

**THE FAITH
AND PRACTICE
OF THE
PROTESTANT
REFORMED
CHURCHES**

A SUMMARY

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(revised 2004, 2015)**

Second Printing, 1998
Third Printing, 2000
Fourth Printing, 2004
Fifth Printing, 2008
Sixth Printing, 2011
Seventh Printing, 2015

INTRODUCTION

This brief study is intended to serve as a basis for introducing the Protestant Reformed Churches to those who are interested in knowing more about our historical roots and doctrinal foundations, as well as certain practices which distinguish us from many other churches. I have prepared this especially for those who, in God's providence and by the work of evangelism or church reformation, are considering whether or not to join us. It is my prayer that God will use this material as a means of instruction, perhaps also to clear up certain misconceptions, and to serve the strengthening of His Church.

This study is not intended in any way to be a comprehensive study. Because of its brevity, the user would also do well to read collateral material, some of which is noted in this study. Recommended as companion volumes for this entire study are *Doctrine According to Godliness*, by Ronald Hanks (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), *For Thy Truth's Sake*, by Herman Hanks (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), and *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005). The latter volume includes the scripturally referenced creeds of the Reformed churches: The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. Study them. But above all, show yourself as the Bereans (Acts 17:11), who searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether the teaching and preaching of the Apostle was according to God's own Word.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Besides the faithful instruction I received in the Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, which instruction, I trust, is reflected in this work, I want also to acknowledge the undated Doctrinal Review of Rev. Jason Kortering, from which I was able to obtain many ideas in filling out the sketch outline obtained in the pamphlet noted above.

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I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES (PRCA)

Introduction: I begin with history for two reasons.

1. The Spirit of truth leads the church into the truth throughout history and gives the church to develop the truth throughout history.
2. Given that organic development of the truth, it is important to see the place of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the line of the church historically and as churches being faithful to the historical development of the truth of Holy Scripture.

A. The Pre-Reformation Period

1. The early New Testament church (through A.D. 590)
 - a. Doctrinally, the church was in her infancy. Though she was well-established by the Apostles, she had not yet faced the serious doctrinal controversies which would clarify and establish her understanding of the whole counsel of God.
 - b. This was an age of tremendous growth and westward expansion. Strikingly, this spread of the gospel was not due primarily to the work of ordained missionaries, but came through the spiritual strength of the church, the strength of personal witness (Acts 8:4).
 - c. The people of God suffered severe persecution through most of her early history.
 - d. The church from the beginning has had to contend with the attacks of Satan and the rise of heresies of various sorts (cf. e.g., II Tim. 3 and 4; Titus 1: 10-16; Jude 3).

- e. The chief controversies in this period of church history were¹:
 - (1) the Trinitarian controversies, which arose first because Satan himself knows the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the practical life of the church.
 - (2) the Christological controversies (of various sorts) which denied the biblical truth concerning the Person and (or) natures of Christ.
 - (3) the heresy of Gnosticism (I Tim. 4:1-3; Rev. 2:6,15), with its synthesis of paganism and Christianity, its rejection of biblical revelation and the divine act of creation, and the exaltation of self as the source and standard of truth.²
 - (4) the Pelagian controversy in which Augustine was the chief defender of the faith (see pp. 30).

2. The Medieval Church (A.D. 590-1517)
 - a. Medieval Church history was characterized by a steady decline in the spiritual welfare of the Church until it reached unbelievable depths of immorality, apostasy and formalism which could only be changed by a radical reformation which involved the break with Rome and the complete re-establishment of the church institute.
 - b. The entire period is characterized by the intermixing of the Church and the pagan barbarian tribes of Europe, with a consequent break-down of morals within the church.

¹Some of these errors are considered later in this study under their related doctrinal headings.

²To see the widespread influence of this ancient heresy in the church and world of our day, confer Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*, (P & R, 1992) and *Spirit Wars* (Winepress Publishing, 1997).

- c. The early part of Medieval church history also saw the rise of Islam, which became a tremendous threat to the church. Islam is not a redemptive religion, but a religion of laws. Being anti-trinitarian, Islam has no concept of fellowship with God (I John 1:3) and the joy of the Christian faith. The concepts of salvation in Jesus, and the life of Christ in us by His Holy Spirit compelling us to live in willing submission to God's will as a matter of thankfulness, are foreign to the follower of Islam.
- d. During this period was also seen the denial of the office of believer in the church, the rise of the papacy, the first major division in the church between East (the Greek Orthodox) and West (Roman Catholic), and the addition of many unbiblical practices in the life of the Roman Catholic Church — penance and indulgences, the mass, the multiplication of sacraments, the worship of saints and images— many of these things closely related to the loss of preaching and the rejection of the Scriptures.
- e. Even while the Church was sinking into spiritual darkness, there were shining lights, faithful children of God, who maintained the truth of Scripture in moral and spiritual integrity. While these were severely persecuted, there were those who survived even until the dawn of the Reformation. God used many men to kindle the fire that would be ignited by Martin Luther. Among the major names were John Wycliffe in England and John Hus in Bohemia.

B. The Reformation

- 1. The main figure of the Reformation was Martin Luther.
 - a. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a professor in Wittenberg and a monk of the Augustinian order, nailed on the door of Wittenberg's Cathedral 95 theses

or statements confronting errors in Romish teaching and practices.

- (1) Luther never intended to split from the Roman Catholic Church.
- (2) He simply followed a common practice of that day, intending merely to introduce subjects for debate within the Augustinian order.
- b. Luther's 95 theses, however, touched a chord in the lives of the people in Germany and consequently these theses were printed and widely distributed, and raised a furor in the church.
 - (1) After major debates in Heidelberg and Leipzig, the breach between Luther and Rome was clear.
 - (2) In 1520, Luther was excommunicated by the pope. (This is an example of how Rome revealed herself as the false church, according to our Belgic Confession, Article 29: "she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ...and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.")
 - (3) God so used Luther to begin the great Reformation, a work which spread like wildfire throughout Germany and Europe.
- c. The Lutheran Reformation focused especially on the following truths of Scripture that had long been lost within the Roman Catholic Church:
 - (1) Justification by faith alone in Christ alone apart from works.
 - (2) The absolute authority of the Scriptures.
 - (3) The priesthood of all believers.

- 2. The Calvinistic branch of the Reformation

- a. John Calvin carried on the Lutheran Reformation and brought a different emphasis to the development of the Reformation.
 - (1) Whereas Luther's development was prompted by questions of personal salvation and dealt primarily with the doctrine of salvation as well as the doctrine and work of Christ, Calvin built upon the Lutheran Reformation and developed the truth especially in theology (the doctrine of God) and ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church).
 - (2) Calvin's God-centered emphasis is seen in the phrase *SOLA DEO GLORIA*, roughly translated, "To God alone be the glory."
- b. The major contributions of Calvin are seen in especially two areas:
 - (1) Doctrinally, the principles developed in the Calvinistic branch of the Reformation can be remembered by the mnemonic, TULIP, otherwise known as the Five Points of Calvinism:
 - (a) T - Total depravity
 - (b) U - Unconditional Predestination
 - (c) L - Limited Atonement
 - (d) I - Irresistible Grace
 - (e) P - Preservation and Perseverance of the saints
 - (2) In the area of ecclesiology, Calvin's influence was great in the areas of worship and church polity.
 - (a) Calvin emphasized not only the office of believer, but the special offices instituted by Christ — pastor, elder and deacon.
 - (b) Calvin also emphasized — as did Luther — the primacy of the preaching; but he went beyond Luther in emphasizing the proper place of discipline in the church and the work of ruling elders.
 - (c) The simplicity of Reformed worship is also due to Calvin (cf. pp. 62-63).

C. The Spread of the Reformed Faith

- 1. In the years immediately following the Reformation, the churches of the Reformation faced continual opposition from especially three sides — the Anabaptists, the mystics, and the Roman Catholics.
 - a. The error of the Anabaptists arose from within the Reformation movement.
 - (1) The chief mark of the Anabaptists was their denial of infant baptism (cf. pp. 51-53).
 - (2) But they were characterized by many other errors as well, with some rejecting significant biblical doctrines, some rejecting civil government (contrary to Rom. 13:1-6 and I Peter 2:13-16; see also Belgic Confession, Art. 36 and Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 37), and others teaching a physical separation from this world with the resulting bondage of legalism (contrary to I Cor. 5:9-11 and John 17:15).
 - b. Another significant error that developed in the churches of the Reformation was that of mysticism, divorcing the individual Christian experience from the objective standard of the Word of God.
 - (1) This was the teaching of a continued revelation which comes by way of subjective feelings apart from the Word of God, true conversion being marked by “experiences” or “events” by which God comes near and reveals Himself.
 - (2) This error continues today especially among the Pentecostal movement, but even among small branches of the Reformed camp.¹

¹We need to remember that the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirits, but that He bears that witness only through the Scriptures. See Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 19, II Timothy 3:15-17.

- c. The third source of sharp opposition to the Reformation churches came from Roman Catholicism.
 - (1) The Council of Trent was held from 1545 to 1563, defining very sharply the separation between Rome and the Reformation.
 - (2) Persecution by the Romish Church ("The Inquisition") caused the believers of the Reformation churches to scatter and find refuge in different countries.
 - (a) So God used persecution to bring the truth of Scripture and the Reformed faith to different countries.
 - (b) In France the Reformed became known as Huguenots.
 - (c) In the Lowlands (Belgium and the Netherlands), as well as in parts of Germany and even extending to modern Hungary, they were known as Reformed.
 - (d) In Scotland they became known as Presbyterians and in England as Puritans.
- 2. Eventually persecution forced our forefathers to come to America together with those from different church backgrounds in Europe — Lutheran, Anabaptist, etc.
 - a. "Reformed" is a generic term, used to describe in general one particular Calvinistic branch of the Reformation, and therefore today includes many denominations.
 - b. Our churches have their roots in the Dutch Reformed Church.
- 3. The Arminian Controversy
 - a. The first major controversy to rock the Calvinistic (or Reformed) branch of the Reformation was the Arminian controversy.

- (1) Jacobus Arminius (born Jacob Harmesen in 1560) was a minister in the Reformed Church in Amsterdam who had studied at Geneva under Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor) and had consciously rejected Beza's exposition of the Book of Romans, especially chapter 7.
 - (a) Later, Arminius came to reject the doctrines of sovereign predestination and sovereign particular grace, and began teaching against these biblical truths.
 - (b) An Arminian party arose in the church, which also became known as the Remonstrants.
- (2) The heretical teachings of Arminianism came to focus in "The Five Articles of the Remonstrants," which in sum teach the following:
 - (a) The first article teaches a conditional election, that election is determined by man and particularly by faith. The Reformed doctrine is that election is unconditional, God's sovereign choice, and that election is **unto** faith.
 - (b) Article II teaches universal or general atonement, with the saving effect of Christ's death being limited by man's will. We teach limited (or particular, definite) atonement, i.e., that Christ died for those given Him by the Father, and that His death atoned, satisfying God's justice for them.
 - (c) Article III attempts to show unity with the Reformed faith, teaching that man has not saving faith of himself, but receives it by being born again. This article is correct when taken by itself (although it avoids mentioning total depravity), but taken in the context of the other 4 articles appears rather contradictory.
 - (d) Article IV insists that grace is all, but contradicts this teaching in the very same

article by maintaining after all that grace is resistible. We maintain the scriptural truth of irresistible grace, that God's grace is so powerful that it effectively breaks man's stubborn will.

- (e) Article V denies the perseverance of the saints. Grace is "assisting" and Christ is willing to preserve "if only they are ready for the conflict." Over against that, the Reformed faith maintains that God preserves His people and thus they persevere in the faith and can never be lost.
- b. The following summarizes the difference between Arminian and Reformed thought:
 - (1) Arminianism shows its doctrinal perspective as man-centered, teaching that man is the center of all things and that God reacts to man. Calvinism maintains on the basis of Scripture that God is the center of all things and performs all His will with regard to man and the creation. As we proceed in this study we will demonstrate these truths from Scripture.
 - (2) It should also be noted that Arminianism and Pelagianism both limit sin to the act, and not to the nature, while Scripture teaches the total depravity of the sinner and the necessity of the wonder work of grace in Christ Jesus.
- c. The Arminian controversy was addressed by the Synod of Dordt (1618-19).
 - (1) The Synod of Dordt, a gathering of delegates from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, also included 27 foreign delegates.
 - (2) Although there were delegates who favored the Arminian position, after thorough discussion of Scripture over a lengthy period of time, the Synod adopted the *Canons of Dordt* as their position and

condemned Arminianism. The *Canons* develop thoroughly "the Five Points of Calvinism."

- (3) As a side note, the Synod of Dordt did treat many other matters besides the Arminian controversy. They adopted official versions of the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession, formulated the *Church Order of Dordt* (which is basically the Church Order that we use today), appointed a committee for Bible translation, and made decisions on catechism instruction, besides other work.
- 4. After the Arminian controversy, the Reformed churches continued to face the attacks of Satan by heretics of different sorts, as well as the inroads of dead orthodoxy.
 - a. Over the 200 year period from Dordt to the early 1800s, the strength of the church deteriorated, until it became evident that the marks of the true church — faithful preaching, the exercise of Christian discipline, and the proper administration of the sacraments — were lost and suppressed by theological liberalism. Where there were ministers in the churches who still preached the Word of God faithfully and attempted to oppose error, these were silenced more and more and became fewer and fewer in number.
 - (1) In 1834, the Act of Secession was signed by five ministers, including H. Scholte (who later came to America and settled in Pella, Iowa) and A.C. Van Raalte (who later settled in Holland, Michigan).
 - (a) The secession (known also as The Afscheiding) quickly spread throughout the Netherlands; but no other ministers joined the group.
 - (b) The Afscheiding was a genuinely reformatory movement, a return to Scripture and the confessions.

- (2) The Afscheiding was a reestablishment of the church institute through secession.
 - (a) This is always the nature of a genuinely reformatory movement.
 - (b) When Christian discipline and the power of the pulpit is lost, secession is the only way church reformation can be accomplished.
- b. In 1886 another reformatory movement took place among those who had stayed in the State church.
 - (1) This movement was called the Doleantie and was led by Dr. Abraham Kuyper.
 - (2) Just two years after the Doleantie, the churches of the Afscheiding and the churches of the Doleantie began to meet with a view to union. That union came about in 1902 and became the Gereformeerde Kerken (GKN).

D. The Beginnings of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

- 1. In the United States, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) was born in 1857.
 - a. The Reformed Church of America (RCA) had been in the United States from the middle 1600's, but was not characterized by strength of doctrine.
 - b. The CRC was born primarily out of differences with practices within the RCA:
 - (1) Lodge membership (RCA favored permitting it; CRC opposed it).
 - (2) Use of hymns in worship (RCA favored; CRC opposed, maintaining rather the practice of singing versification of the Psalms in worship).

- (3) The rejection of errors in the Canons of Dordt (RCA would not adopt them; CRC included them in their doctrinal standards).
 - (4) There were also serious weaknesses in the RCA concerning their views of Christ's atonement, with many falling anew into the errors of Arminianism. (It is striking today that there is no further difference between these churches in the areas mentioned above.)
- 2. The Protestant Reformed Churches began in 1924.
 - a. Prior to 1924 doctrinal departure was quite prevalent in the CRC in the form of Arminianism, in attacks upon Scripture, and in the teaching that God's grace is general (one of the errors of the Arminians).
 - (1) The biography of Herman Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken*, gives examples of opposition to the Reformed truth that he faced in his first pastorate.
 - (2) In 1922 charges were brought against a professor at Calvin Seminary, Dr. Ralph Janssen, accusing him of teaching views that were contrary to Scripture. Although Dr. Janssen was removed for his higher critical view of Scripture, Janssen found much support in the church for what he saw as the basis for his views — the doctrine of common grace.
 - b. The common grace controversy developed when Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who was the editor of the doctrinal column in *The Banner*, the official periodical of the CRC, began to discuss the issue in his column.
 - (1) Various protests were brought against him for his denial of common grace. (See the Appendix on page 68 for *The Three Points of Common Grace* and our evaluation of them.)

- (a) These protests against Hoeksema and Rev. Henry Danhof eventually made their way to Synod, which adopted "The Three Points of Common Grace," favoring a common grace of God toward all men.
 - (b) While the CRC Synod condemned the position of Hoeksema and Danhof, it at the same time judged these men to be fundamentally Reformed and referred the matter, already adopted, to the churches for further study.
- (2) Because Hoeksema and Danhof, together with Rev. George Ophoff, could not in good conscience subscribe to the three points adopted by the Synod and continued in their preaching and writing to oppose the three points with their implications, the Classes in which these men were ministers deposed from office them and their consistories (something which a Reformed Classis has no rightful power to do).
- (a) Thus the Protestant Reformed Churches were born, a child of the Protestant Reformation.
 - (b) Although the PRC faced its own grievous doctrinal controversy in the early 1950s in defense of the unconditional nature of God's covenant of grace — a controversy which resulted in a large departure from the PRC and a return by many into the CRC — the Protestant Reformed Churches have since been characterized by doctrinal stability and slow but steady growth.

Recommended Reading:

- Portraits of Faithful Saints*, Herman Hanko
- Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth*, Herman Hanko
- Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther*, Roland Bainton
- The Church in History*, B.K. Kuiper
- This Was John Calvin*, Thea Van Halsema
- Three Men Came to Heidelberg, and Glorious Heretic: The Story of Guido de Bres*, Thea Van Halsema
- From Dordt to Today*, (syllabus from the Protestant Reformed Seminary), Herman Hanko
- 1834*, Marvin Kamps
- Therefore Have I Spoken, A Biography of Herman Hoeksema*, Gertrude Hoeksema
- The History of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, Herman Hoeksema:
(<http://www.prc.org/resources/publications/books/the-history-of-the-protestant-reformed-churches-1924-1936>)
- For Thy Truth's Sake*, Herman Hanko

II. OUR REFORMED CONFESSIONS (often called "creeds")

Introduction: The word "confess" means "to say together with" and refers to what the church says with Christ and the church of the past on the basis of the Scriptures. The word "creed" comes from the Latin verb "credo," meaning "I believe." Creeds, therefore, are documents which give expression to the beliefs of a particular church or group of churches.

A. The Purpose of Confessions or Creeds

1. Based upon the teachings of the Bible, the confessions present the truth in a systematic order.
2. Most confessions arose out of controversy, being formulated in opposition to the teachings of heretics and in obedience to the calling of Jude 3, to "contend for the faith."
3. The confessions safeguard the church from heresy ("there is no new thing under the sun") and serve to unite the church in the truth.

B. The Protestant Reformed Churches are united on the basis of the ecumenical creeds, and more particularly those confessions called "The Three Forms of Unity."

1. The ecumenical creeds are confessions adopted by the ancient N.T. Church:
 - a. The Nicene Creed
 - b. The Apostles' Creed
 - c. The Creed of Chalcedony
 - d. The Athanasian Creed

2. The Protestant Reformed Churches also agree with much in creeds of other traditions of the Reformation, most notably the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted by the Presbyterian branch of the Reformation.
3. The Three Forms of Unity, which unite all the congregation of our denomination are as follows:
 - a. The Belgic Confession [also known simply as The Confession of Faith, or the Netherlands Confession] (1562)
 - (1) Written by Guido de Bres in 1561.
 - (2) Its purpose was to instruct and to defend the Reformed faith before a government which persecuted the church, by showing that the Reformed faith was based upon Scripture. (It is unfortunate that our version of the Belgic Confession does not have the original Scripture references that were footnoted to each article. Each article was thoroughly footnoted, showing the biblical defense of each truth explained.
 - (3) The Belgic Confession is the most comprehensive of the Reformed creeds from a doctrinal point of view, providing a systematic study of the truth of Scripture.
 - b. The Heidelberg Catechism (1562)
 - (1) Written by Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus in 1562, who were commissioned by Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate to do the work.
 - (2) The purpose in the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism was twofold: to resolve the dispute (in the German provinces) between the Lutheran and the Reformed; and that the people and youth might be instructed in the doctrines of Scripture and the Reformed faith.
 - (3) The Heidelberg Catechism is divided into 52 Lord's Days for preaching on each Sunday of the

year, and considers the truth from a personal and experiential viewpoint. The theme is "Our Only Comfort."

- c. The Canons of Dort (1618-19)
 - (1) Composed by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 as an answer to the errors of the Remonstrants (the party of the Arminians).
 - (2) Its subjects are Unconditional Election (I), Limited or Particular Redemption (II), Total Depravity and Irresistible Sovereign Grace (III & IV), and Perseverance or Preservation of the Saints (V).

Recommended reading:

The Three Forms of Unity

The Triple Knowledge, Herman Hoeksema

The Voice of Our Fathers, Homer C. Hoeksema

The Westminster Confession of Faith

III. OUR TEACHINGS

A. The Bible

1. The doctrine of Scripture is critical to the health of the believer and the church, for this determines everything that we believe.
 - a. Faith depends upon the Word of God, the Bible.
 - b. We confess that God is the Author of Scripture by the Holy Spirit, who inspired men for the writing of His Word (II Peter 1:19-21; II Tim. 3:15-17).
2. We believe also that inspiration was a wonder work of grace, the Holy Spirit moving certain men whom God had chosen and prepared for this work to write God's Word and governing them as they wrote, so that they wrote God's Word and His Word only.
 - a. Because it is inspired, Scripture is reliable, authoritative and infallible.
 - (1) We believe this inspiration was plenary (full or complete) and verbal (word for word).
 - (2) This belief in Scripture's inspiration and authority does not rest only upon a couple proof texts.
 - b. Scripture gives evidence throughout by its own testimony, also by that of Jesus and the apostles.
 - (1) Scripture claims to be the Word of God, and witnesses to the truth of this claim — this testimony the Holy Spirit binds upon the heart of the believer.
 - (2) If then the Scripture gives this testimony of itself and that too through the word of Him who is the holy and true One, the faithful witness, Who cannot lie, then there is certainly no choice for the believer but to receive that Scripture as the Word of God.

3. The Dignity and Authority of Scripture
 - a. A fundamental truth of the Reformed faith is that Scripture alone has authority over the Church's faith and life.
 - (1) There is one authority in the Church and over the Church, Jesus Christ.
 - (2) Jesus Christ exercises His authority by His Word, the Scriptures, which are applied to the church by the Holy Spirit.
 - b. By Scripture, all teachings, writings, decisions and demands of men, as well as all our actions, must be judged (cf. II Tim. 3:16,17).
 - (1) Nothing need be believed which Scripture does not teach and nothing may be believed which Scripture contradicts.
 - (2) The sole authority of Scripture is a truth of supreme significance for the Church. To abandon this truth is, principally, to abandon Christ Himself and to choose instead the authority of the words of men, "of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself."
4. The Sufficiency of Scripture
 - a. The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contains all that is necessary for the Church and believer to know, both as regards faith and life, doctrine and morals.
 - b. If Scripture is in any way deficient or if it needs to be complemented by something else, Scripture is not the sole authority.
5. The truth of the perspicuity or clearness of Scripture is vital in connection with Scripture's sufficiency.
 - a. This truth contains two elements:
 - (1) Scripture in itself is clear and can be understood by the individual believer.

- (2) The individual believer can interpret Scripture by the Holy Spirit's guidance.
 - b. I John 4:1 and II John 10 put the Bible in the hand of all believers and calls all believers to study Scripture.
 - (1) Bible study must always be a spiritual exercise.
 - (2) True knowledge is possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit causing the objective truth of Scripture to be reflected in the consciousness of a believing child of God.
6. The Infallibility of Scripture
 - a. If the Bible is not infallible, it cannot be authoritative.
 - b. The Bible has authority since it is the truth of God, which truth of God, in contrast with the lying and vain nature of man and his words, is infallible.
 - c. Denial of the infallibility of Scripture, as widely made in Protestantism today, is a great step away from the doctrine of Scripture's sole authority and a great step back to the bondage of Rome.

Recommended Reading:

The Doctrine of Scripture, Homer C. Hoeksema

B. The Doctrine of God

1. God's Being
 - a. First, we assert God's existence: **God is** a living, personal Being (Cf. Heb. 11:6)
 - (1) Not doubted or questioned by the believer.
 - (2) Cannot be proved to the unbeliever, nor is it necessary to attempt this.
 - (3) Every human being knows that God is (Rom. 1:19-21), but the unbeliever denies it because he is a spiritual fool (Psalm 53:1, 14:1).

- b. There is "one only" Being Who is, and must be called, God.
 - (1) God is God alone; there are no other gods, no other divine being, besides Him (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 40:25; Eph. 4:6).
 - (2) He reveals Himself by different names, all in order that we might know Him and speak to and about Him with reverence. The names most often revealed in Scripture are God, Jehovah (LORD in the King James Version of the Bible), and Holy One.
- c. The one, only true God is Triune, three Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one divine Being).
 - (1) Essentially the three Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — are one, each being 100% God, each possessing all the divine attributes, each absolutely equal one to another.
 - (2) Personally they are distinct, with distinct personal activities (Cf. John 1:14,18; 10:30; 15:26; I Cor. 2:10).
 - (3) Because God is Triune, He lives a life of fellowship and love within His own Being, the life of the covenant (about which we shall say more presently).

2. God's Attributes

- a. The Bible reveals to us many attributes or perfections of God's Being.
 - (1) attributes that belong to His very Being and nature — independence, omnipotence (all-powerful), eternity and omnipresence, immutability (unchangeable).
 - (2) attributes that are found perfectly in God, but of which the redeemed also partake — holiness, righteousness, wisdom, love, grace, mercy, longsuffering.

- b. Important to note in connection with God's attributes is the truth of God's simplicity, i.e., God's one Being is not divisible or composed.
 - (1) God's attributes are not parts of His Being; but His whole Being is love, is goodness, etc.
 - (2) There is no conflict in God, nor division in His attributes: Just as God **is** love, mercy, etc., **so** His righteousness **is** His love, His justice **is** mercy, His holiness **is** grace, etc. In God there is perfect unity and harmony. It is the separation of God's attributes and the failure to maintain this truth of God's simplicity which has resulted in all kinds of heresies today.
 - (3) There is practical significance here for the believer: We must remember that exactly because God loves Himself, His wrath burns against all who are wicked; and furthermore, we who understand that God **is** His virtues will see at once that such expressions as "Goodness! Gracious! Mercy!" and the like are taking God's name in vain and have no place in our speech.
- ## 3. God is a Covenant God.
- a. This truth is precious to us from a practical point of view.
 - (1) We regard this truth as having a central place in Scripture, and as basic to the Reformed faith as pertains to both doctrine and life.
 - (2) As the doctrine of election is the heart of the church, and the truth of the cross is the heart of the gospel, so a proper understanding of God's covenant is the heart of all true religion.
 - b. The idea of the covenant.
 - (1) Not a contract mutually agreed upon by God and men and dependent upon the fulfillment of certain stipulated conditions by two parties.

- (2) Rather, a living relationship of love and fellowship or friendship between God in Christ and His elect Church.
- c. The basis of the covenant is to be found in God Himself.
 - (1) That God is a covenant God means that within His own Triune Being He lives a life of perfect fellowship and love.
 - (2) God's covenant life is the perfect expression of and the basis for His covenant with men.
 - (3) As God has fellowship within Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so He takes His people in Christ into that covenant life, and reveals to them His secrets and love; and they in turn praise Him (Gen. 17:7; Psalm 25:14; James 2:23).
- d. The recipients of God's covenant fellowship
 - (1) Those whom God wills to take into His covenant life are known as the elect (I Peter 2:9), the redeemed (Isa. 62:12), and believers (John 3:16).
 - (2) Thus this covenant is established with those for whom Christ died.
 - (a) God cannot deny Himself (His holiness) and have fellowship with the sinner in his sin.
 - (b) Christ removed the curse of our sin and delivers us from corruption, therefore opening the way for fellowship between God and His people.
 - (3) God has been pleased to establish His covenant historically with believers and their seed (children), with those who are in Christ Jesus according to election (Gen. 17:7; Rom. 9:8; Gal. 3:16,29).
- e. God established His covenant with His people in Christ through faith.

- (1) Faith is not a condition to the covenant. One does not become a family member by fulfilling certain conditions.
- (2) Faith, the "gift of God" (Eph. 2:8), is the means by which God realizes His covenant, as well as the means by which the elect enjoy the benefits of that covenant fellowship and carry out their part or calling within the covenant.
- f. Practical implications of the covenant God has established with us:
 - (1) Our religion is one of serving God with our whole life, body and soul.
 - (2) If we are living in fellowship with God, we must have lives that are different and separate from the unbelieving and ungodly (II Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:6-16).
 - (3) Because marriage is the earthly symbol of the covenant between Christ and the Church, an unbreakable bond, we must maintain the sanctity of holy marriage and oppose the evil of divorce and remarriage. (See pages 64-65.)
 - (4) The Protestant Reformed Churches also stand in the conviction that our children must receive a covenant education, distinct from that of the world. For that reason we also establish Christian schools, and emphasize education that is in harmony with our beliefs and confessions. (See page 67.)

Recommended Reading:

All Glory to the Only Good God, Herman Hoeksema
God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace, Herman Hanko
Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition, David J. Engelsma
The Covenant: God's Tabernacle with Men (pamphlet), Herman Hoeksema

C. Creation and Providence

1. We must immediately notice that creation belongs to the sphere of faith (Heb. 11:3).
 - a. It is important that we understand this approach, especially in our day when the whole biblical doctrine of creation is openly attacked.
 - (1) There are many educated men of science today who profess to believe in creation, but who because of their enslavement to the field of science so compromise and camouflage the truth of creation that you can hardly recognize in their views the confession, "*We believe that the Father..hath created of nothing...all creatures*" (Belgic Confession, Article 12).
 - (2) One may not claim to be Reformed, unless he wholeheartedly and without compromise or reservation confesses what is set forth in Scripture; for faith lays hold of the Scriptures, not scientific theories.
 - b. We need never to assume the defensive or to be ashamed of our Christian bias in the realm of science.
 - (1) The Christian should remember that what are often presented as the conclusive findings of natural science are but mere hypotheses and theories.
 - (2) We ought also to remember that when we deal with Scripture's account of things, we are **not** dealing with theories, but with truths and facts.
 - (3) Therefore, we must develop our own scientific theories from the principles of faith and regeneration, and always in subjection to God's Scriptures.
 - c. We believe that God created out of no material thing the universe and all creatures for His own glory (Gen. 1; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:11).

- (1) In our adherence to the authority of Scripture, we note that the Bible does not allow for an earth possibly millions of years old. Scripture teaches clearly that the earth was created in six literal 24-hour days (Gen. 1; Exo. 20:8-11).
- (2) Creation is an act of God's sovereign will and efficacious calling, and serves His sovereign counsel and good pleasure, to reveal His own glory through Jesus Christ.

Recommended Reading:

The Framework Hypothesis and Genesis 1 (pamphlet), H. Hanko
In the Beginning, Homer C. Hoeksema

2. The Doctrine of God's Providence

- a. The meaning:
 - (1) God did not forsake the things He had created, give them up to fortune or chance, or leave the world to run by its own laws ("laws of nature").
 - (2) God upholds and governs all things according to His own will so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment (Heid. Cat., L.D. 10).
- b. **All** things fall under the scope of God's providence — great things and small things, pleasant and unpleasant, the good as well as what we consider evil (Psalm 147:7-9; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6; Matt. 6:25-30; 10:29-31; Acts 17:24-28).
 - (1) God accomplishes His purpose even through the deeds of sinful men (Acts 2:23; 4:27,28).
 - (2) Yet God is not the author, and must never be charged with the sins that are committed (James 1:13).
- c. Our consolation from this doctrine
 - (1) Our heavenly Father directs all for our sakes (Rom. 8:28,38,39), causing all things to work for our salvation (II Cor. 4:17,18).

- (2) Our heavenly Father also protects us against our enemies.

D. Man and His Fall into Sin

1. God created man after His own image.
 - a. Man is an image-bearer of God.
 - (1) Man was created a rational moral creature, with a mind, will and emotions, as well as a body with natural senses — all to serve God.
 - (2) He was created able to talk to God and to hear God speak.
 - b. But God also gave to man the necessary spiritual gifts so that man could dwell in God's covenant fellowship (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:10):
 - (1) true knowledge of God, the knowledge of love, by which Adam knew God perfectly and had living fellowship with God.
 - (2) righteousness, by which he did exactly what God willed.
 - (3) holiness, in which Adam perfectly consecrated himself to God in love.
2. God created man to fill a threefold relationship.
 - a. In relationship to God Adam was His covenant friend-servant.
 - b. In relationship to the creation Adam was king under God.
 - c. In relationship to the human race Adam was:
 - (1) representative head, so that all men were represented by him legally (Rom. 5:12-19).
 - (2) first father, so that all men are brought forth out of him (Acts 17:26).
3. Man's fall into sin.

- a. Man's fall was a willful subjection to sin (Gen. 2:16,17; 3:1-6).
 - (1) There was nothing in his nature that impelled him to sin.
 - (2) His sin was willful, an act of rebellion against God.
 - (3) Therefore, God held him responsible for his sin, and he stood guilty before God, liable for the punishment God said He would inflict.
- b. Besides the temporal judgments inflicted by God upon man and woman and the creation (Gen. 3:16ff), God executed the death sentence upon man.
 - (1) Death is not merely the physical death suffered by all men, but the spiritual death that is inflicted upon the whole human race as the punishment for their guilt.
 - (2) Death consumed man, with the heart (the center of all spiritual things) immediately becoming desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), and thus the mind, will and emotions were corrupted, and the whole body now serves as an instrument for sin in the service of Satan.
- c. This scriptural truth of total depravity shows us that there is nothing good to be found in fallen man. He is dead in trespasses and sins, incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness.
 - (1) The sinner is so consumed in the bondage of sin and death, that he does not want salvation, is not able to save himself, and only increases his guilt continually. He must be born again, in order to live (See Gen. 6:5; John 3:3; Rom. 3:9-18; Eph. 2:1,5).
 - (2) In the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and contributing to its origin, this truth of total depravity was maintained over against the theory of common grace adopted by the Synod of

the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. That theory brought forth a devastating denial of this truth in the Second and Third Points. (See the appendix to this booklet for an examination of those Points, p. 68.)

4. The consequences of Adam's fall for the whole human race:
 - a. Because Adam stood as the legal head or representative of the whole human race, his guilt was charged to all men yet to be born into the world (Rom. 5:18).
 - (1) This is the truth of "original guilt."
 - (2) All are guilty before God.
 - b. The punishment of that guilt came upon Adam and through Adam to all men, women and children (cf. Psalm 51:5; Rom. 5:12).
 - (1) This answers the questions: How is it possible, from the viewpoint of justice, that a man comes into the world dead in trespasses and sins? How can he be held responsible, when he is born with a dead nature?
 - (a) The answer is this: He is born dead in trespasses and sins, because such is his punishment.
 - (b) Corruption and death is the sentence imposed upon the whole human race because of their guilt in Adam.
 - (2) Original guilt is first; original pollution follows as the punishment of original guilt.
 - (a) The corrupt nature of the first father Adam is passed on in the act of generation and conception and birth (Psalm 51:5).
 - (b) So death permeates our nature, as every child entering this world is totally depraved, saved only by the sovereign will and power of God.

- c. That fact of original guilt as the basis for original pollution and the total depravity of the human race is the truth of Scripture over against the lie of the Pelagian heresy.
 - (1) The Pelagian (see page 2) explained universal sin with the theory of the imitation of a bad example and the influence of a bad environment.
 - (a) They taught that the human nature is inherently good, and the will is always free to determine whether it shall do good or evil.
 - (b) Pelagianism in its appeal to man's pride, is essentially humanism, the self-glorification of man.
 - (2) The Pelagian theory is based upon the erroneous view that sin is only in the deed, never a corruption of the nature.
 - (a) Scripture, however, teaches that guilt makes us worthy of death.
 - (b) And death, which includes spiritual death, is the corruption of the whole nature.
- d. What is God's attitude toward the sinner?
 - (1) Because the Lord is the Holy God and always seeks exclusively Himself, He blesses those who bless Him, is merciful to the merciful, satisfies those who come to Him for help in time of need, hearkens to them who cry unto Him. But also because He is God, He hides His face from the ungodly, hates the wicked every day, is filled with wrath toward the profane, has no fellowship with the sinner, and is unto the wicked a consuming fire. This truth is set forth in abundance in the Scriptures (cf. Psalm 5:5; 11:5; 73:1-19; Prov. 3:33; Isa. 57:20,21; Rom. 3:10-18).
 - (2) Thus the goodness of God reveals itself toward His people in Christ Jesus as love and grace and

mercy; but hatred and wrath toward all the workers of iniquity.

- (3) Only in Christ Jesus do we receive the favor of God's fellowship and grace.
- (4) The confession of all this, i.e., the confession of **this** God, is praise and adoration. In this confession we glorify God.

Recommended Reading:

The Bondage of the Will (pamphlet), Steven Houck

E. The Doctrine of Predestination

1. Election is the eternal and sovereign decree of God concerning the eternal salvation and glorification of the Church and all her individual members, each in his or her own place.
 - a. This truth is expressed by the use of different terms in Scripture.
 - (1) to know (i.e., to know in love): Amos 3:2; Rom. 8:29
 - (2) to choose, approve, choice: Deut. 7:6,7; John 15:19; Eph. 1:9,11.
 - (3) to determine, to place before oneself, to purpose: Rom. 9:11; Eph. 1:9,11.
 - (4) to predetermine, to predestine, foreordain: Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5,11; Acts 13:48.
 - b. We notice in Ephesians 1:3ff that Paul does not declare that the children of God were "chosen" because He foreknew that they would believe, but **in order that** *"we should be holy and without blame before him."* And in verse 11, being predestinated not because of foreseen faith in us, but *"according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will;"* which "will" we read in verse 9 is *"according to his good pleasure which he*

hath purposed in himself." Thus we notice the following:

- (1) God foreordained or chose unto Himself **in** Christ an organism, the Church.
 - (2) But He also chose every individual member of that Church, every brick in the building, so to speak. Rom. 9:11-13; Eph. 1:4,11.
 - (3) This election takes place "without any respect to their works," as our Belgic Confession states it (Art. 16), and therefore **unconditionally** (Rom. 9:11-13).
 - (4) Election is **in** Christ Jesus our Lord.
2. Reprobation is the eternal and sovereign decree of God concerning the eternal damnation of the "vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction."
 - a. Scripture teaches us that reprobation is the sovereign decree of God to determine some men and women to be vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction in the way of their own sin, (also for a distinct and particular purpose).
 - b. Reprobation must not be seen as being an equal with election, the flip side of the same coin.
 - (1) Both are aspects of God's sovereign decree of predestination, but reprobation stands in the service of election.
 - (2) Not only is reprobation for the manifestation of God's power and just wrath; but it is for the realization of His Church in Christ. (As chaff serves the wheat, so the reprobate must serve the elect.)
 - c. Scriptural mention of reprobation
 - (1) There is no verb that expresses directly the idea of sovereign, eternal rejection unto damnation.
 - (2) But the idea of reprobation is both presupposed by election and very clearly expressed in several passages. See Mal. 1:2-4; Rom. 9:11-13,21-23; John 10:26; I Peter 2:6-8.

Recommended Reading:

Calvin's Calvinism, John Calvin

The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel
(pamphlet), Herman Hoeksema

F. Jesus the Christ

1. Our heavenly Father, the Triune God, in harmony with His eternal purpose of love toward His people, sent His only begotten Son into our flesh, so that He became like us in all things, sin excepted (John 1:14; 3:16,17; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14,17; 4:15; 7:26).
 - a. The Son is sent by the Father into the flesh (Isa. 42:1; 49:6; 62:1-3; John 3:16,17,34; 4:34; 17:3; etc.).
 - b. On the other hand, the Son came by an act of His own will. He took upon Himself the form of a servant, assumed the human nature (Psalm 40:6-8; Phil. 2:5-8; II Cor. 8:9).
 - c. Lastly, He was conceived and formed in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).
2. The necessity
 - a. To accomplish that salvation purposed by God, a Mediator is necessary to pay the debt of sin and to satisfy God's justice.
 - b. The Mediator Jesus Christ is necessary as well to free man from spiritual slavery and make him holy (I Cor. 15:22).
 - c. Only in this way can the friendship of the covenant be restored.
3. To accomplish God's purpose, Christ, the Anointed of God:
 - a. must be real man.
 - (1) because He must take our place legally and bear our sin.

- (2) because He must impart the glorious life of God's covenant to us and therefore must be related to us.
 - b. He must be very God.
 - (1) because mere man can never bring an offering for another, let alone himself.
 - (2) because mere man would lack power to sustain the wrath of God to the full.
 - (3) because mere man could not impart life to us.
 - c. He must be one divine Person.
 - (1) Only a divine Person could be free from guilt.
 - (2) The natures must not be separated, otherwise there would be two mediators.
4. This Mediator, Jehovah-salvation or Jesus, made the satisfaction for our sin (otherwise known as the atonement).
 - a. The debt of sin required by God is that of perfect love and obedience.
 - (1) God demands that for one to make this payment, he must, as an act of love for God, bear the wrath of God against sin. That is, he must descend into hell as an act of obedience and love.
 - (2) No mere man can make this payment.
 - b. God in the flesh, Jesus, paid the price for our sin.
 - (1) All His life long, but especially on the cross, He bore in love the suffering required by God for our sin and guilt (Gal. 3:10,13; Heb. 2:17; 9:27,28; 10:14).
 - (2) God raised Christ from the dead as proof of His perfect work (Rom. 4:25).
 - c. This atonement was a definite (particular or limited) atonement.
 - (1) Christ did not die for all men, as the Arminian believes (see p. 6). [Explain a couple texts which seem to teach that Christ died for all: John 3:16; II Peter 3:9; I John 2:2.]

- (2) Christ died for the elect (Matt. 1:21; Mark 10:45; John 10:15,26-29; 17:9; Acts 20:28; Heb. 2:17).
- d. Not only does Christ purchase salvation for His people, but as the risen and exalted Lord He actually delivers them from the power of sin, and by His Spirit applies to their hearts all the blessings of salvation.
 - (1) His elect people, dead in their sins, were not able to cooperate with Him in their salvation.
 - (2) Salvation is all of grace, the powerful work of a wonderful Savior.
 - (3) For this reason we gladly join the Apostle Paul in his confession of I Cor. 2:2: *"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;"* and say, *"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord"* (I Cor. 1:31). For this reason also we rejoice in the opportunity to preach Christ crucified.

Recommended Reading:

"God So Loved the World...." (pamphlet), Homer C. Hoeksema

G. The Preaching of the Gospel

1. We believe that the gospel is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and that Christ Himself has called His Church to preach that gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).
 - a. In the preaching of the Word Christ Himself calls men to repentance and faith (Luke 10:16; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:14; Eph. 4:21).
 - b. The preaching of the Word is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), for it is through the preaching of the gospel that God works, strengthens, and preserves faith in the elect.

2. The fruits of the preaching in us who are called by this means:
 - a. Through this efficacious calling in the preaching we receive ears to hear, eyes to see, an illuminated mind to perceive and understand the things of the Spirit of God; and we receive the correct view of the things of the kingdom of God.
 - b. By it we see our sin and we see Christ in all His fullness and the precious benefits of salvation, so that we long for Him and for the possession of all His benefits.
 - c. By it we learn to know with a spiritual knowledge the will of God concerning us and concerning our calling as the people of God in the midst of the world.
3. We reject wholeheartedly the so-called well-meant offer of the Gospel.
 - a. This was probably the most serious doctrinal error set forth in the Three Points of Common Grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 (see Appendix, p. 69), and is also a prevalent heresy in much of the evangelical church world today.
 - (1) In the First Point a theory of universal grace was adopted which teaches that in the preaching of the gospel God is graciously inclined toward and bestows grace upon all who hear that preaching.
 - (2) The gospel, therefore, is said to be a general, well-meant offer of salvation, and the preaching of that gospel is grace to all.
 - b. The whole idea of the general, well-meant offer of the gospel corrupts and militates against, in every respect, the Reformed doctrine of the saving call (see p. 41) and fundamentally affects for ill the whole idea of preaching.
 - (1) In contradiction of the scriptural teaching of the saving call, the presentation of the general offers is not that the preacher calls as the ambassador of Christ, but that he begs.

- (2) The presentation of the general offer is not that God speaks and it is done, but that God expresses His desire that all be saved and then waits for man to accept His offer.
4. The Scriptural and Reformed position concerning the preaching of the gospel.
- a. Over against this theory of an offer of grace, the scriptural and Reformed position is that of:
- (1) a promiscuous proclamation of a particular promise.
- (2) The contents of gospel preaching is the promise of the gospel, proclaimed in connection with the call to repent and believe (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 31, Q&A 84.)
- b. Canons III, IV 8 teaches that what God proclaims in the gospel is unfeigned, serious, namely, that it is pleasing to Him that the called should come to Him, and that He promises eternal life to them that come (the elect).
- (1) A promise is not an offer.
- (a) The realization of an offer is made dependent upon the willingness of the second party to consent to that offer.
- (b) If the second party refuses, the offer is vain.
- (2) The promise, in brief, is the positive declaration on God's part that He will surely bestow all the blessings of salvation upon His people:
- (a) Whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life.
- (b) A promise is a declaration which binds the person who makes it to do the very thing promised.
- (3) The certainty of the promise, as regards the promise of the gospel, is emphasized by the fact that it is God Who makes the promise.
- (a) This means, in the first place, that the promise cannot be dependent on anything outside of

God. His work is never contingent upon the will of the creature. God is God.

- (b) This means, in the second place, that the promise is as faithful and true as God is unchangeable. God cannot deny Himself. He will surely realize the promise.
- c. Thus the preaching of the gospel is, both in God's intention and in actual application, grace to the elect only, while it is a means of working death unto death for the reprobate, and that according to God's good pleasure (II Cor. 2:15,16; Matt. 11:25,26; I Peter 2:8).
- (1) God places every man who comes under the preaching of the gospel under a demand to repent and believe, to serve and glorify Him.
- (a) God doesn't offer; He commands.
- (b) And when God causes the sound of His command through the preaching of the gospel to penetrate the heart and will of the elect, regenerated sinner, that sinner repents and believes, and not before.
- (2) The fact that the wicked do not repent and believe is not simply an accident; for the preaching of the gospel not only saves, but also hardens, and reveals itself not only as a savor of life unto life, but also of death unto death (II Cor. 2:15,16; Matt. 11:25,26).
- (a) That also means that the ungodly, under the preaching of the gospel, are convicted.
- (b) Just as the elect come to the saving conviction of their salvation, so the unbeliever, who sits under that same preaching of the Word, is left without excuse before his own consciousness.

Recommended Reading:

Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel, David J. Engelsma

H. The Doctrine of Salvation

1. God through Christ and by the Holy Spirit applies unto the elect all the blessings of salvation merited for them by Christ.
 - a. All the spiritual benefits of salvation are derived from and received from Jesus Christ alone and in fellowship with Him.
 - (1) There is no salvation apart from Christ.
 - (2) So you have the phrase repeatedly used in Scripture with reference to salvation: "*in Christ Jesus,*" or "*in Him.*"
 - b. This work of God is accomplished through the Spirit.
 - (1) Through that Spirit, Christ returns to His Church and makes His dwelling place in the hearts of His people (John 14:16,17; 16:13-16).
 - (2) So the blessings of salvation in Christ are not only **for** us, but **in** us.
 - (3) As for the miracles and tongue-speaking, etc., in the early New Testament church, these were given by God for one reason: to confirm the credentials and Word of the apostles (Mark 16:14-20; II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1-4). When the apostolic office ended, and thus the Scriptures were complete, the signs ended too. The Spirit now works by the Word. The question then becomes: How does God the Holy Spirit work that salvation in man?
 - c. Though God is never subject to man in the work of salvation, God works that salvation in His people in perfect harmony with their natures as rational, moral, willing creatures (Phil. 2:12,13).
 - (1) God makes them alive, and they live; God gives them faith, and they believe; God justifies them, and they say, "I know that my sins are forgiven;" He sanctifies them, and they fight the good fight of faith; He preserves them, and they persevere.
 - (2) So "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before*

ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Recommended Reading:

Temporary Offices and Temporary Spiritual Gifts: A Defense Against Pentecostalism (pamphlet), Thomas Miersma

2. The steps of salvation are generally derived from Scripture as the following: regeneration, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification.
 - a. Regeneration
 - (1) To be regenerated is to be "born again" or "born from above," and is necessary in order for a man to see and to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3).
 - (2) In regeneration the Spirit makes the dead sinner alive by implanting in his heart the new life of Christ (Ezek. 11:19,20; I Peter 1:23-25).
 - (3) According to I Peter 1:23-25, the work of regeneration is distinguished by three stages:
 - (a) The seed of regeneration is planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit without the use of any human means. (See also John 3:8).
 - (b) The seed of regeneration is developed into the new birth, or quickened into active life, by the powerful, living and abiding Word of God, Who is Christ. (This also provides receptivity to the preaching of the Word.)
 - (c) Finally, that new life is called to our consciousness by the Word preached.
 - (4) Regeneration is not synonymous with *conversion*.
 - (a) The life of regeneration comes to expression in true conversion.
 - (b) But conversion is the work of God by His Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:18-19; II Tim. 2:25)

which manifests itself in the sinner's repentance.

- (c) Conversion speaks of a turning of the mind and life in heartfelt sorrow for sin. See the Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 33.

b. Calling

- (1) In the calling God through the Holy Spirit addresses the regenerated sinner by the Word of the gospel and calls him spiritually out of the darkness of sin and death and into the light of His glorious grace.
- (2) There are especially four elements to the saving call.
- (a) God calls by name [a comforting thought for the child of God] (Isa. 43:1; 49:1; Matt. 11:28; John 10:27).
- (b) He calls those whom He has predestinated (Rom. 8:30; John 10:27-29).
- (c) He calls His own powerfully and irresistibly, not alone by the preaching of the gospel, but internally through the operation of the Holy Spirit in their hearts (John 5:24,25; Rom. 1:16).
- (d) He calls His people from darkness to light, and therefore to a life of holiness (I Peter 2:9).
- (3) This calling results in a life of true conversion, seen in a sincere sorrow of heart for one's sin and a turning from sin, a sincere joy in God through Christ, and a love and delight to do God's will in all good works (Psalm 51:3,8,17; Rom. 5:1,2; 8:10,11).

c. Faith

- (1) Faith is that gift of God which unites the elect, regenerated and called sinner to Christ, and by which that sinner consequently embraces and takes to himself Christ and all His benefits.

- (a) Faith is, first of all, the spiritual bond or union God establishes between Christ and us.

- i) We are united to or grafted into Christ.
- ii) Thus, faith is not a work which we perform, nor a condition which we have to fulfill in order to obtain salvation.

- (b) Faith is also an activity that flows out of that bond, by which activity we actually and consciously lay hold of Christ and all His benefits.

- (2) When we speak of faith as the conscious act of believing, faith has two elements (Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A 21).

- (a) A certain knowledge, the true spiritual knowledge by which a man has fellowship with God in Christ and takes to Himself spiritual things (John 17:3; II Tim. 1:12).

- (b) Spiritual confidence, by which we draw near to Christ without fear, lay hold of His promises, and know that God loves us personally (II Tim. 1:12; John 6:68,69).

d. Justification

- (1) Justification is a legal act by which God acquits the guilty sinner, declaring him righteous in Christ and giving him the right to eternal life (Rom. 4:4-6; 5:1).

- (a) The basis for our justification is, first of all, God's sovereign election in Christ (Rom. 8:29,30).

- (b) The basis for our justification is, secondly, the obedience of Christ and His atoning work on the cross (Rom. 4:25).

- (2) Justification is always **by faith** alone (Rom. 1:17; 4:1-5).

- (a) This means, first of all, that our faith is in Christ only, with faith being the bond whereby God unites us to Christ, so that through that faith we are righteous in Christ before God.

(b) In addition, by the activity of faith, we also lay hold of Christ and the benefits of justification, knowing our guilt, knowing our redemption by Christ, being assured of our forgiveness and receiving peace with God (Rom. 5:21; John 1:12; Rom. 3:24; 5:1).

(3) The objection raised against this truth of justification by faith is that it leads to licentiousness, making Christians careless and profane (cf. Rom. 6:1; Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 24, Q&A 64).

(a) In answer, we note that it is impossible for a Christian to say that he can freely walk in sin because he is justified (Rom. 6:1,2,18).

(b) The fruit of justification is exactly that the Christian is caused to hate sin and to fight it with all his might.

e. Sanctification

(1) To sanctify means to make holy, and implies separation from sin and consecration unto God.

(a) While justification is a legal declaration, sanctification is an on-going process by which God through the Spirit of Christ frees us from the dominion of sin and enables us continually to do good works (Rom. 8:5,9,10; I Thess. 5:23; II Thess. 2:13).

(b) This means that God by His Spirit and grace continually sustains the life of sanctification in us, so that we continually put off the old man and put on the new man in Christ (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:12,13).

(2) The truth of sanctification teaches that a Christian **must** do good works.

(a) Though perfection is not attained until the believer reaches glory, it belongs to the nature of the spiritual life in Christ that it bears good fruits (Matt. 7:16-20).

(b) This life of sanctification and these good works are means which God uses to bring others to Himself (Prov. 11:30; I Peter 3:1,2).

f. Preservation

(1) God also preserves His saints unto salvation, so that they can never fall away from the grace they once received (John 6:37-40; 10:27-29; Phil. 1:6).

(2) Because God preserves His elect unto final salvation, they also by His grace persevere, walking in sanctification (John 10:27).

g. Glorification

(1) This is the work of God by which He causes all His people to enter the final state of perfect glory, and to enjoy perfectly the fellowship of God in Christ Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth (Rom. 8:30; Rev. 21:1-4).

(2) This state of glory is received immediately upon death (II Cor. 5:1), and is finally and completely realized at the end of time.

Recommended Reading:

God's Sovereignty in Salvation (pamphlet), Steven Houck

The Gift of Assurance (pamphlet), David J. Engelsma

I. The Church

1. The Idea of the Church (See Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 21, Q & A 54; Belgic Confession Articles 27-29.)
 - a. The Church bears several attributes according to Scripture:
 - (1) Oneness
 - (a) Many, especially Baptists and other dispensationalists, deny that the Church is one throughout the ages, teaching instead that God's work was with Israel in the Old Testament, and is with the Church in the New Testament.
 - (b) Scripture teaches that the Church is one body throughout all time, being found almost exclusively in Israel during the Old Testament, but now being gathered from all nations to form the one true Israel (Church) of Jesus Christ (Acts 7:37,38; Rom. 2:28,29; 9:6-8; Gal. 3).
 - (2) Catholicity
 - (a) By catholicity we refer to the truth that the Church transcends all national boundaries and distinctions.
 - (b) From the whole organism of the human race, the organism of the Church is gathered (Psalm 87; Gal. 3:16,28; Rev. 7:9).
 - (3) Holiness
 - (a) We believe that the Church, with respect to both her nature and her calling, stands consecrated to God (I Peter 2:9).
 - (b) This holiness is entirely a gift of grace, and has its source in Christ, *"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."* (Eph. 2:21).
 - (c) Although we have been speaking of the Church as the invisible organism of God's elect, this attribute of holiness also implies a

calling within the church institute. Separation from and opposition to all that is unholy and profane is the calling of the Church and her individual members.

- b. The Church, therefore, is the one elect and holy body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-27), gathered by Christ through the Spirit and Word from all nations.
 - (1) This Church is an object of faith.
 - (a) The church appears in the world as hopelessly divided and terribly unholy.
 - (b) But the essence, attributes and calling of the Church are not to be determined by what is seen, but by what God Himself reveals of her in the Scriptures.
 - (2) This Church is a living organism, one perfect whole, in which each member occupies a particular place (Eph. 2:19-22; I Cor. 12:12-31).
 - (a) This Church, being distinct from the church institute, is known perfectly only by God Himself.
 - (b) But this Church does become manifest in the church institute, in congregations of believers and their children.
 - (3) With so many different churches in the world today, the question becomes this: To what church must I belong as a member of the one universal church?
 - (a) Membership is to be a mark of faithfulness to God, and therefore we belong in that congregation which is true to His Word.
 - (b) What do we look for in determining whether or not a particular church is true to the Word of God?
2. The Distinguishing Marks of the True Church
 - a. There are three marks by which a church institute can be known as a reflection of Christ's body (Cf. Belgic Confession, Article 29).

- (1) The preaching of the gospel in harmony with the truth of Scripture.
 - (2) The proper administration of the sacraments as ordained by Christ and taught in the Scriptures.
 - (3) The faithful exercise of love toward Christ's flock, seen in the exercise of Christian discipline according to the principles of Scripture (Matt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5; II Thess. 3:14-15).
- b. These marks are to be the determining factor in the believer's calling to join himself to a true church of Jesus Christ.
- (1) That the believer is called to unite himself with a congregation of believers, and to place himself under officebearers appointed by God, is the clear teaching of Scripture (Matt. 18:15ff; Acts 2:42; 11:22,26; 14:23; 20:28; Eph. 4:11-16).
 - (2) The question of "where I must join myself" must not be considered in absolute terms, as if there is one true church, identifiable with a particular congregation or denomination while all others are false. There is no perfect church institute this side of heaven.
 - (3) But because the degree to which the three marks are absent indicates a church falling away or having departed from the truth of Scripture, it is our obligation before God and our own conscience to seek a church that most closely reflects the three distinguishing marks of the Christian church. This is not only necessary for our own spiritual welfare and that of our children, but it is our obligation to glorify God in the seeking and maintaining of His truth.
3. Church Government (Belgic Confession Articles 30-32)
- a. Principles of Church Government
- (1) Christ is King of His Church (I Cor. 15:27; Phil. 2:9-11)

- (2) Christ exercises His power and authority through officebearers whom He calls and qualifies (Acts 20:28; I Cor. 12:28; Heb. 13:7,17).
- b. The Offices of the Church
- (1) Beside the office of believer, occupied by every church member (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 6:11,12; I John 2:27), God has appointed special offices for the spiritual nurture and care of His Church.
 - (2) The special offices are those of:
 - (a) Ministers (or teaching elders), called especially to preach the Word, reflective of the prophetic office of teaching (Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 5:17; II Tim. 4:1,2).
 - (b) Elders (ruling elders), called to exercise government over the congregation, reflective of the kingly office of spiritual rule (Acts 20:28; I Thess. 5:12-13; I Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5; Heb. 13:7,17).
 - (c) Deacons, called to administer the mercies of Christ in caring for the poor and widows, reflective of the priestly office of sacrifice and giving (Acts 6; I Tim. 3:8-13).
- c. Congregation and Denomination
- (1) Each local congregation is autonomous, i.e., self-governing, and itself a reflection of the body of Christ.
 - (a) Throughout the Book of Acts, the Apostles established local congregations without any formal connection to each other, each with their own officebearers, their own ministry of the Word and sacraments, their own exercise of Christian discipline and ministry to the poor.
 - (b) But according to their unity in Christ, each congregation sought to establish fellowship one with another and sought each other's welfare (Acts 15; I Cor. 16:1-3).
 - (2) Denominational unity is the communion of various churches according to the principle of

their spiritual unity in Christ and on the basis of their common confession to the truth of Scripture.

- (a) In this voluntary federation, each congregation enters into labors that it is unable to perform on its own (seminary instruction, mission labors, etc.), expresses the unity of Christ's Church, and subjects itself to the decisions of the broader gatherings of the churches.
- (b) The Classis is one such broader gathering of churches in a particular area. The Classis is made up of one minister and one elder from each local church, and treats business unable to be finished by a consistory [local body of elders] (such as protests or appeals), as well as things that concern the churches in common on the geographical level.
- (c) The Synod meets once a year, and consists presently of five ministers and five elders who are delegated from each Classis. Synod deals with business not able to be finished by the various Classes of the denomination, or business which concerns all the churches of the denomination.

4. The Christian's calling within the church

- a. The sum of the Christian's calling within the church is found in the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39, to *"love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,"* and *"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."*
- b. This love comes to expression within the life of the church in several ways.
 - (1) By faithful attendance at the worship services of the church (Heb. 10:25), and in that way not only growing spiritually ourselves, but provoking *"one another to love and to good works"* (Heb. 10:24).
 - (2) By submitting to the teaching ministry and to the discipline of the elders, as they come with the Word of God (Heb. 13:17).

- (3) By caring for the poor and giving willing financial support to the ministry of the Word in its most broad sense — not only for the care of the pastor and the expenses of the local church, but to the work of the denomination in missions, seminary, needy churches, care for emeritus pastors, etc., as well as the Christian education of covenant children (Deut. 6:4-9; 15:11; Ps. 78:1-4; Prov. 3:9; Matt. 10:8; I Cor. 9; II Cor. 9:7).
- (4) By supporting the work of Christ with the various gifts and talents God has given you (Rom. 12, Eph. 4, and many, many other passages) — with your time and prayers, your fellowship and upbuilding words, even your admonitions for the love of the brother or sister who is departing from the way of the Lord. Included in this calling is the obligation for male members to exercise their role in the office of believer by attending congregational meetings, and for all members to enter into the life of the church as much as possible — in her Bible studies, work of evangelism, special activities, etc.
- (5) By living lives of spiritual separation, finding no fellowship with the ungodly and unbelievers (II Cor. 6:14-17; James 4:4).

Recommended Reading:

The Marks of the True Church (pamphlet), Homer C. Hoeksema
Church Membership In An Evil Age (pamphlet), Steven R. Key

J. The Sacraments

1. The Meaning

- a. The sacraments are signs, i.e., visible representations of invisible spiritual realities — the realities of God's covenant (Gen. 17:7), righteousness by faith (Rom. 4:11), forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Matt. 26:28), fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3ff).
- b. Sacraments are also seals, i.e., a sign which marks at the same time the genuineness of a thing and also the authority of the One Who seals.
 - (1) They seal not persons, but a particular promise, guaranteeing the relationship between faith and righteousness.
 - (2) The sign of circumcision, e.g., was a seal of the righteousness of faith (Rom. 4:11).
- c. Sacraments are instituted by God to be observed by and within His Church (Matt. 28:19; I Cor. 11:23-27).
- d. The sacraments, thus defined, are two: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

2. Baptism

- a. Its meaning:
 - (1) Baptism signifies incorporation into the body of Christ by faith through the washing of His blood, and thus signifies all the blessings of salvation that follow from this union with Christ — forgiveness, regeneration, sanctification, etc.
 - (2) Baptism also marks us as separated from the world.
 - (3) This sacrament is to be applied to adult believers who are newly converted, as well as to infants of believers (Matt. 28:19; Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39).
- b. The proof of infant baptism rests upon four essential points of conclusive scriptural instruction.

- (1) Scripture teaches that the Church is **one** both in the Old and New Testaments.
 - (a) If the Church is one, then there is one covenant established with that Church (Gal. 3:7-9,16,29).
 - (b) It is true that the covenant in the Old Testament was cloaked in types and shadows, and that the covenant as revealed then is sometimes called the old covenant or the covenant of the law.
 - (c) But the promises of God and the covenant which He established with His people were essentially the same then as they are now.
 - (d) Therefore, there is only one covenant — the everlasting covenant of grace (Cf. also point (3) that follows.)
- (2) If there is only one covenant, there is also only one sign of the covenant.
 - (a) This sign of the covenant may undergo some outward and external changes, and does, in keeping with the change in Testaments.
 - (b) But since the essence of the covenant remains the same, so does the essential meaning of the sign of the covenant (Col. 2:11,12).
 - (c) Thus the sign of circumcision has the same meaning as the sign of baptism. Compare Deut. 10:16, 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 36:25,26; and Rom. 4:11 with Acts 2:38, Rom. 4:11-13; Gal. 3:27; I Peter 3:18-22.
 - (d) It follows, therefore, that the command to circumcise children in the Old Testament is a command which holds for baptism in the New.
- (3) When God established His covenant with Abraham and gave him the sign of circumcision as a sign of that covenant, He spoke emphatically of an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7).
- (4) God establishes His covenant in the line of generations with believers and their children.

- (a) O.T. proofs: Gen. 3:15; 9:9; 17:7.
- (b) N.T. proofs: Acts 2:39; 16:33; I Cor. 1:16.
- c. Do we assume, then, that all the children which receive the sign of baptism are saved?
 - (1) By no means, for the line of election and reprobation cuts also through the families of the church.
 - (2) Nevertheless, understanding the sacrament — as well as the preaching of the gospel — in terms of sovereign, particular grace, and viewing the church organically, we recognize that while there may be some reprobate and therefore unfruitful branches that receive the outward sign of the sacrament, the sign of the righteousness which is by faith is sealed to the entire elect organism. Therefore we may pray with thanksgiving (cf. our *Form for the Administration of Baptism*), “...we thank and praise Thee, that Thou hast forgiven us, and our children, all our sins....”

Recommended Reading:

The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers, David J. Engelsma

We and Our Children, The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism, Herman Hanko

Believers and Their Seed, Herman Hoeksema

Form for the Administration of Baptism

3. The Lord's Supper

- a. While baptism is a sign of entering into the covenant of God, the Lord's Supper is a sign of continuous living in that covenant and is a continual feast for believers in Christ Jesus.
 - (1) The Lord's Supper signifies and seals the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ, and assurance of righteousness in Him.

- (2) In the Lord's Supper, believers partake spiritually of Christ's body and blood with the mouth of faith, just as really as they partake of the bread and wine with the natural mouth.
- (3) As we eat and drink the bread and wine as instituted by Christ, the Holy Spirit feeds and nourishes us spiritually, strengthening our faith in the true work of Christ as Mediator.
- b. The participants in this sacrament are to be confessing believers, who find their righteousness and life in Christ (I Cor. 11:27-29). As our Belgic Confession summarizes it in Article 35: “...Lastly, we receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of the people of God with humility and reverence (Acts 2:42; 20:7), keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior with thanksgiving, making there confession of our faith and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to this table without having previously examined himself; lest by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup he eat and drink judgment to himself” (I Cor. 11:27-28).
 - (1) At the same time, a careful consideration of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth will show that participation in the Lord's Supper may not simply be left to the individual, but that God has appointed the elders to oversee who may and who may not partake of the sacrament.
 - (2) Because the Lord's Supper symbolizes the unity of the congregation partaking (I Cor. 10:16-17), the Supper is first of all for those who have confessed the Lord and embraced His Word as it is maintained in the local congregation and under the oversight of God's elders. The elders must be able to answer for any who they will admit to the table.
 - (3) To partake of the Lord's Supper is not an option for the confessing church member. We are commanded to partake. Therefore, where there is any hindrance to partaking properly, that hindrance must be removed with urgency.

Recommended Reading:

Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper

K. The Last Things

1. Death

a. Death itself is an enemy (I Cor. 15:26), the punishment of the wrath of God upon sin and the entrance into everlasting death, which is separation from God.

(1) But for the Christian, Christ conquered this last enemy (I Cor. 15:22ff) by bearing the wrath of God for our sins.

(2) For the believer in Christ, therefore, death is now the transition to life everlasting.

b. Immediately after death believers do not merely enter a state of sleep, but they enter a state of glory in which they are conscious of God's fellowship and made perfect partakers of His covenant life (Phil. 1:21; II Cor. 5:1ff; Luke 16:22-24; 23:43).

(1) The glory of this state is not yet complete, for the saints must yet await the glorification of their bodies (Phil. 3:20,21; Rev. 6:9). Yet they experience a glory without sin and with the beautiful and perfect fellowship of God in Jesus Christ.

(2) After Christ's return, the bodies of all the saints shall be resurrected and glorified, fit for the perfect state of the new heavens and the new earth (I Cor. 15:50ff).

2. The Second Coming

a. We believe in a final, sudden, personal and visible coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven.

(1) Christ shall come accompanied by His angels and the saints already glorified (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 19:11-14).

(2) It will be a coming to raise the dead (John 5:28,29), to judge all rational, moral creatures (II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 21:7,8,27), to renew all things (Rom. 8:19-21; II Peter 3:10-13), and to realize the state of final glory (Rev. 21 and 22).

b. Although Christ's final coming shall be sudden and unexpected, He has given us many signs to indicate His return. (See Matt. 24.)

(1) These signs are more or less present throughout the New Testament, increasing in frequency and intensity as the end approaches.

(2) These signs of coming judgment, although a terror to the unbelieving, are received by us as a comforting confirmation of what God has promised in His Word.

c. Concerning the "Millennium":

(1) By the millennium we refer to the "*thousand years*" referred to in Revelation 20:3, a passage of much disagreement in interpretation.

(2) We maintain that the number one thousand must be taken symbolically in harmony with the character of the Book of Revelation, which is a series of visions. The number ten in Scripture often has a symbolic meaning, representing a fullness, the complete measure of anything according to the will and counsel of God. It occurs here in the third power, a great measure, and in connection with years, not days. Thus the thousand years signifies a long period, determined by God, which must be fulfilled before Satan can be permitted to deceive the nations on the four corners of the earth.

(3) The thousand year period, therefore, refers to the New Testament age, from Christ's exaltation until shortly before His second coming on the clouds of heaven. Obviously, then, there is no rapture prior to this period, as taught by the premillennialists,

but one final coming of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:27; 24:2,29-31; Rev. 19:11-14; 22:12).

3. The Final Judgment

- a. The final judgment will be the event that concludes the history of this present world, and ushers in the everlasting state.
- b. That judgment will be universal, Christ publicly declaring the final destiny of every person, according to (not because of) his or her works (I Cor. 3:13-15; Rev. 22:12).
- c. In this judgment the perfect righteousness of God will be revealed in everything He has done, including the salvation of His people and the damnation of every one of the ungodly.

4. The Everlasting State

- a. The final destiny of every person is either heaven or hell. Both are definite places — heaven, incomprehensible in its beauty, the place of everlasting fellowship with the covenant God in Jesus Christ (I Cor. 2:9; Rom. 8:18; Rev. 21:3; and hell the place of everlasting torment in conscious separation from God and the experience of His just punishment (Matt. 10:28; Rev. 19:3).
- b. We who are in Christ Jesus will enjoy the everlasting state in the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (II Peter 3:13).

Recommended reading:

Behold He Cometh, Herman Hoeksema

Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism, David J. Engelsma

The Antichrist (pamphlet), Barrett L. Gritters

IV. OUR WORLD AND LIFE VIEW

A. The Relationship between Doctrine and Life

1. Doctrine is the foundation for Christian living.
 - a. Just as it is impossible for a tree to have beautiful foliage and healthy fruit without a healthy root system, so a truly holy, God-glorifying walk of life is dependent upon sound knowledge.
 - b. While knowledge itself does not necessarily bring forth fruits of holiness; true knowledge, the knowledge of faith, will bear such fruits (Matt. 7:16-19).
2. When we speak of "our world and life view," we are referring to our spiritual outlook on all various aspects of life.
 - a. The Scripture speaks to every aspect of our life, either directly or by that which is derived by good and necessary consequence from what is written (II Tim. 3:16,17).
 - b. When considering our world and life view, it is necessary to distinguish three categories.
 - (1) Sin: all things which are contrary to God's Word; not only contrary to the letter of the law, but that which stands in opposition to our calling to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.
 - (2) Duty: such things that God tells us to do.
 - (3) Christian liberty (adiaphora — things indifferent): things which are not expressly forbidden in the Bible, nor are we exhorted to do them (what kinds of foods we eat, where we travel, the moderate drinking of alcohol, recreational activities, etc.). Here the Christian must be governed by the desire to glorify God in all things (cf. Rom. 14; I Cor. 10:23-33).
 - (a) Christian liberty is not the freedom to do as we please; but the freedom to serve God in the

joy of our salvation, using God's good gifts for the purpose for which He has given them.

- (b) For good reason, therefore, Paul commands us to use this world "as not abusing it" (I Cor. 7:31), recognizing that in all things we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:7-8).
- (c) John Calvin: "The knowledge of this liberty is very necessary to us; where it is wanting our consciences will have no rest, there will be no end of superstition" (*Institutes*, III.19.7).
- (d) The church is not to be held hostage by the opinions of men. No one has a right to object to practices, appealing to a troubled conscience, except his objection be soundly based on God's Word (Gal. 2:3-5; Col. 2:18-23).

B. The Place of the Law in the Life of the Christian

- 1. In agreement with Article 25 of the Belgic Confession, we believe that the ceremonies and figures of the Old Testament law ceased at the coming of Christ.
 - a. The entire body of precepts found in the first five Books of the Bible were given to Israel for the regulation of their life and walk as a covenant people in the midst of the world.
 - (1) The law offered shadows, ceremonies, and figures of things to come, seen, e.g., in Israel's national existence (a shadow of the royal priesthood of God's covenant people), the laws concerning the tabernacle and temple, the altar and sacrifices, the washing and cleansings, tithes, hallowing of buildings and vessels, fastings, etc.
 - (2) All the ceremonies and figures of the law have their substance in Christ, in Whom they have their completion.

- b. Thus the ceremonial and civil aspects of the Old Testament law are abolished as far as their literal use is concerned.

(1) Their fulfillment is seen as follows:

- (a) Jerusalem still is, but no more the earthly city; it is the spiritual city of God.
- (b) Canaan still is, but not in the land of Palestine; it is the inheritance of the people of God.
- (c) God's temple and tabernacle still are; but it is the covenant fellowship of God with His people in Christ.
- (d) Christ is our Prophet, Priest and King, and we are a royal priesthood in Him; so that He is the fulfillment of all the sacrifices; washings and cleansings are now in the spiritual acts of a sanctified heart; tithes and firstfruits are the true sacrifices of our thanksgiving to God; and fasting is the real sorrow of a contrite heart.

(2) But although the shadows and figures of the law have been abolished, finding their spiritual fulfillment in Christ, yet the law of the Old Testament is of great value.

- (a) Insofar as it shows that the Lord Christ fulfilled His promises, it confirms us in our faith and helps us to understand the reality.
- (b) Insofar as in the substance of the shadows there were also eternal principles of truth and righteousness, it also regulates our life and walk in the world. Examples:
 - i) Deut. 22:5 maintains the principle that the distinction between a man and woman are to be maintained also in appearance.
 - ii) Lev. 19:28 and Deut. 14:1-2 reveal that the children of God are to be different from those of the world, being called to holiness, spiritual separation.

- 2. The abolishing of the ceremonial and civil law leads us to the question: What is the place of the Ten Commandments in our life?

- a. Christ maintained the moral law (the Ten Commandments) in all its significance.
 - (1) We teach and maintain and strive to obey all ten commandments, not as a matter of legalism, but as those who long to live in thankfulness to God.
 - (2) The law cannot curse us, Christ having borne its curse for us (Gal. 3:10,13); nor can our obedience to the law save us (Rom. 4:13,14), but Christ alone and the righteousness which is by faith.
- b. But the law serves us as a safe and necessary guide to direct our way according to the will of God (Psalm 119:1,165; Matt. 22:36-40).
 - (1) As those who are not under the law, but under grace, the law (the Ten Commandments as unveiled by Jesus) reveals to us an ever deeper knowledge of the horror of sin in all its significance.
 - (2) Through the instruction of the law, we come to a deeper and clearer knowledge of the preciousness of Christ and the forgiveness of sins in fleeing to Him Who walked the way of perfect obedience.
 - (3) As we grow in our understanding of the significance of the law, we also increase in our knowledge of God's will, in the desire to walk worthy of our calling, and in the earnest endeavor to put off the old man, and to put on the new, to the glory of God our Redeemer.

Recommended Reading:

The Christian and Culture (pamphlet), Herman Hoeksema

C. Some Distinctive Practices

1. In Worship

- a. Because worship is, at heart, fellowship with God, a holy conversation between God and us, our churches emphasize the primacy of the preaching of the Word as the most important element in the worship service.
 - (1) The preaching is God in Christ speaking to us His people (Luke 10:16; John 10:27; I Thess. 2:13). Because preaching is indispensable unto salvation, is not to be usurped by any other element in the worship service. (Cf. Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 25, Q & A 65; L.D. 35, Q & A 98; Rom. 1:16; 10:13-17; I Cor. 1:17,18).
 - (2) Our singing, giving, and praying are all elements of worship which reflect upon the Word heard in the preaching. The wonder that the Almighty God would speak to us and enter into covenant fellowship with us compels us to respond in thankful worship, holy adoration.
- b. Our churches practice the singing of Psalms in public worship, and that by the entire congregation (Psalm 67:3,5; 105:2).
 - (1) Although we do not forbid the singing of hymns in family worship and special programs, it is our conviction as churches that the Psalms are the inspired songbook of the church's worship. The Holy Spirit has given the Psalms to the church to be the praise, thanksgiving, and supplication that she sings to God.
 - (2) Although those who would introduce and defend the singing of hymns in worship often point to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, it has been recognized by the church historically that the Old Testament Psalms were divided into three sections, the headings of which were "Psalms" and "Hymns" and "Spiritual Songs." The reference, then, by the Apostle is to the whole of the Psalter, and not to the singing of man-made songs.

- (3) The requirement of active congregational involvement, an expression of the church's organic unity, is an important reason why we do not allow for "special music," choirs and soloists in worship services. The church's worship is to be the congregation's worship of God, not worship that makes the congregation a mere audience of the performance of others.
- c. In public worship our churches use the King James Version of the Bible exclusively.
 - (1) The use of the KJV is also encouraged and is predominately used in our personal and family life.
 - (2) The KJV faithfully maintains the principle of verbal (word for word) inspiration in its translation, and also uses the best manuscripts of the original Hebrew and Greek documents.

Recommended Reading:

Reformed Worship (pamphlet), Barrett L. Gritters

Psalm Singing: A Reformed Tradition (pamphlet), Jason Kortering

Modern Bible Versions (pamphlet), David J. Engelsma

NIV or KJV? (pamphlet), Ronald Cammenga

2. Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

- a. Marriage is not an institution established and defined by humans and the changing standards of culture, but is a creation ordinance of God establishing a union between one man and one woman until death parts them (Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:5-6; Rom. 7:2-3).
 - (1) God purposed that marriage serve the unique companionship of husband and wife, and in that way reflect the beautiful relationship between Christ and His Church.
 - (2) God also created the marriage union to serve the purpose of procreation. The family, the Christian home, is the place where He is pleased to prepare His children through believing parents to be kings and queens, princes and princesses in His everlasting kingdom (Psalm 45). Marriage, therefore, serves God's purpose in forming His own family, gathered to live in the fellowship of His covenant life, and that forevermore.
- b. Because marriage itself is the symbol of the unbreakable relationship of intimate love between Christ and His Bride, the Church (Eph. 5:32), it is an unbreakable bond.
 - (1) Marriage is a relationship for life, to be "put asunder" only by God Himself in the death of either the husband or the wife (Matt. 19:6; Rom. 7:2-3; I Cor. 7:39).
 - (2) Divorce is forbidden by the words of Jesus in Matt. 19:6, "*let not man put asunder.*" When a man divorces his wife, he makes her commit adultery (Matt. 5:32). He exposes her to an adulterous relationship with a third party.
- c. The one **only** exception in Scripture to the prohibition of divorce is for "fornication" (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).
 - (1) Adultery is so serious that, when there is not repentance, it tears at the very heart of the institution of marriage.
 - (2) Even with the one exception to the prohibition of divorce, however, Scripture in no place allows for the remarriage of divorced persons, condemning

such remarriage as adultery (Matt. 5:32; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3).

- d. Divorce does not sever the marriage bond! It is impossible to undo what God has done in making two *one flesh*. Divorce, therefore, or literally a *putting away*, is nothing more than a legal separation of bed and board.
 - (1) That this interpretation is true is also evident from the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:4-9. They were stunned at Jesus' teaching, so foreign was that teaching to what had become acceptable in their culture.
 - (2) The Protestant Reformed Churches, holding marriage in its biblical place of high esteem, defend this institution and allow no members to walk contrary to God's Word in this area.

Recommended Reading:

The Unbreakable Bond of Marriage (pamphlet), Herman Hoeksema

Better to Marry, David J. Engelsma

Marriage, the Mystery of Christ & the Church, David J. Engelsma

Until Death Us Do Part, "The Sad Case of Bart Zandstra" and Other Essays on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (pamphlet), David J. Engelsma

The Prohibition of the Remarriage of the "Innocent Party" (pamphlet), David J. Engelsma

3. Christian Labor and Submission to Authority

- a. In this day when civil disobedience is common even in evangelical Christian circles, we emphasize the calling of the Christian to submit to those in authority (Exo. 20:12; Rom. 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-16).
 - (1) Positively, Christians may occupy a place in government positions, so long as such a place does not conflict with their spiritual principles; and it belongs to the calling of believers to occupy their position as prophets, priests and kings also in relationship to their government officials.
 - (2) But no believer may refuse submission to government, nor violate the laws of the land. If it comes down to a matter of obeying God rather than men, we must certainly obey God. Yet we obey God only in the way of submitting to the punishment of the governing authorities. Vengeance belongs to the Lord.
- b. In the area of labor relations, we view labor unions as an evil violation of what God's Word teaches concerning submission to authority and the servant-master (employee-employer) relationship (Exo. 20:12; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22 - 4:1; I Peter 2:18).
 - (1) For this reason we maintain that Scripture forbids membership in such unions.
 - (2) Although in the past this meant a loss of certain jobs for our church members, in recent years, the laws in the USA have been changed to allow employees to opt out of the union for religious grounds.

Recommended Reading:

Labor Union Membership in the Light of Scripture (pamphlet), David J. Engelsma

4. Christian Education

- a. The Protestant Reformed Churches are strong supporters of Christian education, and more particularly Protestant Reformed Christian education.
 - (1) The basis for Christian education is exactly that we are a covenant people who serve a covenant God, and God's covenant embraces all of life.
 - (2) Because the Lord our God is **one Lord**, Lord over **all**, He and His precepts may not be excluded from any sphere of life (Deut. 6:4-9).
- b. All education must be permeated with God's truth (Prov. 1:7).
 - (1) Our Christian faith, our Protestant Reformed faith, is applicable to every aspect of life.
 - (2) The purpose of Protestant Reformed Christian education is to help our children understand and relate to God, to man, and to the rest of creation **in harmony with what God reveals in Scripture concerning Himself and His purposes and works.**
- c. Therefore, wherever possible, our churches have established Protestant Reformed Christian schools.
 - (1) Such schools are parental schools, extensions of the covenant family, staffed by teachers who are one with us in the faith, and who teach our children from the same biblical perspective as we try to maintain in our homes.
 - (2) So we also strive to fulfill the vows which we make before God in baptism, when we promise *"to see these children, when come to the years of discretion (whereof you are either parent or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine (the doctrine of the Bible which is taught in this Christian Church), or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power."*

Recommended Reading:

Reformed Education, D. Engelsma

APPENDIX

THE THREE POINTS OF COMMON GRACE

ADOPTED BY THE SYNOD OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH 1924

A SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

I. The First Point

- A. The First Point adopted by the Synod of 1924 reads as follows (translated from the Dutch):

"Relative to the first point, which concerns the favorable attitude of God towards mankind in general and not only towards the elect, synod declares it to be established according to Scripture and the confessions that, apart from the saving grace of God shown only to the elect, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the scriptural passages quoted and from the Canons II,5 and III,IV,8 and 9, which deal with the general offer of the gospel, while it also appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology that our Reformed writers from the past favored this view." (Scripture passages quoted were: Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:44,45; Luke 6:35,36; Acts 14:16,17; I Timothy 4:10; Romans 2:4; Ezekiel 33:11; Ezekiel 18:23).

In this First Point the CRC adopted as doctrine two theories:

1. That God is gracious to all men in bestowing upon them the things of this present time, such as rain and sunshine and all earthly things. This grace is supposedly limited to this present earthly life and history, so that the wicked are the objects of God's common grace in time, but the objects of God's wrath and curse in eternity. This is what synod meant when it spoke of grace to all creatures.
2. The second theory adopted as doctrine was that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel to all that hear the preaching. The preaching of the gospel, therefore, is a general well-meant offer of salvation.

B. The Scriptural and Reformed Position:

1. Concerning the idea of "common grace," as expressed in the first part of the First Point, we must notice two things:
 - a. This teaching is contrary to Scripture, which teaches that God hates the reprobate wicked, and that He uses even the things of this present time unto their destruction. See

Psalm 5:5; 11:7; 73:17-20; Proverbs 3:33; Romans 9:13; etc.

- b. Grace, blessing, is **not** in things as such, no more than curse, wrath, is in things as such. All things are but means which God uses to the salvation of the elect, while He uses them to the destruction of the wicked reprobate. And because men also use these same means as rational, moral creatures, they are responsible. But grace is never common.
2. Over against the theory of an offer of grace (which our fathers correctly understood as the real point of the first point), the scriptural and Reformed position is that the preaching of the Word, contrary to being an offer of grace to all, is a promiscuous proclamation of a particular promise. See Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 84; Canons II,A,5; and related Scripture passages.
 - a. The contents of preaching is centrally the promise of the gospel. Canons III,IV,8 teaches that what God proclaims in the gospel is unfeigned and serious, namely, that it is pleasing to Him that the called should come to Him, and that He promises eternal life to them that come. The promise, in brief, is the positive declaration on God's part that He will surely bestow all the blessings of salvation upon every one who believes. Whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Who are those that come to Christ? Who are those who believe? Those who believe are the elect, those given to Christ by the Father (John 10:27-29). Notice:
 - 1) A promise is not an offer. The realization of an offer is made dependent upon the willingness of the second party to consent to that offer. If the second party refuses, the offer is vain. An offer that is contingent upon the acceptance and consent of the second party may be general. But the gospel is no offer.
 - 2) A promise is a declaration which binds the person who makes it to do the very thing promised. The certainty of the promise, as regards the promise of the gospel, is emphasized by the fact that it is God Who makes the promise. This means, in the first place, that the promise of the gospel can never be dependent upon anything outside of God. His work is never

contingent upon the will of the creature. God is God. This means, in the second place, that the promise is as faithful and true as God is unchangeable. God cannot deny Himself. He will surely realize the promise.

- b. In the preaching of the gospel Christ speaks, accomplishing God's sovereign purpose (Luke 10:16; John 10:27; Romans 10:14; I Thessalonians 2:13).
 - 1) By means of the preaching of the gospel, Christ gathers His Church, while at the same time hardening the hearts of and working condemnation in those who *"stumble at the Word, being disobedient: whereunto all they were appointed"* (I Peter 2:8).
 - 2) Thus the preaching of the gospel is, both in God's intention and in actual application, grace to the elect only, while it is a savour of death unto death for the reprobate (II Corinthians 2:15,16; Matthew 11:25,26; Romans 8:29,30).
- c. The whole idea of the general well-meant offer of the gospel corrupts and militates against, in every respect, the Reformed doctrine of the saving calling.
 - 1) The error of the general well-meant offer fundamentally affects the whole idea of preaching. Because it corrupts the biblical truth of the saving call, it necessarily changes the task of the preacher. The presentation of the well-meant offer is not that the preacher commands and calls, but that he persuades and begs.
 - 2) The presentation of the well-meant offer is not that God speaks and it is done, but that God says something and then waits for man to be pleased to do something.
- d. We must remember in this connection that the external aspect of the saving call is inseparable from the internal.
 - 1) The theory of common grace in the so-called "offer" of the gospel destroys the external aspect of the call.
 - 2) The truth is: God does not offer; He commands. And when God causes the sound of His command through the preaching of the gospel to penetrate the heart and will of the elect, regenerated sinner, that sinner repents and believes, and not before. So the "real

point" of the First Point attacks the very heart of the saving call.

II. The Second Point

- A. The Second Point of 1924 teaches: *"God by the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin; by which human life in society remains possible."* (Note: This speaks not of the **outward** restraint of the sinner, which is a biblical concept; but it speaks of a restraining operation of the Holy Spirit which is evident of grace also to the reprobate.)

This Second Point teaches:

- 1. That a remnant of the original goodness in the state of righteousness is constantly preserved and is also brought to bear fruit in many good works in this life. This was the viewpoint of the Dutch theologian, Dr. Abraham Kuyper.
 - 2. The original good that is left in man is continually guarded against further corruption, by the Spirit's gracious work of checking and restraining the progress of sin.
 - 3. According to the explanation of Louis Berkhof, that remnant of natural good germinates and bring forth fruit, so that the natural man performs good works in the sphere of natural and civil life. (This ties the Second Point to the Third Point.)
- B. Putting this Second Point to the test of Scripture, we note the following errors:
 - 1. This theory teaches dualism, presenting sin and death as powers next to God and operating independently of Him. However, Scripture tells us that sin and death are the result of God's own cursing wrath against the sinner. They are but the executors of God's righteous judgment. In harmony with God's sovereign purpose, sin develops organically throughout history. See Rom. 1:18ff; 5:12ff; II Tim. 3:1ff.
 - 2. Grace is given through Christ alone (Cf. John 1:16,17; Rom. 1:5; II Thess. 2:16; as well as the benedictions found throughout the New Testament, *"Grace to you and peace*

from God our Father — i.e., the Triune God, our Father — and the Lord Jesus Christ" — through Whom that grace of God our Father is given us). The grace that God manifests to His people in Christ is based upon the atonement and perfect obedience of the Savior. But the world outside of Christ is without any ground of righteousness on which it can justly be partaker of the grace of God. The theory of common grace, therefore, is an attack upon the righteousness of God and His justice with regard to the sinner.

3. This theory is based on the error of resistible grace, and says that the operation of the Holy Spirit is not irresistible. If it were, there would be no development of sin at all.
4. This theory denies the total depravity of the natural man.

III. The Third Point

- A. The Third Point of 1924 teaches: *"The unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good,"* or that by virtue of a positive, gracious influence of God upon him for good, the natural man is able to do good works in the sphere of things natural and civil.

The teaching of the distinction between spiritual and natural good as interpreted by the leaders in the CRC in 1924 are as follows:

1. Both are good in the moral sense before God. Neither of them may be called sin.
2. While the source of spiritual good is in the regenerating influence of the Spirit, the source of natural good is in the unregenerate nature of the sinner as restrained by the Spirit of God from total corruption.
3. Saving good is eternal; civil good is only temporal.

- B. In criticism, it is easy to see that the Third Point is the fruit of the Second Point, and contains the following errors:

1. It separates the first and second tables of God's law.

2. It is a denial of the total depravity of the natural man, and makes total depravity an abstraction, not applicable in real life.
 - a. Contrary to this theory, Romans 14:23 states unambiguously and without exception that *"whatsoever is not of faith is sin."*
 - b. The Bible teaches, therefore, in opposition to this theory of the Third Point, that one only does good (in God's sight) when he or she stands in a faith-connection with Christ.
3. This false doctrine destroys the antithesis between good and evil, light and darkness, and creates a domain where Christ and Belial may have fellowship. (This has borne devastating fruits in the CRC, leading to a complete breakdown of the antithesis from a practical point of view.)
4. The Third Point teaches moral determinism and destroys the freedom of man as a moral agent.
 - a. The Holy Spirit compels man to do good works wholly contrary to the intents of his own heart.
 - b. The theory is that the Spirit of God so influences the corrupt nature of the unregenerate man, that he (with a heart full of hatred, as Scripture teaches), performs that which is pleasing in God's sight. The corrupt tree is made to bear good fruit.
5. This error also attacks the justice of God.
 - a. God's justice is always manifested in rewarding the good with good, and punishing the evil.
 - b. But the Third Point teaches that the natural man performs good works for which he is never rewarded.

Recommended Reading:

Grace Uncommon (pamphlet), Barrett L. Gritters

A Triple Breach in the Foundation of the Reformed Truth, Herman Hoeksema