual Life) by my deceased father, *Theodorus à Brakel*. If you desire meditations of a simpler level, you ought to read, *De Aandachtige Leerling* (The Attentive Pupil) by my deceased wife, *Sara Nevius*.

A Final Exhortation

The conclusion of all that we have stated as a warning against the Pietists is as follows: There is *natural* and *spiritual* religion, a natural and spiritual *denial of self*, a natural *belonging to* God as Creator and preserver and a spiritual and true belonging to God as a reconciled Father in Christ, a natural and spiritual *love to God and to man*, and a natural and spiritual *reflection upon and beholding of God*. This is the crux of the matter; everything depends upon this, and salvation or condemnation is contingent upon this. We have made as clear a distinction as possible between the natural and the spiritual, and wish that every one to whom salvation is dear would know this distinction, reject that which is natural, and practice what is spiritual, rather than embrace immediately whatever has the appearance of spirituality.

Objection: Religion, self-denial, belonging to God, love for God and man, the beholding of God, etc., are indeed good things, and if a person is engaged in that which is good, we ought to love such a person. Is it necessary to be so careful in investigating the difference between the natural and the spiritual, and to weigh it upon the scale of a goldsmith? We ought not to judge each other in these matters, but tolerate one another. The one may do it in this manner and the other in that manner, but we must overlook the manner itself, considering it to be insignificant.

Answer: However, must we not have a heartfelt love for our fellow man? Is it love if we, in order to maintain peace and unity, allow our neighbor to run to his destruction in hell? Is it not love if we wish to lead him by the hand unto salvation and warn him about the way which leads to hell? And even if he becomes difficult

and views you as dealing lovelessly with him and as being desirous to lord over him, is it therefore not love if we nevertheless wish to pull him away from his destruction? What I did in this chapter I have done out of love, in order to deliver souls from destruction and to direct them in the holy way unto salvation. If you do not wish to hear me, it will grieve me that you are intent on running to your destruction.

You are saying that the actions of all parties are one and the same; the manner in which they are done is a matter of insignificance, and therefore, we must allow everyone to proceed according to his own opinion. If, however, everything depends on the manner in which one proceeds, and if this determines whether something is either natural or spiritual, and leads either to damnation or salvation, then this is not a matter of insignificance. Love demands that we point this out to each other, and warn, protect, and correct each other. For example, in the realm of the natural, is it a matter of indifference to you whether you have a clear diamond in your ring or a piece of glass of the same size and appearance? It also glitters. Is it a matter of indifference to you if a coin has but the proper imprint, regardless of whether it is copper or gold—as long as it is red? You do search out the difference in the natural realm—either choosing or rejecting it—and will not allow yourself to be fooled by external appearance, and would you yet be careless in the spiritual realm upon which everything depends? If there are two rich persons, the one owning his goods righteously and the other unrighteously, will you consider them to be of equal status and say, “Rich is rich, and the matter of ‘how?’ is not important; that should not be so strictly investigated or distinguished”? Should one not give consideration as to the “how” in spiritual matters, since everything depends on it? If there are two horses and the one is clean, vigorous, and fast, whereas the other is full of stinking abscesses, stiff, and halting miserably, would you then say, “A horse is a horse, life is life, and progress is progress”? Are there differences in the physical realm and must we yet approve of everything in the spiritual realm? Is it the same to you whether a dead horse teems with living worms, or whether it is alive? Is it the same to you whether you have your father, child, husband, or wife represented on a painting, or whether they are present in very person? Would you say, “It is all the same”? This is likewise true in the spiritual realm. Is it a matter of indifference as to whether a clock indicates the hour by her chime or whether this is indicated by a human voice? If some people wish to go to the same city and some travel upon the right

way, whereas others enter upon a way which does not lead to the city, but to the land of the enemy, would you then say that they all have good intentions, and one must thus leave them alone in their choice of direction? Must we not warn those who have strayed?

I have presented an abundance of examples to convince everyone forcefully that everything does depend upon the “how” or the *manner*, and that primary attention must be given to this. Scripture says that we must take heed *how* we hear, and we must speak and act accordingly. Natural men who behold spiritual matters in a natural sense remain natural and unregenerate in the flesh, and the light they have only changes them as far as the degree of virtuousness is concerned—with which they cannot please God (Rom 8:8). They remain without Christ, without true saving faith, and therefore without spiritual life; all their reflections, self-denial, and love for God and men are but dead works. With all their illusions, spirituality (as they call it), and delightful daydreaming they will perish if they do not repent. Be warned, and may the Lord convict such persons and bring them to the right place. Take note of the following texts: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24), since they are not upon the right way and do not seek to enter in the right manner. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov 16:25). Since they are of the opinion that they are correct, believing that the hidden and spiritual way to heaven has been found by them, there is but little possibility that they can be convinced of their error. “Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you ... but the publicans and the harlots believed Him” (Matt 21:31-32). Therefore, I warn you in love; do not stray any further, lest you perish. And you who are beginners in grace, and have been enticed by such natural beholding of God, self-denial, and love, I call out after you, “Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee” (Song 6:13). May the Lord hear my prayer on your behalf.

A Word of Encouragement to the Godly

I have indeed anticipated that some of the godly in reading this warning would become concerned and doubt their state, thinking as follows: “If the unconverted also can come this far—that is, live in the beholding of God, in the denial of self, loving God and man, are determined to have God as their portion, and to commune with God as their God—do I even resemble them? How can I think to possess grace if I do not, so to speak, resemble them at all—neither

in their activity, nor in their ecstatic speaking about those matters and about the Lord Jesus? I truly ask myself: ‘Do I have grace indeed?’”

To this I answer that whatever they do in a natural manner, you do in a spiritual manner by the principle of spiritual knowledge and life which is within you. Even if they acted and spoke as you perceive they do (although they do not do so), you nevertheless have no reason to doubt your spiritual state, for a small, weak child is just as much a human being as the strongest man. In the church there are indeed men and fathers in Christ, and there are also weak children. Due to the faint resemblance to others, one may not draw the conclusion that one is neither gracious nor possessing grace. Rather, one must acknowledge that which he possesses and be desirous for growth.

Furthermore, your understanding of God and Christ, your prayers, your desires after God, your seeking after the Lord Jesus, your focusing upon God, and your deeds and exercises—all proceeding from this principle of life—exceed all their beholding of God, reflections, sinking away in God, losing themselves in God, and similar expressions. The difference is as great as the difference between a dead and a living person; it is incomparable. The difference is not one of degree but of very essence. The one is natural and the other spiritual; the one is but an illusion, a fabrication. They are but self-made images which you can observe as frequently as you wish, whereas the other is truth, Spirit, and a life emanating from the Holy Spirit. If you were familiar with their activity and the manner in which they behold God—however, they do not come to God, but imagine a God who is according to their wishes—and the manner in which they deny themselves, love, and speak, you would not desire such spirituality, but would reject it. You are also able to create natural images of God and mentally ascend higher and higher. If you yield to such natural imagination, however, you will readily perceive that this cannot delight you; it makes you colder and you will reject it. However, the least ray of God in the face of Christ, the least fleeing to Jesus and leaning upon Him will be incomparably sweeter to you than all that lifeless meditation. Therefore, rejoice quietly in your portion—however small it may seem to you—since it consists in light, life, truth, union with Christ, and love, and allow all those who have such elevated natural notions to go their way. Out of love for communion with Jesus and for His children, continue to be exercised with that spiritual principle which is according to the Word of God, and thank the Lord for your portion, which incomparably exceeds all their natural motions. Your spiritual principle cannot

coalesce with theirs, since they are the very opposite of each other. To be but acquainted with their activities is sufficient to reject their principle and to flee from it. Consider but this one example: You love the godly because they love the Lord Jesus and are loved by Him, whereas you love other people in an entirely different manner from the children of God. You cannot be in agreement with all manner of false doctrine. They love indiscriminately, regardless of which religion a person may belong to. It is only the truly godly who stand firm in the faith, who are established in the truth, and who have intimate fellowship with God in the Spirit, whom they do not love. Rather, they abhor them and flee from them since their works, which are not upright but only of a natural disposition, are made manifest by the light of such. By this you can discern the rest of their doings. Be on your guard against this, and let your dealings between God and your soul be in simplicity and in truth. Let your eye continually be focused upon the Word of God whereby you have received spiritual light and life, which is also your continual nourishment and the rule for your life. Then you will proceed safely.

We have thus presented to you the fundamentals to which you must adhere in order to be safeguarded against the temptation of the Pietists, which simultaneously serve as marks whereby they are discovered. We have therefore considered the following from two perspectives: love to God and man, the denial of self, belonging and being united to God, and the beholding of God. We have done so both from the side of the Pietists and the side of the godly, having demonstrated from the Word of God that their activity is but the natural activity of the unconverted by which they will perish; and that the activity in which the godly engage is rooted in God, is by the Holy Spirit, is according to the Word of God, and leads them to salvation.

That which has been said is sufficient to convince those poor misguided people who, desiring to approach unto God and become partakers of salvation, instead depart from God and enter upon the broad way of destruction. Oh, that the Lord would open their eyes and change their hearts so that they would forsake their foolishness and walk in the way of understanding!

That which has been said ought also to suffice as a warning for those who are inclined toward the ways of the Pietists. That is an easy way which agrees with man's nature and in which Satan leaves them alone, being able to safely lead them to hell in this way—for the truly godly have both their nature and the devil against them. Therefore, withdraw your foot from them, depart from them, and

remove yourself from their snares. If you desire pure light and true godliness, remain with the church, follow the Word, and walk in straight paths.

It also ought to suffice to stir up the truly godly to walk in the way of the Lord with new courage and lifting up of the heart, and to let their light shine—to let it shine in demonstration of what truth is, what the efficacy of truth is, and what is the way of uprightness and holiness, so that the Pietists and their illusions may be put to shame. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). May the Lord send out His light and truth; may they lead and bring you unto His holy hill, and to His tabernacles (Ps 43:3).