

Where We Stand And Why

The Protestant Reformed Churches
And The Declaration of Principles

With a response to Dr. Klaas Schilder
and the Liberated Churches

By Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Contents	Page
Preface: by the Editor, Rev. Thomas Miersma.	3
Part 1: As To Conditions	
As To Conditions, An Exposition From The Confessions	
Introduction By Herman Hoeksema.	5
1. Faith An Instrument, Not A Condition	7
2. Election and Conditions	14
3. Conditionality In Salvation Distinctively Arminian	18
4. A Conditional Salvation Requires A Conditional Decree	22
5. "Effectually Redeemed" and Infallibly Led to Salvation	26
6. Unconditional Regeneration and Its Spiritual Fruit	31
7. God's Part And Man's Part - Preservation And Perseverance	34
Part 2: The Declaration of Principles	
Origin, Meaning, and Purpose of the Declaration	38
An Exposition of the Declaration of Principles	
Introduction	48
1. The Nature of the Promise, an Unconditional Oath	49
2. A Particular Promise for the Elect Alone	59
3. Faith Included in the Promise, Conferred According to the Promise	68
4. Faith an Instrument of Grace, not a Condition	76
5. Conclusion of the Concerning the Covenant and Article 31	83

Contents (continued)	Page
Part 3: A Response to Schilder and the Liberated	
Schilder and the Declaration: Election the Fountain and Cause	88
“The Stocking is Finished”	96
Promise and Prediction	
Introduction	105
1. Schilder, Veenhof, and the Liberated Viewpoint	106
2. The Promise for the Elect Alone	117
3. Schilder, Veenhof, and Baptism	127
4. A Response from the Confessions	134
A Response to Schilder’s Extra-Scriptural Binding Accusation	
1. Very Clear! Defining “Conditions”	140
2. Defining the Promise: the Promise Includes Faith	146
3. The Promise Includes Faith as an Instrument	151
4. The Promise Includes all the Blessings of Salvation	155
5. According to the Confessions, Conditional Theology is Arminian	159
6. The Baptism Form and the Promise	163
7. The Baptism Form, Our Part and the Responsibility of Man	172
8. The Promise to the Children of Believers, Who They Are	175
9. The Baptism Form and “Sanctified in Christ”	185
10. The Baptism Form and the Prayer of Thanksgiving	188
11. The Term “Conditions” and the Conclusion from the Confessions	191
Part 4: Appendix	
1. “Once More....The Promise” by George Ophoff	
1. “The Promise” is not an If-clause	199
2. Promises are If-less; If-clauses to be Distinguished by Kind	207
3. If-clauses are Declarations and Commands, not Promises	215
2. Reasons for the Adoption of the Proposed Declaration of Principles	223
3. The Liberated Churches, their Covenant Conception	228
4. Binding or not Binding? A Response to a Liberated Writer	240

Preface

by Rev. Thomas Miersma, editor

The following material was written by Rev. Herman Hoeksema, beginning in 1946 and continuing throughout 1953. The direct occasion was renewed contact with Dr. Klass Schilder and the split in the churches in the Netherlands which occurred during the war. Schilder also came to North America, and a meeting was held with Protestant Reformed leaders in the fall of 1947. The churches engaged in correspondence with the Liberated or Schilder churches in the Netherlands. These discussions would lead to “The Declaration of Principles,” formulated by the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1950 and adopted in 1951. The “Declaration” is a systematic statement of what the creeds teach on conditionality, the promise, and the covenant, intended for use by missionaries as a teaching tool, for the organization of Protestant Reformed Churches.

The position of the Protestant Reformed Churches on the covenant had been, in fact, well established since the beginning in 1924. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, in his book *Believers And Their Seed*, written in the Dutch language, had rejected a conditional covenant at the very inception of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In this rejection, not just that of common grace, the churches had followed him and were formed because of it at their inception. It was not his private view. He had further developed this rejection in a second work, *Het Evangelie, (The Gospel)* written in the 1930s over against the views of Prof. W. Heyns of the Christian Reformed Church. In response to the visit of Schilder in 1948, Rev. Herman Veldman wrote an extensive positive exposition of the doctrine of the covenant from scripture, emphasizing that the covenant is a relation of friendship, unilateral and unconditional. Hoeksema at the time was recovering from a stroke.

In the light of these discussions, Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote, over the course of a year, the following articles, under the title “As To Conditions” in the *Standard Bearer*, concluding the series in the summer of 1950. His purpose was to teach and instruct, rather than simply to engage in controversy. His intention was to develop the truth of God’s unconditional covenant and the unconditional work of salvation from the confessions. The issue in the discussion, as it took shape, was particularly focused on the idea of *faith as a condition*, either of the covenant or salvation and the notion that God’s promises are general or conditional.

At the same time, the churches, in their contact and mission work with the Liberated, were running into a conflict over the different views of the covenant on just that issue of conditionality. The concern was to make clear where the Protestant Reformed Churches stood. Having rejected common grace and the well-meant offer, a conditional promise in the preaching, and Heyns’s view of a conditional covenant,

Hoeksema, Ophoff and others were concerned that it not be reintroduced into the churches in the form of the Liberated view of a conditional covenant in baptism, which contained elements of Heyns's view. There were, however, others in the churches who wanted to open the churches to the Liberated and their view. The result would ultimately lead to the split in the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1953.

The "Declaration of Principles" was drafted in 1950 and adopted in 1951. The provisional, and then final, adoption and of the declaration lead to an extended discussion, particularly between Hoeksema in the *Standard Bearer* and Schilder in *De Reformatie*. This forms the bulk of the material that follows, taken from the *Standard Bearer*. Hoeksema himself wrote an exposition of the Declaration as it stood in draft form and responded extensively to Schilder both before and after Schilder's death.

This material, together with the other Protestant Reformed writings on this subject from the confessions, has never been answered by the proponents of a conditional covenant or conditionality. Schilder from outside and others within the churches had many criticisms of the "Declaration of Principles," but there has never been, after sixty years, a serious response to them *from the confessions*. Schilder's "Extra-Scriptural Binding," references virtually only one article of the Canons, taken out of context and for the rest engages in arguments which are beside the point. For the point is *what do the confessions teach, consistently*. The challenge Hoeksema made 60 years ago still stands: if the Declaration is wrong, prove it *systematically from the confessions*.

"The Declaration of Principles," a summary of the teaching of "The Three Forms of Unity," has sometimes, therefore, been vilified as "extra-confessional binding." This characterization is often made by those who have never actually read the "Declaration." It is also made by some to hide the fact that their doctrine of conditionality, is "anti-confessional unbinding," a violation of the "Formula of Subscription," and their characterization a smokescreen for the errors they wish to introduce into Reformed doctrine.

The articles have been formatted by the editor into sections and subdivided into chapters. The titles are taken largely from the original articles while the subtitles, chapters, and internal divisions are the work of the editor. A few changes were made in the text. Names of some individuals have been elided, as they are not relevant to the material itself. The text needed to be cleaned up from the original OCR version. There have been few other changes to the material. Much of the material introduces itself. The material in the appendix has been added, as it adds clarity to the discussion, its context, and the doctrinal issues involved. TCM

Part 1: As to conditions

As To Conditions

An Exposition From The Confessions

By Herman Hoeksema

“Faith itself is also no condition for the other benefits of salvation (justification, sanctification).” –Bavinck

“The covenant relation did not depend on the keeping of the law, as a preceding condition; it was no covenant of works, but rested only upon God’s electing love.” –Bavinck

“The (covenant) is not dependent on any condition of man.” –Bavinck

“There are really in the *foedus gratiae* (covenant of grace, H.H.), i.e., in the gospel, which is the proclamation of the covenant of grace, no demands and no conditions.” –Bavinck

“Conditional this covenant of grace is never. God gives everything. Everything for nothing. And nothing of what God gives is made dependent upon the contra-presentation of man.” –Kuyper

The above quotations are taken from Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, IV, 124; III, 236; III, 556; III, 242; and Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek Locus de Foedere*, p. 134. Translated by H. Hoeksema.

Introduction

As the reader knows there has been, for the last year or so, a controversy in our papers about the question of conditions in the covenant of God. The question was really whether the term “condition” could be used properly in Reformed theology, and especially whether it could be used to express Protestant Reformed thought.

Some think that we need the term in order to express a necessary element in the Reformed conception of the covenant, the element of the responsibility of man. Nevertheless, I do not agree on the question concerning conditions in the covenant, and I think, too, that this terminology is dangerous and is liable to convey a meaning that is foreign to the Reformed conception of the truth.

Whatever meaning we may attach to certain terms, we must never forget that words have meaning in themselves, and that this fundamental meaning of the terms stands out in the minds of the people. And when it is said that God establishes His covenant with us, or that we are saved, “on condition of faith and obedience,” the impression this expression makes upon the minds of the people (and not without reason) is that the will of man is one of the determining factors in the matter of salvation. And thus, on the wings of a term, one instills *nolens volens* the Arminian heresy into the minds and hearts of the people. And for that reason I consider the term “condition” dangerous.

Chapter 1

Faith An *Instrument* Not A Condition According To The Confessions

Now, in order to have a fruitful discussion on the matter from a Reformed viewpoint, it seems but proper that we, first of all consult our confessions, the Three Forms of Unity, and the Reformed Confessions in general. Besides, we can also turn to our liturgical forms, such as the Form for the Administration of Baptism, etc., which must be used in our churches and which are often considered standards of secondary value and importance.

An Argument From Silence

And then we discover, in the first place, that the term “condition” never even once occurs in any of our Reformed Standards.

Do not minimize the importance of this obvious fact by saying that this is a mere *argumentum e silentio*, an argument from silence, which has but little force. For this is not true. In the first place consider that our fathers certainly were acquainted with the term *conditio* for already Calvin, who had a profound influence upon Reformed thinking at the time and upon the formulation of the Reformed symbols, used the term. Yet the Reformed fathers in the composition and formulation of our confessions studiously avoided the term condition, or at least had no room for it anywhere in the expression of Reformed thought.

Besides, in as far as this is, indeed, an *argumentum e silentio*, we must not overlook the fact that our own *Three Forms of Unity* together with our liturgical forms are rather elaborate expositions of all the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith, treating of God and man, of the fall and original sin, of the covenant and man’s original state of integrity, of election and reprobation, of the incarnation and the atonement, of faith and justification, of regeneration and sanctification, of the church and the means of grace, etc., etc. Surely if the term condition had represented an important element in Reformed thinking it would be met with more than once in this elaborate exposition of our truth as we confess it. Yet it is never once used.

I think this makes this *argumentum e silentio* rather weighty and valid. It proves definitely, if not that our Reformed fathers consciously rejected the term and purposely avoided it, yet that they had no need of it, and that they found no room for it in the system of Reformed truth.

*Faith As An Instrument
Not A Condition*

But there is much more.

The question is, of course, whether faith may be presented as a condition of salvation, and whether the establishment and continuation of God's covenant with us is in any sense of the word contingent upon our fulfilling the conditions of faith and obedience. This, unless we juggle words, is the plain and simple meaning of the question, and in this simple form it certainly will stand before the minds of the people.

But I dare say that, in this sense, the term condition not only has no room in the Reformed system of doctrine, but is, as far as our Confessions are concerned, thoroughly unreformed.

For our Confessions uniformly present faith not as a condition which we must fulfill, but as a God-given means or instrument empowering the soul to cling to Christ and to receive all His benefits, and that is a radically different conception from that of condition. And as far as obedience or walking in the way of the covenant is concerned, also this is never presented as a condition but rather as the fruit, in fact, as the inevitable fruit, of our being ingrafted into Christ.

Let us consult our Confessions on these points.

*1. Faith And The
Heidelberg Catechism*

In the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, question and answer 20, we read: "Are all men then, as they are perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No, only those who are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits, by a true faith."

Notice that faith here *is* the spiritual means or, as it is often called, the instrument, whereby we *are* ingrafted, incorporated (ingelijfd, einverleibt) into Christ. This is an entirely passive notion. Man has nothing to do with it. Besides the Word of God plainly teaches us that this instrument is given us of God. Man does not have the power to believe in Christ of himself. This, too, is taught by the Heidelberg Catechism in the next question and answer, which reads as follows: "What is true faith? True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word, but also an assured confidence which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, are freely given me by

God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits."

The point is, of course, that if faith is an instrument which God uses and works in the heart of man, it certainly cannot be at the same time, a condition which man must fulfill in order to obtain salvation, or to enter into the covenant of God. How different the sense of question and answer 20 of the Catechism would become if we would read: "Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No, but only those that comply with the condition of faith, and receive all his benefits." I am well aware, of course, that those Reformed theologians that favor the term "conditions," usually add that God Himself fulfills all conditions. But this is plainly camouflaging the truth that there are no conditions which man can or must fulfill to obtain salvation.

The same truth is implied in Lord's Day, 20, which reads: "What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost? First, that he is the true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that he is also given me, to make me by a true faith partaker of Christ and all his benefits, that he may comfort me and abide with me forever." Also here it is evident that faith is the instrument, not of man but of God, to make us partakers of Christ. And once more, the idea of condition is completely foreign to this Lord's Day.

It is true that in the Lord's Day that speaks of justification by faith, (Lord's Day 23, q/a 60) it is the activity of saving faith that is emphasized rather than faith as a power. It tells us that we are justified because God imputes to us the righteousness of Christ, "inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart." And in question 61 we read that we are righteous by faith only because "I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only." But also this is far from saying that faith is a condition unto justification. It only means that the believer is able to receive the grace of justification by faith *as* a means which is given the sinner by God.

Again the same truth is emphasized in Lord's day 25, question and answer 65: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence does this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." Also here, let me point out, there is no room for anything man can or must do. We are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by a true faith and of that faith the Holy Ghost alone is the author. Where would there be any room for the notion that faith is a condition unto salvation? There is no room for it whatever.

According to the Heidelberg Catechism, as we have seen, faith is never presented as a condition unto salvation, or as a condition which we must fulfill in order to enter

into or remain in the covenant of God. Always it is presented as a means or instrument which is wrought in us by God and given us of Him, by which we are ingrafted into Christ, become one body with Him, and thus receive all His benefits.

Instrument and condition certainly do not belong to the same category of conceptions.

If faith is a condition it certainly is something man must do in order to and before he can obtain salvation. Unless we attach that meaning to the word it has no sense at all. And as I wrote before, in the minds of the people the term condition undoubtedly stands for some notion that makes salvation dependent on something man must do.

If, however, faith is a God-given instrument it is completely outside of the category of *condition*, for the simple reason that, in that case, it belongs to salvation itself. It is part of the work of God whereby He brings sinners to Christ and makes them partakers of all His benefits of righteousness, life, and glory. And part of salvation cannot, at the same time, be a condition unto salvation.

2. Faith And The Belgic Confession Of Faith

The same conception of faith as an instrument is found in the *Confessio Belgica* or Netherlands Confession, Art. 22. There we read:

“We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things, which are requisite to our salvation, are not in Jesus Christ, or, if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert, that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow, that Christ was but half a Saviour.

Therefore, we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us, and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.”

This article speaks of faith in Jesus Christ.

And it speaks of it in such a way that all possibility of presenting faith as a condition is ruled out. Faith in its essence is a spiritual bond that unites us with Christ. The article emphasizes this in more than one way. For, first, it stresses the fact that all our salvation is in Christ, and that, therefore, we can derive it only from Him. Christ is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and complete redemption. He is our all. Hence, secondly, it is only in union with Him that we can be saved, and receive all the blessings of grace. This union, it is emphasized thirdly, is established by faith. The article mentions this when it says that “faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits.” And again, faith “is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness.” And once more, “to attain the knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him.”

From all this it is evident that faith is the spiritual bond that unites us with Christ in Whom is all our salvation, the spiritual instrument with which it is possible for the regenerated sinner to cling to Christ, to embrace and appropriate Him, and thus to receive all His benefits.

Moreover, the article emphasizes that this faith is not of man. It is a God-ordained and God-given instrument, for “the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith.” The power or faculty of faith is wrought in the moment of regeneration, and active faith, which the article has in mind especially, is wrought by the Spirit in our hearts through the preaching of the Word of God.

Hence, it is plain from the whole article that faith is not the ground or reason, neither the meritorious cause of our salvation, nor a condition which man must fulfill to obtain the same.

The idea of condition is quite foreign to this article of our confession.

The same truth is clearly expressed in Art. 24 of the same Confession, which speaks of “Man’s Sanctification and Good Works.”

To this article we must call attention in a later connection when we treat of the relation between regeneration, faith, sanctification, and good works as our “part” in the covenant of God. But here we must call special attention to the beginning of this article which reads as follows:

“We believe that this true faith being wrought in man by the hearing, of the Word of God, and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man,” etc.

It is evident that regeneration is here understood in the wider sense, for the whole article speaks of sanctification and good works.

But what demands our special attention in this connection is the fact that faith, and that, too, conscious faith, which is wrought through the hearing of the Word of God, is here presented as part of our salvation, given to us by the Holy Ghost. And again I maintain that part of our salvation cannot, at the same time, be a condition which we must fulfill, or with which we must comply, to obtain salvation.

3. Faith And the Canons of Dordt

The same note is sounded throughout in the Canons of Dordrecht. We will quote a few passages from them just to show that, in our Confessions, faith is never presented as a condition with which we must comply in order to obtain salvation, but always as a God-given means or instrument that unites us with Christ.

This is plain already from some of the very first articles of the Canons. In I, A, 4-6 we read:

“Art. 4. The wrath of God abideth upon those that believe not this gospel. But such as receive it and embrace Jesus the Saviour by a true and living faith, are by him delivered from the wrath of God, and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them.

“Art. 5. The cause or guilt of this unbelief as well as of all other sins, is in no wise in God, but in man himself; whereas faith in Jesus Christ, and salvation through him is the free gift of God, as it is written: *“By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,”* Eph. 2:8. *“And unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him,”* etc. Phil. 1:29.

“Art. 6. That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God’s eternal decree, *“For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,”* Acts 15 : 18. *“Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will,”* Eph. 1:11. According to which decree, he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while he leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy,” etc.

Now I ask, how can there possibly be room in the above language for the notion that faith is a condition? The grace of faith is a free gift from God. Can, at the same time, faith be a condition with which we must comply to receive that free gift of God? We feel that this is absurd. Faith, moreover flows from God's decree, and is bestowed only on the elect, while the rest are hardened, or according to the infralapsarian terminology of the Canons, are left "in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy." Is faith a condition with which we must comply in order to become elect? That would be Arminian indeed! Besides, the Canons teach us that faith flows from God's decree, and is, therefore, an unconditional gift. Again, the Canons teach us that, when God bestows that free gift of faith upon the elect sinner, He "graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe." Now, if man is by nature obdurate and wicked, he certainly can comply with no conditions unto salvation whatever. And if God must soften his heart, and incline him to believe, faith certainly can be no condition unto salvation, for that would imply that he had faith before God softens his heart, which again would mean that he comply with the condition of faith before he was inclined to believe, which is an utter absurdity.

I write thus in order to point out emphatically that, in Reformed terminology the term "faith as a condition" simply has no room.

With that term you must needs sail under the flag of Arminianism.

Chapter 2

Election and Conditions

The teaching of the Canons of Dordrecht, in regard to the subject we are now discussing, is very clear and emphatic. On the one hand they present election as unconditional and, absolute. The Remonstrants, as we all know, did not literally deny the Scriptural truth of election, but made it contingent upon the faith of man, and upon his perseverance to the end. But our fathers of Dordt, rejected the Arminian doctrine, and maintained that election is unconditional and absolute. It is not contingent upon anything in man, or upon anything that he can do or must accomplish, but rests in the sole good pleasure of His will.

*Unconditional Election
And Faith That Flows From It.*

It is defined as follows:

“Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation;” Canons of Dordt, I, A, 7.

Here we have, as you will notice, an infralapsarian definition of election. But it teaches very emphatically that election is unconditional, and that it rests only in “the sovereign good pleasure of his own will.”

And this alone would be sufficient to rule out all possibility of speaking of conditions in connection with salvation. For it must be evident to all, that if election, from which all our salvation flows, is absolute, salvation itself, whether in the objective or in the subjective sense of the word, can never be said to be conditional on anything man must do.

Faith Flows From God’s Decree

But this is not all.

The Canons do not leave it to us to draw the conclusion from their definition of the truth of election, that salvation is unconditional, and that faith may never be

presented as a condition unto salvation, but they also state this truth clearly.

Already in the same article in which the definition of election occurs, quoted above, we read:

“This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and to draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification.” I, A, 7.

It is plain from this article that faith, together with all the other blessings of salvation, is a gift of God which flows from the unconditional decree of God, and is, therefore, never itself to be presented as a condition.

But this truth is expressed still more clearly in other articles of the Canons.

Beautiful, in this respect, is the language of Art. 8 of I, A, which presents the counsel of God as the only source of all, our salvation, for according to that counsel and purpose of His own will, “He hath chosen us from eternity, both to grace and glory, to salvation *and the way of salvation, which he hath ordained that we should walk therein.*” (italics are mine - HH). How clearly and beautifully it is expressed here that the whole of salvation is determined by the counsel of God! Salvation and the way of salvation, regeneration, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification, – it is all of God. And not only that, but He has also ordained that the elect should, and do walk in that way. How utterly impossible it is, then, to conceive of faith as a condition which man must fulfill in order to obtain salvation, or to enter into the covenant of God!

That this is, indeed, the meaning of the Canons is evident also from I, A, art. 9. There we read:

“This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as a prerequisite, cause or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects...”

Arminian Conditionality

Notice, first of all, that here, for the first time, the term condition is used. But it is

put in the mouth of the Remonstrants. We will call attention to this again, for in the Canons we will meet with the term *conditions* more often, but always in the same condemnatory sense. To the fathers of Dordt it represents, not a Reformed, but an Arminian notion. This should certainly teach us a lesson. Dr. Schilder wrote in one of his articles in *De Reformatie* that there are Reformed people that are “*vuurbang*” i.e. afraid as of fire, of the term “condition.” Well, I belong to them. And I dare say that I am in good company. The fathers of Dordt also were “*vuurbang*” of the term, witness the fact that they never use it for the positive exposition of the Reformed truth, although they were well acquainted with the term, but always mentioned it as an Arminian term expressing an Arminian idea. And why, pray, should we play with fire?

For the rest, it is very plain that there is no room for the concept *faith* as a *condition* in the article quoted above. For faith does not occur as a condition in the counsel of God, and if it does not occur in that relation in God’s eternal purpose, it cannot possibly occur in that relation in the historical realization of salvation, nor in the experience and consciousness of the people of God. We are not chosen, and therefore, we are not saved on condition of faith, or of the obedience of faith; but we are chosen *to* faith, and *to* the obedience of faith, and, therefore, we are saved through the instrument of faith, and in the way of obedience. That, and that only is Reformed language.

The same Arminian use of the term condition is referred to in the very next article of the Canons, I, A, 10. There we read:

“The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election; which doth not consist herein, that out of all possible qualities and actions of men God has chosen some as a condition of salvation; but that he was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to Himself...”

The meaning of this is plain. The Arminians denied the truth of personal election. Instead, they invented the theory that God had selected certain qualities as a *condition* of salvation. The chief of these qualities is, of course, faith. Hence, the Arminians drew the conclusion, that, in the counsel of God, and, therefore, also in reality, faith appears as a condition of salvation. But note, that our fathers rejected this notion, and emphasized the truth of unconditional and personal election. Again I say that the term *condition* or *faith as a condition* is an Arminian term. We should not even attempt to use it in a sound sense. For by making this attempt, we willfully classify ourselves with the Arminians. And why should we want to adopt their language? There is absolutely no need for it in Reformed terminology.

Again, the same denotation of the term *condition*, i.e. in the Arminian sense, is referred to in the “Rejection of Errors” under head I of the Canons.

We read in I, B, 3 : (The true doctrine concerning Election and Rejection having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those):

“Error: Who teach that the good pleasure and purpose of God, of which Scripture makes mention in the doctrine of election, does not consist in this, that God chose certain persons rather than others, but in this that he chose out of all possible conditions (among which are also the works of the law), or out of the whole order of things, the act of faith which from its very nature is undeserving, as well as its incomplete obedience, as a condition of salvation, and that he would graciously consider this in itself as a complete obedience and count it worthy of the reward of eternal life.

Rejection: For by this injurious error the pleasure of God. and the merits of Christ are made of none effect, and men are drawn away by useless questions from the truth of gracious justification, and from the simplicity of Scripture; and this declaration of the apostle is charged as untrue: *‘who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal.’* (II Tim. 1:9).”

After what I wrote above on I, A, 10, it is not necessary to *comment* elaborately on this article. I quote it here chiefly because it furnishes another proof for my contention that the term *condition*, and *faith as a condition* is not Reformed, but Arminian, and for that reason should be scrupulously avoided by us. When the Arminians teach that, in the counsel of God, faith and the incomplete obedience are chosen by God as a condition of salvation, they mean, of course, to deny sovereign election and reprobation, and to present salvation as a matter that is contingent upon the freewill of man. Such is the implication of the term in the thought-structure of the Arminians throughout. And our fathers, understanding very well that words not only have meaning in themselves, but deserve significance also from the *usus loquendi*; i.e. from the common use of a term, avoided it altogether. We will do well if we follow their example.

Chapter 3

Conditionally In Salvation Distinctively Arminian

Thus far we have shown:

1. That in our Confessions the term *condition* never occurs in a good sense. From this we may safely conclude that in the Reformed system of doctrine there is neither room for nor need of the term. For, first, our fathers were well acquainted with the term; and, secondly, in our Reformed symbols we have a rather complete and even elaborate system of doctrine, so that we might certainly expect that, if the term *condition* were at all important, if not indispensable, for the expression of Reformed truth, it would occur in these symbols. Yet it is never employed there in a sound sense.
2. That in those Confessions faith never appears as a condition, but uniformly as a means or instrument which God works in the heart by the Holy Spirit. And to be sure, faith cannot be a condition which somehow man must fulfill and a God-given instrument, which He unconditionally works in man's heart, at the same time.
3. That the gift of faith, according to the same Confessions, flows from God's unconditional election. We are not chosen on condition *of*, but *unto* faith. In God's decree, therefore, faith does not occur as a condition. It follows that it cannot appear as such in time, either objectively in the promise of the gospel, or subjectively in the experience of the believers.
4. That, in the Confessions, the term condition is always attributed to the Pelagians and Arminians. They, and they only, had room for and need of the term. And, to my mind, this is sufficient reason to be "*vuurbang*" for the term, and not even to attempt to employ the term in a sound Reformed sense, lest we "instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced... the poison of the Pelagian errors." Canons II, B, 6.

I think that the truth of the above conclusions is plain to all our readers.

The term *faith as a condition* is not confessionally Reformed; is, on the contrary Pelagian and Arminian.

*Conditionality in Salvation
Distinctively Arminian*

But we are still discussing the Canons. We meet with the term condition, as

ascribed to the Pelagians, also in I, B. 4. There we read : “The true doctrine of election and reprobation having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those:

“**Error:** Who teach that in the election unto faith this condition is beforehand demanded, namely, that man should use the light of nature aright, be pious, humble, meek; and fit for eternal life, as if on these things election were in any way dependent.

Rejection: For this savors of the teaching of Pelagius, and is opposed to the doctrine of the apostle, when he writes: *‘Among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest; but God being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory.’* (Eph. 2:3-9).”

The Arminians taught an election on the basis of foreseen faith and perseverance. God had chosen those whom He knew would believe and persevere. Faith, therefore, is a condition in the counsel of God, unto salvation. Yet, they understood, too, that man does not have this faith of himself. Scripture teaches too plainly that it is a gift of God. Now, how did they meet or rather circumvent this difficulty? By their theory of “common grace,” or of the proper use of the light of nature. By this theory, they could even, if need be speak of an election unto faith! O, the error is made to look so much like the truth! When the Reformed believer speaks of sovereign grace, the Arminian agrees with him wholeheartedly – it is all of God! When the Reformed believer confesses to believe in election, the Arminian has no objection. When the Reformed child of God confesses that we are saved through faith, and that faith is a gift of God, the Arminian agrees with him. And yet their views are opposed to each other as light and darkness. This becomes apparent as soon as you ultimately ask the question: but to whom does God give this saving faith? Then the Reformed believer confesses: God gives the saving faith to whom *He* will, unconditionally; according to His absolutely free and sovereign and unconditional election! There are absolutely no conditions in the matter of salvation, no condition of faith, neither any conditions unto faith! But the same question the Arminian answers as follows:

God bestows the gift of faith upon those that are willing to receive it. There is, after all, a condition attached unto election unto faith, and that condition is that man must use the light of nature aright, that by that light he must walk

humbly and in meekness before God, become pious, and render himself worthy and fit for eternal life!

Thus the question is always ultimately: is salvation determined by God or by man?

If you answer: by God, you say at the same time: there are no conditions which man must or can fulfill.

*Salvation Is Either
Conditional Or Unconditional
Determined By God or Man*

But if you speak of conditions in the matter of salvation, no matter how or where or when, you deny that salvation is of God, and you agree with the Mssrs. Pelagius and Arminius.

That is why our fathers were so “*vuurbang*” for the term conditions. Some Reformed theologians use the term and camouflage it by adding that God Himself fulfills all conditions which He demands.

This, however, is plain nonsense.

For a condition is either something which man must fulfill in order to receive grace from God, or it is no condition, but simply a work of God.

Faith, or believing the promise of the gospel, is either a condition the fulfillment of which God demands of man before He saves him, and in order that God may establish His covenant with Him; or the gift of faith, together with the act of believing, is the sovereign work of God, and then it is no condition.

And only the latter is true.

We say that the sinner is responsible for the sin of unbelief; and rightly so, because he is a rational and moral being. But did you ever hear that he is responsible for his faith, even though by faith he becomes a rational and moral being in highest and perfect freedom?

To be sure, no Reformed man would ever speak thus.

But in the article quoted above, the Pelagians and Arminians teach that man is responsible for his own faith, for it is entirely up to him, up to his free will, up to his fulfillment of certain conditions, viz., the proper use of natural light, whether or no

God will bestow or not bestow faith on him.

Did you ever hear of the nonsense of a man's being responsible for his own election?

Yet that nonsense, is the plain implication of the theory of the arch heretics Pelagius and Arminius. For they teach that man is elected unto salvation on condition of faith, or on condition of the proper use of his natural light.

And ultimately any theory of conditions must lead to the same Arminian error.

I have room in this issue for just one more reference to the Canons. In Art. 5 of I, B, we read: "The, true doctrine concerning election and rejection having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those who teach:

"Error: Who Teach that the incomplete and non-decisive election of particular persons to salvation occurred because of foreseen faith, conversion, holiness, godliness, which either began or continued for some time; but that the complete and decisive election occurred because of foreseen perseverance unto the end in faith, conversion, holiness and godliness; and that this is the gracious and evangelical worthiness, for the sake of which he who is chosen, is more worthy than he who is not chosen; and that therefore faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness and perseverance are not fruits of the unchangeable election unto glory, but are conditions, which being required beforehand, were foreseen as being met by those who will be fully elected, and are causes without which the unchangeable election to glory does not occur."

This article needs, perhaps, some elucidation for some of our readers, perhaps for most of them.

We will therefore wait with discussing it till our next issue.

But even now I want to point out that one who sets his feet on the path of conditions moves on a very slippery road.

For once he speaks of faith as a condition, there is no possibility of stopping, and he will soon discover that the entire way of salvation is strewn with conditions.

But about this next time.

H.H.

Chapter 4

A Conditional Salvation Requires A Conditional Decree

At the close of our last article we were discussing Canons, chapter I, Rejection of Errors, 5.

The Arminians, as is plain from that article, presented the entire way of salvation as conditional, and, therefore, as depending on something man must do, on conditions which he must fulfill in order to be saved.

They were afraid that the doctrine of unconditional election and unconditional salvation would lead to a denial of the responsibility of man. And the latter they wanted to maintain at all cost, even at the expense of the truth of sovereign and unconditional election and reprobation.

Hence, they spoke of a conditional election, and, therefore, of a conditional salvation.

For, let it be plainly understood, these two belong together. Either salvation is conditional because election is conditional or both are unconditional. *For* the application of salvation flows from the counsel of election. Hence, he that teaches that faith is a condition unto salvation, must necessarily teach that it is also a condition unto election.

Arminian Salvation Conditional Throughout

And this the Arminians did, indeed, teach.

Already from Art. II, of Head. I, Rejection of Errors, we learn that they taught:

“that there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive and absolute.”

And in the article we are now discussing, I, B, V, we read further about this incomplete or complete, nondecisive and complete election of particular persons. And this is further explained by saying that in God’s election of particular persons unto eternal life not only faith, but also the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness and perseverance are conditions and causes of the unchangeable election unto glory.

You understand what this means, reader?

Briefly, it means that for the Arminian the whole way of salvation is strewn with conditions!

And conditions means that, ultimately, everything depends on man's free will.

We have all learned in catechism that the Arminians teach an election on the basis of foreseen faith. God chose those of whom He foresaw that they would believe in Christ. In other words the election of God unto salvation is conditioned by man's faith.

But, true though this is, it is by no means all of the Arminian doctrine. They cannot possibly stop there.

When a man is chosen on condition of faith, his election is not yet sure, it is not yet complete and decisive: May he not lose his faith and become an unbeliever?

Hence, there is a further condition, which man must fulfill in order to have a place in God's election unto eternal life and be saved. That further condition is the obedience of faith, which includes, of course, holiness and a godly walk.

But even this is not sufficient.

A man may be chosen on condition of his foreseen faith, and his foreseen obedience of faith, holiness and godliness, and still his election unto eternal life may be incomplete and non-decisive. May he not fall away, apostatize from the faith? And if he does, is not his election changed into reprobation? Hence, a final condition must be attached to God's election of man unto eternal life. And that final condition is perseverance. Only the man whom God foresaw as persevering unto the end is elect. And only when man fulfills all the conditions can he be saved.

Do you not see, reader, that this road of conditions is a very slippery path, and that there is abundant reason to be "*vuurbang*" for this Pelagian and Arminian term?

Once you say that you are saved on *condition* of faith, you must continue and maintain that you are saved on condition of obedience, on condition of holiness, on condition of godliness, on condition of perseverance.

And always a condition is something, some requirement man must fulfill.

That means that the entire way of salvation, from beginning to end is, ultimately,

dependent on the will of man.

Let us, therefore, reject this Pelagian heresy, together with the term that is used to express it.

But, you say, how then about the responsibility of man? Do we not need the term *condition* to denote that man is a responsible creature? Do we not make man “a stock and block” by laying all emphasis on the truth of election and sovereign grace?

My answer is decidedly: No!

*Faith, A Gift of God Conferred
“in the Way Of” God’s Saving Work*

I must say more about this in the future. I am not yet through with my discussion of conditions. But let me suggest that instead of the Pelagian term “condition” we use the term “in the way of.”

We are saved in the way of faith, in the way of sanctification, in the way of perseverance unto the end. This term is capable of maintaining both: the absolute sovereignty of God in the work of salvation and the responsibility of man.

But, as I say, about this I must write more in the future.

I must now continue my discussion of the question whether, in our Reformed Standards, faith is ever presented as a condition unto salvation.

For this purpose I want to quote just one article from the second chapter of the Canons, viz., II, A. 8.

In the preceding articles under this head the Canons spoke of the atoning death of Christ and its infinite value, of the promiscuous preaching of the gospel unto all unto whom God sends it in His good pleasure, of the responsibility of those who reject the gospel, and of the truth that those that are saved are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God. And then it continues in Art. 8:

“For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly unto salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people,

tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts, of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory to his own presence forever.”

Notice that in this beautiful article, the entire truth of salvation, from election to eternal glory, is completely covered. And I quote it here in order to show, not only that it does not speak of conditions, but that there is absolutely no room for the notion in the entire article.

You cannot even make room in this quite comprehensive statement of the truth of salvation for the idea that faith is a condition of our entering the covenant of God, or of our obtaining salvation.

Just let us check up on this by following the various clauses and phrases of the article.

The article states, first of all, that it was sovereignly determined in the counsel of God, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of the Son of God should extend to all the elect and to them only. This is surely unconditional. It is an absolutely sovereign determination of God with respect to the exact scope of the power of the cross: it is limited to the elect, and it will surely save them all.

There is no room here, therefore, for the idea that faith is a condition of salvation.

Secondly, the article continues, by stating: “for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly unto salvation.” Here, too, it is impossible to speak of faith as a condition, in any sense of the word. God bestows the justifying faith. It belongs, therefore, to salvation itself. How then can a gift of salvation be a condition unto that gift? This is, evidently, absurd. Moreover, by this gift of justifying faith, bestowed upon us unconditionally by God, He leads us infallibly unto salvation.

It is, therefore, all determined by God, faith and salvation, and there can be no conditions. There simply is no room for anything that man must fulfill before he can attain to salvation.

There is more in this article. But the discussion of the rest must wait until the next issue; D. V. H. H.

Chapter 5

“Effectually Redeemed” and Infallibly Lead To Salvation

[Note: A break in the series occurred at this point]

It may be expedient, at this stage of our discussion, briefly to recapitulate what we have developed thus far in regard to the question of conditions.

We based our arguments entirely on our Reformed Confessions which constitute the basis of our common faith as Protestant Reformed Churches, and which are binding for all of us.

First of all, I appealed to the *argumentum e silentio*, the argument from silence, which means in this case that in none of our confessions the term is used in a sound sense. This proves, at least, that in a Reformed system of doctrine there is no need for the term condition, for our confessions are a rather elaborate expression of all the basic principles of the Reformed truth, yet, in a positive sense, the term is never employed in them.

Secondly, I showed that, in our confessions, faith is always presented as a means or instrument of salvation, and that, too, as an instrument, not of man, but of God. Never is faith explained as a condition. And to be sure, *instrument* and *condition* are two entirely different conceptions.

Further I based my argument against the use of the term *condition* on the fundamentally Reformed truth of election, and showed that, according to our confessions, the gift of faith flows from God's unconditional decree of election. It follows that, if faith does not appear as a condition unto salvation in God's eternal decree, it cannot appear as such in time.

Finally, we showed that in our confessions the term *condition* does, indeed, occur, but always as a term that is employed by the Arminians and Pelagians. In their presentation of the truth (which is the lie) there was not only ample room for, but also need of the term *condition*.

In my last article on this subject (cf. The Standard Bearer of Dec. 15, 1949) I was discussing the Canons, II, A, 8, an article of our confessions which completely covers the entire truth of our salvation from election to eternal glory. Yet, this article not only fails to speak of conditions but leaves no room for the notion at all. It speaks of the sovereign decree of election as the unconditional source of our salvation. It

emphasizes that the gift of faith is bestowed by God only upon the elect, so that faith is presented as belonging to salvation itself. Moreover, by this, God-given means of faith, the elect are infallibly led unto salvation. And how can a gift possibly be, at the same time, a condition unto that gift?

But there is still more in this article of the Canons.

Effectually Redeemed

First, the article continues to emphasize God's unconditional election in the words: "it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation and language, all those and those only, who were from eternity chosen unto salvation, and given him by the Father." Note the expression *effectually, redeem*." When Christ effectually redeems the elect that redemption cannot possibly be conditioned upon anything in the elect themselves.

But there is still more.

Note especially the following: "that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death." Notice especially: 1. that faith is presented here as belonging to the gifts of salvation by the Holy Spirit; 2. that Christ confers this gift upon the elect alone; 3. that He purchased this gift of faith for them by His death. Now, how could one possibly introduce the element of condition here, Shall we say that the gift of faith is conditioned by faith? This is absurd. It is, therefore, unconditional. Shall we say that Christ works faith in the heart of the sinner on condition that he believe? Again, this is equally absurd. Besides, it would imply the thoroughly Arminian conception that Christ stands knocking at the door of the heart of the sinner, the key of which is on the inside. Shall we say that the death of Christ, by which He purchased the gift of faith, for the elect, is conditioned by faith on the part of the sinner? But that would mean that He did not *effectually* redeem the elect at all. It would really imply a denial of sovereign election.

The rest of the article speaks in equally unconditional terms. We, read there: "should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot or blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever." All this belongs to God's part of the covenant. We have no part in it whatsoever. He redeems us. He bestows upon the elect the gift of faith. He delivers us from the dominion of sin, and sanctifies us. He preserves us, and leads us on to eternal glory. And this entire work of God is absolutely unconditional. If it

were not, no sinner could possibly be saved.

Only on the basis of the truth that the entire work of God concerning our salvation is sovereign and, therefore, unconditional, can the Canons close this chapter with the following beautiful confession:

“This purpose proceeding from everlasting love towards the elect has, from the beginning of the world to this day, been powerfully accomplished, and will henceforward still continue to be accomplished, notwithstanding all the ineffectual opposition of the gates of hell, so that the elect in due time may be gathered together into one, and that there never may be wanting a church composed of believers, the foundation of which is laid in the blood of Christ, which may steadfastly love, and faithfully serve him as their Saviour, who as a bridegroom for his bride, laid down his life for them upon the cross, and which may celebrate his praises here and through all eternity.”

Unconditional Salvation In Christ

Of course, the Arminians deny this unconditional work of God concerning our salvation. But the Canons insist upon it, and deny the errors of those:

“**Error:** Who teach that Christ by his satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ is effectually appropriated; but that he merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions. For these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error.”

This is strong language.

But it is the truth, nevertheless.

And into this Pelagian error, which has its origin in hell, we must needs fall, as soon as we teach that faith is a condition unto salvation. For then we must necessarily deny that “faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ is effectually appropriated,” is merited by the satisfaction of Christ and is wrought in our hearts efficaciously by the Holy Spirit. In other words, one must choose between the error that salvation is, wholly or in part, which means the same thing, dependent upon the free will of man, or he must deny that there is a conditional element in salvation, and confess that

salvation is of the Lord alone.

You say, perhaps, that you believe that salvation is of the Lord alone, but that one can, nevertheless, speak of faith as a condition in such a way that the freewill of man has nothing to do with it? I answer: 1. that our confessions never speak that language, but, on the contrary, uniformly repudiate the term conditions and all its implications. I am, therefore, in good company when I deny that faith may ever be presented as a condition, while those that like to lay stress on the conditional element are certainly not confessionally Reformed; and, 2. that I challenge anyone to make plain that the proposition “faith is a condition” can be used in a truly Reformed sense. If he takes up this challenge, I promise that I will make plain to all that can read that either he camouflages the term condition or somehow he tries to make salvation dependent on the free will of man.

Regeneration and Faith

That faith can in no wise be presented as a condition which in some way must be fulfilled by man, and is, therefore, in some way dependent on the will of man, is also evident from those articles of the Canons that speak of regeneration and faith. Note the following, Canons III-IV, A, 12:

“And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the Author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in that marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received.”

This beautiful article has an important bearing upon our discussion of conditions.

There are several questions implied in the subject of conditions that receive a rather clear answer in this article.

If faith is a condition is not regeneration also to be presented as a condition? But why not, if both are the work of God, and if, moreover, faith is rooted in and a fruit of regeneration?

Is there any part of the work of salvation left for man after God has accomplished His part?

Is it in the power of man to remain unconverted after God has regenerated him?

What is the proper conception of the relation between God's "part" and man's "part," between the work of God and the activity of the regenerated sinner, between faith and believing?

All these questions are related to our subject, and receive a Reformed answer in this article. Look for the answers in the next issue, D. V. .

Chapter 6

Unconditional Regeneration And its Spiritual Fruit

[Note: A break in the series occurred at this point.]

In our last article under this heading we referred to Canons III, IV, 12, which speaks of regeneration. And at the close of that article we had several questions which we now shall discuss.

*If Faith Is A Condition
Regeneration Must Also Be Conditional*

The first question is whether, if faith is a condition, regeneration must not also be considered as conditional, as something which man must fulfill in order that, God may give him the grace of regeneration. That would seem to be almost an impossible conception, but it is also a conception which seems to be implied in what is written in a recent "Reformed" periodical. For there one reads that the Spirit of regeneration, the Spirit of salvation, comes after repentance and is related to the latter as a condition. And that certainly is the preaching and teaching of many Arminian preachers. If the sinner will fulfill the condition of opening his heart and of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God will enter in and regenerate him and make him a new man. Also the grace of regeneration, according to them, is dependent upon an act of man and upon a condition which he must fulfill. But this is certainly not the Reformed truth. And it is quite contrary to the article which we quoted from the Canons. For there we read:

"And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid."

How absolutely unconditional is the grace of regeneration presented here in this article. It is sometimes alleged by those that do not understand the Reformed truth that Reformed theologian, and especially Protestant Reformed theologians, deny or do not sufficiently emphasize the responsibility of man. And it seems that one of the motives that actuates the Rev. Petter to speak of conditions is rooted in that same misunderstanding of the relation between God's sovereign grace and the responsibility of man.

But let me ask the question: Is man responsible for his own regeneration? That is, indeed, an important question. For, mark you well, if he is not responsible for his own regeneration, but if this is absolutely and unconditionally a work of God, he

cannot be responsible for his faith, which is rooted in regeneration, nor for any other blessings of grace. But what does the article say! It tells us that regeneration is a new creation. That means, therefore, that it is a work of God absolutely and unconditionally, in which man has no part whatsoever. Just as it would be the height of absurdity to teach that the creation of man, the manner of his creation and the nature with which he was created, was conditioned upon anything in man himself, so it is also the height of folly that regeneration, which is a new creation, is at all contingent upon or conditioned by anything that man may do or will or desire. Just as Adam was not responsible for his own creation, so the elect are certainly not responsible for their own regeneration.

Besides, the article tells us that regeneration is a resurrection from the dead, a making alive. And that presents the work of regeneration again as absolutely unconditional. The dead certainly cannot fulfill any conditions. Nor can God possibly require of the dead that they fulfill any conditions. Nor can the dead ever be held responsible for their own regeneration. Nor can the regenerated be held responsible for the fact that they ever were regenerated. And to this the article adds, to make it absolutely sure that regeneration is a work of God alone and that it is performed upon us and in us unconditionally: "which God works in us without our aid." We, therefore, have absolutely nothing to do with our own regeneration, which is the beginning, and at the same time the principle, of all our salvation as it is wrought within our hearts and as it is applied by the Holy Spirit to the elect.

Is Any Part of God's Work Of Salvation Conditional?

The next question which we ask in connection with Article 12 of III and IV of the Canons is whether there is any part of the work of salvation left for man after God has accomplished His part. This is answered negatively by the article in the following words: "But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not." Now regeneration is in principle the whole of salvation as it is applied unto us. All the benefits of salvation are already implied in the one principal benefit of regeneration. I, therefore, put the question in this way, and ask whether there is any part of salvation left for man to do after God has accomplished His part of the work of salvation. Mark you, I do not deny that after that part of the salvation which God works within us there is a part which we do fulfill as the inevitable result and the fruit of God's part.

But the question is simply whether there is any part of the work of salvation as God works it within us left to man, so that the work of God's salvation is really not complete, or so that at any stage of, that work of God in us His work is conditioned

by and contingent upon anything that we must still do. And also this is most emphatically denied by Art. 12 of Canons III, IV. When God has wrought regeneration in the heart of man, which is the principle of subjective salvation, that work of God is entirely complete in itself. It is not in the power of man to be regenerated or not to be regenerated. The work of God is sure and absolutely unconditional as far as the application of salvation to the sinner is concerned.

Still more. The question is also whether it is in the power of man after God has regenerated him either to be converted or to remain unconverted, whether it is in his power after God has given him the principle of the new life either to believe in Christ or not to believe. Also on this question we find the answer in the article of the Canons. The article states that regeneration is not affected by such a mode of operation

“that after God has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man....to be converted or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this, work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in that marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe.”

From this it is very evident that neither regeneration, nor conversion, nor repentance, nor belief in Christ is in any sense conditional upon the work of man, upon his will, or desire. When God works His grace in a man, it is not in his power and it is not in his choice either to be converted or to remain unconverted. But he must be converted. When God works His grace in the heart of any man, it is not in his power either to repent or not to repent, which is an element of conversion. But he must and does actually repent. When God works His grace in the heart of any sinner, it is not up to him to decide whether he will believe or not believe in Christ. But he must believe in Christ and actually does believe. For the work of regeneration, and therefore, all the work which is implied in the application of salvation to the sinner is not inferior in efficacy to creation or to resurrection from the dead. And all in whose heart God works that marvelous grace are “certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe.” Such is the marvelous work of grace which God performs sovereignly and unconditionally upon the sinner.

The question must still be asked: what is the proper conception of the relation between God’s part and man’s part, between the work of God and the activity of the regenerated sinner, between faith and believing? But this we must leave till next time. H. H.

Chapter 7

God's Part And Man's Part Preservation And Perseverance

[Note: A break in the series occurred at this point.]

Once more we meet with the term *condition* in the Canons of Dordrecht, and again the word is put in the mouth of the Remonstrants. It is found in Chapter V, Rejection of Errors, 1 “The true doctrine having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those:

“**Error:** Who teach that the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God, gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which (as they declare) man before his decisive election and justification must fulfill through his free will.

Rejection: For the Holy Scripture testifies that this follows out of election, and is given the elect in virtue of the death, the resurrection and intercession of Christ: *‘But the elect obtained it and the rest were hardened.’* Rom. 11:7. Likewise : *‘He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of (God’s elect)? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’* Rom. 8 :32-35.”

Arminian Perseverance Conditional

The question here, therefore, is whether the grace of perseverance is conditional or unconditional. We know that in Art. 5 of the well-known Remonstrance that was composed in Gouda, 1610, the Arminians made that grace of God unto the perseverance of the saints conditional and contingent upon the free-will of man. They did not say so in so many words, but nevertheless plainly suggested it in the following article:

“Those who are grafted into Christ by a true faith, and therefore partake of his vivifying Spirit, have abundance of means by which they may fight against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and obtain the victory, always, however, by the aid of the grace of the Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ assists them by His Spirit in all temptations, and stretches out his hand; and provided they are ready for the contest, and seek his aid, and are not wanting to their duty, he strengthens them to such a degree that they cannot be seduced or snatched from the hands of Christ by any fraud of Satan or violence, according to that saying, John 10:28; ‘No one shall

pluck them out of my hand.' But whether these very persons cannot, by their own negligence, desert the commencement of their being in Christ, and embrace again the present world, fall back from the holy doctrine once committed to them, make shipwreck of their conscience, and fall from grace; this must be more fully examined and weighed by the Holy Scriptures before men can teach it with full tranquility of mind and confidence."

That already in this article itself the grace of perseverance is made contingent upon the will and the efforts of man is plain, for instance, from the words "provided they are ready for the contest, and seek his aid, and are not wanting to their duty, he strengthens them to such a degree that they cannot be seduced or snatched from the hands of Christ by any fraud of Satan or violence." And besides, at the close of this article they plainly suggest that before they can accept the Reformed truth of the perseverance of the saints, it must be made plain to them from Holy Scripture. The final result was that the followers of Arminius so modified this article that it asserted the possibility of falling away from grace. And in the article of the Canons which we quoted above it is plainly stated that according to the Arminians perseverance is not a fruit of election, but a condition of the new covenant, so perseverance is another condition in order to remain in the covenant of God.

Now in order to understand the question that here concerns us, we do well to distinguish between two aspects of what is usually simply called perseverance, the aspects, namely, of preservation and perseverance.

Preservation And Perseverance

The first aspect refers to the divine factor, the second to the human factor in the perseverance of the saints. The first may be called that act of God whereby through His almighty power and efficient grace He keeps the elect in the midst of the world, in the midst of all temptations of Satan, the world, and their own sinful flesh, in such a way that they can never permanently and ultimately fall away from grace and fail to obtain the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that never fadeth away. The second aspect is the act of man, that is, of the regenerated child of God, of the believer, whereby he fights against sin and the devil and the world, keeps his garments clean, and has the ultimate victory.

The all-important question is, of course: what is the relation between these two aspects, between the act of God in preservation and the act of the believer in perseverance ?

Is it such, that in the power of God the believer is utterly passive? Does God preserve him as a stock and block unto the final salvation? Does the act of preservation mean that God simply holds his hand, and that therefore he is perfectly safe? May the preservation of believers unto salvation be compared to a man that buys a ticket in a Pullman car and

simply goes to sleep until the angels wake him up at the station called heaven? Some seem to think that this conception of preservation and perseverance is very Reformed indeed. God, they say, must do it all, and any conception as if man himself must put forth effort in order to be saved and to persevere in the midst of the world is considered Arminianism. Yet this is not the case. The grace of preservation never works this way. God's part of the covenant, although He performs it alone and unconditionally, never excludes man's part, for the simple reason that the grace of God always works in and through man as a rational, moral agent.

On the other hand, the question may be asked whether in preservation and perseverance man is ever first. That, of course, is fundamentally the conception of all Arminians and Pelagians and also of all kinds of Synergists, that speak of a cooperation between God and man so that each does his share in the work of salvation. They present the work of preservation as wholly or in part contingent upon man's perseverance. The believer cannot persevere without the grace of God, they admit; but God will give that grace only on condition that man really wants it, asks for it, and earnestly strives to persevere. God helps those that help themselves. Hence, the will of man and his earnest effort unto perseverance is the prerequisite, or condition, unto God's act of preservation. In that case there is no real perseverance of the saints. A chain depends for its strength on its weakest link. And if, say, some forty-nine links of a chain consist of a strong steel, while the fiftieth link is a silk thread, the chain is useless. And if the preservation of God, no matter how strong it is in itself, is contingent upon the weak will of man, there is no perseverance of the saints whatever.

Hence, our Reformed fathers repudiated both of these views. They must have nothing of the stock and block theory, nor must they have anything of the Arminian error of man's perseverance as a condition unto God's preservation.

*From Election To Perseverance,
unconditional*

They proceeded, as always, from unconditional election, from that to unconditional preservation, and on the basis of this, to perseverance as a fruit of preservation. Thus it is evident in the article which we quoted above, and thus it is in all the articles on the perseverance of the saints as taught in the Canons of Dordrecht.

According to election God gives them the grace of preservation unconditionally and efficaciously. They are preserved in the power of God, according to I Pet. 1:4. He works within them to will and to do, according to Phil. 2: 13. This work of God is absolutely first and unconditional. There can never be any conditions which man must fulfill as prerequisites for the work of God. Nevertheless, this power of God is not like a strong fortress in which man can afford to wait effortless and feel perfectly safe. On the contrary,

the believer is preserved in the power of God, but also through faith. And that means that this power of God unto preservation works in and through him as a rational, moral creature, so that he fights the good fight of faith even unto the end, that no one may take his crown. The grace of preservation is God's part in the covenant. But the grace of perseverance is man's part, which always is the fruit of God's part.

But these two parts are never so related that man's part is a condition which he must fulfill in order that God may fulfill His part.

The grace of God is always unconditional.

H. H.

Part 2: The Declaration Of Principles

**The Origin, Meaning, And Purpose
Of The Declaration Of Principles,
A Reply To a Questioner**

By Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Although the Questioner did not ask me personally to reply to his questions, published in the preceding issue of the *Standard Bearer*, I will nevertheless try to make a start with the discussion.

In the first place I feel, of course, co-responsible for this Declaration of Principles as a delegate to our last Synod. Secondly, I feel still more responsible because synod added me to the committee that drew up this declaration and advised synod to adopt it. And thirdly, the committee asked me to draw up the first Draft of this Declaration of Principles, which then was discussed by them and proposed by them to synod, and finally adopted by this body. This does not imply that I am the only responsible party, or even that I assume more responsibility for this Declaration of Principles than any other member of synod. For after its adoption synod as a body is responsible. And when I write a word of explanation in answer to the question of the Questioner, – I simply try to voice the sentiment of our last synod. Nevertheless, being so directly and intimately acquainted with the origin, meaning, and purpose of this declaration, I feel that I am at least in as good a position as anyone to answer the Questioner's questions.

Any other member of the committee *ad hoc* or any other delegate, except the one dissenting vote which I heard was cast (though I did not hear it at the time), may, of course, add to my explanation or criticize my interpretation of the sentiment of synod.

Of course, anyone is entitled too to criticize the declaration itself. But this does not belong to the proper scope of this present writing, since the Questioner does not criticize, but simply asks a few questions.

The first question reads as follows:

“I am informed that the Mission Committee requested synod to draw up a form regarding our principles for those (especially in Canada) who request organization. On the basis of this synod drew up this declaration. Now my questions is this: Is it church politically correct to make such a declaration on the basis of a request of a committee? Doesn't this violate the rule of

Reformed church polity that all matters must come to synod via Consistory, classis, etc.?”

Answer.

Synod, in my opinion, did not violate any rule of Reformed church polity by acceding to the request of the Mission Committee for a form or declaration which might be used in the organization of churches. It is not true that it is a rule of Reformed church polity that all matters must come to synod via consistory and classis. The article of the Church Order that pertains to this matter is article 30, which reads as follows:

“In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common.”

The last clause of this article applies to the matter in question. Mission work, like the Theological School, is certainly a matter that belongs to the churches in common. Besides, perhaps article 51 of the Church Order pertains to the same matter:

“The missionary work of the churches is regulated by the general synod in a mission order.”

The Mission Committee, therefore, certainly had the perfect right to appeal to synod for a form that may serve as a basis for the organization of Churches. And the synod did nothing that was church politically out of order, when it drew up the declaration of principles.

Let me, however, explain this matter a little more in detail, especially to show what motivated the Mission Committee to come with such a request to synod.

The Mission Committee is a synodical committee that serves synod and all our churches in the interest of our mission work. Its purpose is through our missionaries and in cooperation with the calling church to propagate and disseminate the pure Reformed truth (which to us is the same as Protestant Reformed truth) outside of the pale of our churches and to bring to manifestation the purest manifestation of the body of Christ in the world (which to us is the Protestant Reformed Church). They have not the calling, therefore, to organize any group of people, regardless of their doctrinal convictions, but only such as are sufficiently acquainted with our Protestant Reformed truth and are willing to subscribe to its main tenets.

We used to conduct this kind of mission work chiefly in the Christian Reformed Church. And the work used to concentrate chiefly around the question of common grace, as adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 and embodied in the well-known Three Points. With this work I am personally thoroughly acquainted, as I used to go out for weeks at a time to explain the errors of the Three Points especially to the Christian Reformed people in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and even in California. It was never our purpose simply to extend our churches and to organize congregations. Always the people were first acquainted with our standpoint and our Protestant Reformed truth in distinction from the errors of the Three Points. And it was only after they were convinced of these errors and as a result of these labors a group was gathered that were willing to subscribe to our Protestant Reformed principles, that they were organized into a church.

Recently, however, the Mission Committee faced what was really the same problem from a different angle. They and our missionaries came into contact with people that are apparently willing to subscribe to our denial of common grace and to repudiate the Three Points, but who insist that the promise is for all the children that are born under the historical dispensation of the covenant. In other words, they wanted to maintain common grace-within the historical line of the covenant. These people had their origin in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. Historically as well as doctrinally they differed from the Christian Reformed Churches in America; but also from our Protestant Reformed Churches. In the Netherlands they had been urged to join the Protestant Reformed Churches and not the Christian Reformed Church. No wonder then that they lived under the impression that they could simply, without further instruction, be organized into Protestant Reformed Churches. But at the same time they wanted to adhere to their own peculiar view of the covenant. They then sent a request to the Mission Committee to be organized on their own basis. That was the difficulty with which the Mission Committee had to contend.

Hence, the Mission Committee wanted a definite form as a basis for the organization of churches; a form on the basis of which our missionaries could labor among these people, and which they themselves could study in order that they might not only become acquainted with our view, but also know what they were doing when they requested the Mission Committee for organization into Protestant Reformed Churches. More than a year ago the Mission Committee requested me to draw up such a form, but I made no work of it for the simple reason that either the Mission Committee themselves were capable of composing such a document, or that they could appeal to synod to furnish a form as a basis of organization for them. The latter they chose. They came to the last synod with their problem. And the synod heeded their request and adopted the declaration of principles. There certainly was nothing church politically wrong on the part of the Committee to come with such a request to Synod, nor on the part of synod to accede to this request.

But after all, the Questioner makes a wrong impression when he writes that the synod made such a declaration on the basis of a request of a committee. Fact is that in order to avoid a semblance of hierarchy the synod did not make or adopt the declaration of principles, but merely proposed it to the churches in order that by way of consistory and classis it may come to the next synod. And they suggested that the Mission Committee and the Missionaries *use* this declaration in the meantime as a working hypothesis. "The synod felt that After all this declaration is a matter of doctrine. And although it is not meant as a certain "fourth form," binding our churches (see below), it nevertheless thought it safer to let this matter come from the bottom up. Hence, the declaration, of principles was never adopted, but consists merely of a proposal to be discussed by all our churches, and to come by way of consistory and classis to our next synod. And it will undoubtedly be very salutary for all our consistories, as well as for all our people, to study this declaration thoroughly and offer their criticism and suggestions for improvement or for revision, in order that our next synod may be ripe for a final adoption.

The next question which the Questioner asks is as follows:

"Is this declaration exclusively for those outside of our denomination, or also for our own people?"

Answer.

If this declaration is finally adopted after being thoroughly discussed by our people, by our consistories, and by our classes, at our next synod, it is not *for* our own people, but it is *by* them as a declaration of what they believe to be the truth concerning the covenant of God, the promise of the gospel; over against those that differ with us as Protestant Reformed Churches. Our own churches have no need of such a declaration for themselves, or at least should not have. It is therefore intended as a working basis. for the Mission Committee and for the missionaries in the organization of churches.

This does not mean that our own people cannot benefit by this declaration of principles and that they cannot very profitably be instructed in it. It would be very beneficial, no doubt, if this declaration of principles were made the object of instruction and study by a catechism class of confessing young people

The third question by the Questioner reads as follows:

"It seems to me that the declaration is mainly directed at the Liberated Churches. Only a small portion is given to the repudiation of the common

grace theory, church hierarchy, etc., while a large portion directly and indirectly is devoted to the repudiation of the Liberated views of the covenant and baptism. Am I correct in drawing this conclusion?"

Answer.

The declaration of principles cannot possibly be directed against the *Liberated Churches* for the simple reason that they claim that as churches they have no covenant conception. They claim that in their churches there is nothing binding concerning the covenant. Of course, the question is how far this goes. I discussed our difficulties with Mr. and Mrs. A. Schilder, brother and sister-in-law of the professor. They were here last summer, and we had the privilege of entertaining them at our home for a couple of days. They proved to be very amiable people, and in the short time that they were with us we learned to love them as a brother and sister in Christ. But I told him that for us it was not a question of receiving some individual families or members from the Liberated Churches, but of organizing groups of Liberated people into Protestant Reformed Churches. And I asked him whether in the Netherlands, supposing there were a group of Reformed people that emphasized the theory of presumptive regeneration and wanted to become organized as Reformed Churches (maintaining article 31), the Liberated Churches would, organize them and receive them in their fellowship on that basis. And both he and Mrs. Schilder replied that they would never do that. And I told him that we confronted the same problem here with respect to the Heynsian conception that the essence of the covenant is the promise and that the promise is for all that are born in the historical line of the covenant.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the declaration of principles is as such directed against the Liberated Churches, for they have not adopted any official conception of the covenant. At most, therefore, it should be said that it is directed at some of the Liberated, who teach that the promise of God is objectively for all the baptized children and that in this promise God is gracious to them all.

It is true, of course, that due to the present circumstances the declaration of principles apparently devotes the lion's share of its contents to the question of the promise of God for all the children that are born under the covenant. Yet this is only apparent. The declaration just as emphatically denies the theory of common grace as adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924. It denies that there is a grace of God to all men, including the reprobate, in the common gifts to all men. It denies that the promise of the gospel is a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all that externally hear the gospel. And it denies that the natural man through the influence of common grace can do good in this world. And over against these points it maintains that the grace of God is always particular and only for the elect; never for

the reprobate. It maintains that the promise of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith. And it maintains that the unregenerate man is totally incapable of doing any good, wholly depraved; and therefore can only sin. Moreover, it repudiates the theory of presumptive regeneration, and, it declares that it must have nothing of the hierarchical action of the Reformed Synod of the Netherlands, 1939-44, whereby they imposed certain doctrinal decisions upon the churches synodically. And whereby they deposed local office bearers. The only difference is that, whereas for the proposition that the promise is not for all the children that are born under the covenant, but only for the elect elaborate proof is furnished from the confessions, it was not deemed necessary to offer the same elaborate proof for the proposition that the Three Points are unreformed, for the simple reason that also the Liberated people are supposed to agree with us in regard to the denial of common grace and in regard to the contents of the Three Points. If, however, confessional proof, must be furnished this can easily be done. And if it should, be done, it, will become, evident that the declaration of principles is just as elaborate on the theory of common grace as it is on the question concerning the promise of the covenant.

In the fourth question the Questioner asks:

“I gather that these principles are meant to be an explanation of the confessions, not, another confession. Does this imply that our confessions are ambiguous on these points, so that these truths cannot be clearly proven from the confessions without this declaration of principles? Does this then also imply that our missionaries, ministers, and people are not able to state the same without them?”

Answer.

That our confessions are not ambiguous on the main question that the promise is not for all is our firm conviction. That this is true is exactly the point of the declaration of principles. You may notice that intentionally the declaration presents very little argumentation, but widely and elaborately and literally the confessions. In this respect there is a vast difference between such a document as the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905, and this declaration of principles. The former adopted synodically some very general. statements on eternal justification, immediate regeneration, presumptive regeneration, the promise of the covenant, etc., without any elaborate proof either from Scripture or from the confessions. But the declaration of principles offers very few statements of its own, but emphatically and elaborately points to the confession and quotes it. This, to my mind, is the strength

of this declaration. And therefore it rests exactly on the assumption that the confessions are certainly not ambiguous.

Hence, our missionaries and ministers, as well as our own people, if they are properly instructed, can very well read the fundamental principles of this declaration in our confessions.

But, as was already stated under “2,” this declaration serves to let others – that allege that the theory of common grace, of presumptive regeneration, and of the promise for all that live under the historical dispensation of the covenant is the teaching of the confessions – read and know what is confessionally Reformed on these points. It is not a question of ambiguity in the confessions as such, nor is it a question what our , ministers and missionaries and people need. But it is rather a question as to how some interpret and, read the confessions *erroneously*. And to point out to them that they do read erroneously is exactly the purpose of this declaration of principles. And to my mind this purpose is admirably served by this declaration.

The final question put by the Questioner reads as follows:

“What is the difference between a declaration and a form? I have heard a few people call this a fourth form. What technically is a form or confession? What historically are the conditions that necessitated the formulation of confessions? Have the Reformed churches ever set a precedent in making declaration of the confessions? If so, in what conditions did they do so?”

Answer.

This is not a fourth form or a fourth confession. Of this we have no need, for we stand on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity only, And this basis is sufficient for us. But it aims to be a declaration of principles which are already contained in our confessions. The difference is plain. A fourth form or confession either adds some new doctrine, which before was extra confessional; or it also adds some elaborate explanation of what is principally implied in the confession, but not elaborately and clearly expressed. And finally a fourth form may also serve to corrupt the confessions. As an illustration of the second instance we may point to the Canons of Dordrecht, They were indeed based upon the principles of the then existing confession. But they elaborated those principles into the present five articles against the Remonstrants. They appeal to Scripture as their basis, but not to the existing confession. And as an illustration of a corrupting addition to the confession we may point to the Three Points of 1924. It is true that the Synod of 1924 also appealed to the confessions and tried to leave the impression that the Three Points

were nothing but an explanation of the Three Forms of Unity. But it can easily be shown, and we have proved repeatedly, that this is not true, and that the theory of common grace as contained in the Three Points is certainly contrary to the confessions that are adopted in the Reformed churches. But this declaration of principles does not aim at being a fourth form or an addition to the confession, but simply a setting forth of principles that are already clearly expressed in the confessions. If this is not true, the declaration is open for criticism. That is the reason why the Synod of 1950 suspended or postponed the final adoption of this declaration until all the churches have made a thorough study of it. Besides, a form or confession or even an addition to the confession is composed for the churches themselves, and after it has been officially adopted the churches are all supposed to abide by that form or addition. But this declaration of principles is not for the churches, but *by* the churches and is proposed as a basis for the organization of churches. In no sense of the word, therefore, can this declaration of principles be called a fourth form or a fourth confession.

The Questioner asks further : “What historically are the conditions that necessitated the formulations of confessions?” We answer briefly that historically the formulation of confessions is usually occasioned by the attack of false philosophy and false doctrine upon the truth as it is in Jesus Christ our Lord. If I may quote from my own work on the Heidelberg Catechism, Vol. II, p. 113:

“And this is especially true in our times. It is a well-known fact that those that seek to undermine the foundation of the true church upon which the Church is built, and to introduce false doctrines, hardly ever reveal their evil intention by openly declaring their opposition to the doctrines as they have been formulated by the Church in the past. On the contrary, they prefer to employ the very same terms the Church has always used to express her faith, although they give them a new and entirely strange content. If they mean to deprive the Church of the truth of sovereign grace, and to introduce the false doctrine of free-will, they employ the Scriptural terms of predestination, election, and reprobation nonetheless; only they declare that God has chosen them that believe, and rejected those that remain in their unbelief. Or they speak of a ‘double track’ and insist that, while they firmly believe in the truth of absolute predestination, they also hold the very opposite, viz., that God will have all men to be saved. And thus they do with regard to every fundamental truth of the Bible. Even present day modernism, though it rejects and opposes all the fundamental doctrines of historical Christendom, is often very efficient in the employment of practically all the terms used to express the object of the Christian faith. They, too, speak of Christ as the Son of God, but in their mouth the term is completely emptied of its true significance so that it does not express at all the essential divinity of the Saviour. And they love to speak

of the kingdom of God and its righteousness, while they refer to a kingdom of mere man, and of this world. And so we might go on. It shows, that as the Church advances in the knowledge of the truth, it will not only need a more elaborate confession to express its faith positively, but it must also more definitely and fully define its doctrines, lest they be open to the attack of gain sayers because of their ambiguity.”

And as to the final question asked, namely, whether the Reformed churches ever set a precedent in making declaration of the confessions and under what conditions they ever did so, I would answer that the churches indeed have often made such declarations. They made such a declaration in 1918, when the Synod of the Christian Reformed Churches appealed to the confessions in order to combat the false doctrine of dispensationalism and premillennialism. At that time they simply pointed to the truth clearly expressed in the confessions of the kingship of Christ, as well as to the other truth, also definitely expressed in the confessions, of the unity of the church of all ages. And on this basis they principally condemned the error of premillennialism. The attempt at such a declaration was also made in 1905, when the Conclusions of Utrecht were adopted by the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. I say that in those Conclusions of Utrecht an attempt was made to make a declaration of principles based upon the confessions. For actually these conclusions never appealed to the confessions whatever. In the condemnation of the instruction of Dr. Jansen by the Synod of 1922 in Orange City repeatedly such declarations are made from the confessions. Thus we read in “Reports and Decisions in the Case of Dr. R. Jansen,” which was published by the Synod of Orange City, 1922: “We remark with reference to these five passages that in each of these, in the one more, in the other less, a human, fallible element is injected into the divine revelation. This does not agree with what we confess in article 3 and 7 of the Belgic Confession of Faith:

“Article 3 reads as follows: ‘We confess that this word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, as the apostle Peter saith. And that afterwards God, from a special care, which he has for us and our salvation, commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed word to writing, and he himself wrote with his own finger, the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine scriptures.’”

“In article 7 we confess as follows:

“We believe that these holy scriptures fully contain the will of God and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship, which God requires of us, is

written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the holy scriptures; nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden to add unto or take away anything from the word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.”

As to the question under what conditions the churches made such declarations, we may answer that additions or corruptions of the confessions were frequently made by the churches from impure and sinful, carnal motives, motives of hatred and envy, as was undoubtedly the case with the adoption of the Three Points by the Synod of 1924. Or it may be the desire of the churches to get away from under the binding force of the truth. Or again, it may be the desire to unite the church in a compromising statement, as was the case: with the Conclusions of Utrecht. But if the church really desires to maintain the truth of the confessions, the purpose is usually to defend the truth over against errors and to safeguard the church over against false doctrines.

And now I have explained to the best of my ability the content and the purpose and the meaning of the declaration of principles that was proposed to our churches by the Synod of 1950.

And once more I want to emphasize that any delegate to the Synod of 1950 may add to or criticize this explanation.

H. H.

An Exposition of the Declaration of Principles
(from the Draft version of 1950)

By Herman Hoeksema

The following material is taken from the
Standard Bearer, from Feb 1951 through April 1951

Introduction:

[This introduction is an excerpt from the longer article,
“Binding or not Binding?” found in Part 4: Appendix, 4. - TCM]

Binding Or Not Binding?

This is really the burning question today.

It is not a burning question for us as Protestant Reformed Churches, for we were always satisfied with the Three Forms of Unity, and consider ourselves to be bound by them alone. And we still are.

That we want to be bound by nothing else than the Confessions is very plain from the Declaration of Principles.

After all, the only question concerning this Declaration is whether it is according to the Confessions, or not. If it is not, we do not want it. In as far as it is not let us criticize it and correct it. But the question is pure and simple whether or not this Declaration is an expression of the Confessions.

But about this only question that is of import, no one has written as yet.

The Declaration of Principles has been submitted to the consideration of our churches in order that they might express themselves about the question whether or not it is in harmony with the Confessions. A half a year has been wasted, and no one has as yet discussed the contents of this Declaration.

Since, however, no one has thus far discussed the contents of the Declaration of Principles, the *Standard Bearer* proposes to do so.

Chapter 1

The Nature Of The Promise, An Unconditional Oath

As to the Declaration of Principles, we will first of all discuss what is found under I, D, 2:

“That the promise of the gospel* is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.”

[The final version has “That the *preaching of the gospel* is not a gracious offer, this is a formal not a substantive change, as the gospel is the good news concerning the promise of God, which is the point both in the preaching and the sacraments. - TCM]

The first part of this paragraph is directed against the First Point of 1924. In that First Point it was declared by the synod that God is gracious to all that hear the gospel as a well-meaning offer on the part of God, in other words, that the preaching of the gospel is grace to all.

The second part, namely, that the promise of the gospel is “not a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith,” is virtually directed against the same error. The error is common grace applied to the sphere of the historical line of the covenant. This is Heynsianism. And it is at the same time the theory of the Liberated.

The question therefore is chiefly what is meant by the promise of God.

They say that the promise is conditional. We maintain that it is unconditional. They claim that the promise of God is for all that are born in the historical line of the covenant. We insist that it is for the elect alone and that it is:

“... an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.”

It will be evident that according to the conception of the Liberated faith is excluded from the promise. I am well aware that on the other hand also the Liberated teach

that faith is a gift of God, and that man of himself cannot believe, and that therefore really they also teach that faith is included in the promise. But on the other hand, they plainly insist that faith is a condition which we must fulfill in order to obtain the promise. And therefore the promise, according to them, does not include faith. This is really the old double-track theology which we have always rejected. Repeatedly I have asked them to explain this contradiction, but thus far they have never succeeded.

Let us clearly see this difference.

Is faith a condition which we must fulfill in order to obtain the promise? Or is faith included in the promise, so that God also promises faith?

Both cannot be true. It is either . . . or.

Now it certainly is Reformed, Confessionally Reformed, to say that faith is not a condition unto the promise, but that God promises faith.

And this is certainly traditionally Protestant Reformed ever since 1924. Everyone may know that we as Protestant Reformed Churches have always sounded the same note in this respect. The promise includes all of salvation, and faith is not a condition unto that promise.

I quote and translate from "*Het Evangelie*," pp. 142, 'ff.

"A promise rests only in the one that promises, the promise of the gospel rests for its certain fulfillment only in the eternal and faithful God; the gospel of the promise, is therefore eternally certain. For a promise is a written or verbal declaration, whereby he that promises is bound to do or to grant something. The gospel of the promise therefore is the glad tidings that God has bound Himself to give unto the heirs of the promise eternal life. And this leads me to the second point of difference: an offer is in its very nature general and indefinite; a promise is particular and definite. If the gospel is an offer, it is a glad tidings to all men without distinction; if the gospel is a promise, as the Scripture teaches, it is glad tidings of God only to the heirs of the promise,

"This idea, this Scriptural idea of the gospel, also determines the contents of the gospel. If according to its idea the gospel is glad tidings concerning the promise to Abraham and his seed, it follows that the gospel cannot be anything else than the proclamation of that promise. The promise is the contents of the gospel. It is nothing else. It is nothing more. It is nothing less.

Whoever preaches the gospel has to speak according to the contents of his proclamation nothing else than of this promise of God. Whoever proclaims something else is simply no minister of the gospel. *A Verbi Dei Minister* is a proclaimer of the gospel of God, or he is an intruder. And not only is it impossible that his proclamation can have another content than the promise of God, but he is also called to present that gospel as the glad tidings of a *promise* which God *surely* fulfills. Whoever makes of the promise of God an offer which for its fulfillment is dependent on the will of man distorts the gospel of God. ... And finally, this proclamation must be the glad tidings of a certain promise of God *to the heirs of the promise*. He who presents it differently, who presents the matter as if the promise of God is meant for all men, makes God a liar. For He does not realize His promise to all men; nor did He ever promise anything like salvation to all men; but He promises the inheritance only, to the heirs, Abraham and his seed, and this promise He Himself realizes as the faithful and unchangeable God.

“If the gospel is according to Scripture the glad tidings concerning the promise; it lies in the nature of the case, that the contents of this promise of God is also the contents of the holy gospel. From this point of view we may distinguish the contents of the gospel according to its objective and subjective aspect. Objectively speaking, the central contents of the promise and therefore also of the gospel is Christ and all His benefits. Christ is the realization of the promise, because God realizes His eternal covenant in and through Him. For that reason through the gospel Christ must be proclaimed in all His significance, in His incarnation, His person and natures, His offices and His relation to the covenant of God and His kingdom, in His Word, in which He revealed to us the whole counsel of God concerning our redemption, in His work, His suffering and death, His resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of the Father, His dominion and power over all things, and His return to judgment, in order to make all things, new and to subject them unto the Father.

“But there is also a subjective aspect of the gospel, which according to its contents is the realization of the promise. It also belongs to the contents of the promise that God makes us really partakers of all the benefits of salvation in Christ Jesus, and that, too, through the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Christ. For the promise is also the promise of the Holy Spirit. And this promise of the Spirit is first of all and centrally fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in and through Him also in the church which is His body. He received the promise of the Holy Spirit and poured out that Spirit in the church on the day of Pentecost. And through that Spirit He came to dwell in His own. And it is through that Spirit that He imparts Himself and all His

benefits to the church.

“Hence also all the work of the Holy Spirit belongs to the promise, to the contents of the gospel and to true gospel teaching. Regeneration and the efficacious calling through the Word unto true life and light, justification and sanctification together with perseverance unto the very end and the final glorification, life, love, faith, and hope, and all that belongs to the life of the Spirit of Christ as He realizes it in the church, – all this belongs to the contents of the promise of God to His people and must be proclaimed as the work of God, the certain work of God in us through His grace in the preaching of the gospel. You certainly detract from the work of God if you would present all this as an uncertain or conditional offer. God, Who cannot lie, has also promised these benefits to the heirs of the promise and swore with an oath that He would grant them unto them. That God fulfills the promise of the Holy Spirit to the elect, just as surely as He centrally fulfilled them in Christ, must be proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel.

“We understand very well, that the contents of salvation, that the blessing of God’s covenant and kingdom assumes a spiritual, ethical character, and that we are subsumed in the whole of the work of God unto salvation as rational, moral creatures. If the work of salvation were merely a deliverance from hell and a receiving into heaven, it could be accomplished without us in the sense that the inner life of our soul, our moral consciousness, had nothing to do with that salvation. But now it is different. Through the work of salvation we are translated from darkness into light, from death into life. Through that work a very fundamental change takes place in the very root of our life and of our person. It is a change in our judicial and spiritual, ethical relation to God! For that reason this salvation comes to us as rational, moral creatures. For that reason it comes to us through the Word of God. Through that Word God speaks unto us. Through that Word He carries the salvation into our consciousness. He addresses us. He directs that Word to our intellect. Through that Word He addresses our will. He teaches, illuminates, instructs, reveals, warns, demands, admonishes, calls unto the obedience of the gospel, invites, draws, even prays, encourages and comforts, exhorts and calls to the fight of faith unto the end. Never are we stocks and blocks. Also the proclamation of the gospel ever places us before the inevitable: Yea and No! And seeing that this proclamation of the gospel reaches many more persons than the elect, the ungodly reprobate are also compelled to say *yes* and *no*, sin is revealed as being really sin, and God is being justified when He judges. But this does not change the fact, that the preaching of the gospel is not a general offer of God to all men, but the proclamation of the contents of the promise,... which God certainly fulfills only to the heirs of the promise.”

This, and not the theory that faith is a *condition* to obtain the promise is Protestant Reformed language. It has always been Protestant Reformed since 1924

Nor can anyone deduce a different sound from a quotation from my “Abundant Mercy”, p. 171, to which also the Rev. Blankespoor refers.

Let me offer the full quotation:

“Nor is the relation between faith and justification to be conceived and presented as that of a benefit on God’s part and a condition on our part. This, too, is often alleged. God saves and justifies us on condition that we believe. Superficially considered, it might seem as if there were truth in this assertion. Is it not true that we must believe in order to be saved? *If* we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be justified; if not, we shall be damned. It appears, then, that justification is conditioned by faith.

“Yet this cannot be the relation. First of all, it should be remembered that objective justification is before faith, Objectively, we are justified regardless of our faith. In eternal election all those given Christ by the Father are righteous before God forever. And this righteousness cannot be contingent upon faith, even though it is true that we cannot appropriate this gift of righteousness except by a true and living faith. Besides, long before we believe, the justification of all the elect is accomplished forever in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, secondly, although it is true that justification in the subjective sense is contingent upon faith, we must never forget that faith is not of ourselves, it is a gift of God. It is therefore not a condition which we must fulfill in order to be justified: God Himself fulfills all the conditions of salvation.”

How anyone can deduce from these paragraphs that I teach that faith is a condition unto justification, whether in the objective or in the subjective sense of the word, is a mystery to me. It is true that I say that justification in the subjective sense is contingent upon faith. But in the first place, it is very plain that I teach here that faith is not a condition even of justification in the subjective sense. And secondly, although the word contingent is probably not a happy term, it certainly does not have the meaning of condition in this connection. I take it here in the sense of dependence upon a cause which is beyond our control. And that cause is faith which God works in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. When God fulfills all the conditions, there are certainly no conditions which we must fulfill at all.

Once more I want to emphasize that this is Protestant Reformed language, and has

always been.

But the Declaration of Principles does not claim to be based on Protestant Reformed tradition; but on the Three Forms of Unity pure and simple. And therefore the question is further, whether this truth, that the promise of God is “an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith,” is Reformed in the confessional sense of the word.

In parentheses let me emphasize that this Declaration of Principles was not composed as a certain fourth form for our churches, but that it was simply meant as a basis for the work of our missionaries in the organization of new churches. In our discussion this has almost been lost sight of, but it is nevertheless true. And it is well to be reminded of this fact. Nevertheless, also such a basis for the organization of prospective Protestant Reformed Churches must, of course, be based four-squarely on our Confessions. And therefore the question is certainly whether this statement, that the promise is an oath of God which He infallibly fulfills unto all the elect, is based four-squarely on the Three Forms of Unity.

That this is indeed the case can be very easily proved. This we do in II, A, of the Declaration. There we read:

“That election, which is the unconditional and unchangeable decree of God to redeem in Christ a certain number of persons, is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation, whence flow all the gifts of grace, including faith. This is the plain teaching of our confession in the Canons of Dordrecht, I, A, 6, 7.”

“Art. 6. That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree, (by the way, this plainly shows that the decree of God is the fountain from which all the benefits of salvation, including faith, flow –HH), *‘For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,’* Acts 15:8. *‘Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will,’* Eph. 1:11. According to which decree, he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate; and inclines them to believe, while he leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men, equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious soul affords unspeakable consolation.”

And again: “Art. 7. Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the

sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation...”

And again: “...This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in the common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of his glorious grace; as it is written: *‘According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.’* Eph. 1:4, 5, 6. And elsewhere: *‘Whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, .them he also, justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified.’* Rom. 8:30.”

Now first of all, I want to call the attention of our readers to the fact that this has nothing to do with the question concerning *supra* or *infra*. The Confessions, as we all know are *infralapsarian*, representing therefore the mildest form of the doctrine of predestination. And that we quote from the *infralapsarian* confession is, plain from the following quotations: “And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men *equally involved in ruin*.” And again, God has “chosen from the whole human race; which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction.” And once more: “This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in the common misery, God hath decreed to give to, Christ.” These quotations abundantly show that the confession is *infralapsarian*. And as far as the Declaration of Principles is concerned, we are quite willing to leave them thus. Hence, the question of *supralapsarianism* and *infralapsarianism* has nothing to do with the Declaration of Principles.

Yet these quotations, especially the last one, plainly prove that the promise of God is an oath that He will infallibly lead the elect, unto salvation in Christ through faith, and that it is unconditional.

You say, perhaps, that these quotations do not speak of the promise, but of the decree of God concerning the promise.

And that is certainly true.

But surely you cannot separate the realization of the promise from the decree of the promise. When our fathers say in Art. 7 of the Canons that “he hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and to draw them into his communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of his glorious grace,” it means, of course, that this is the promise of God to the elect and to no one else, an oath of God based upon His secret decree that He will lead His people infallibly unto salvation in Christ.

The moment you speak of conditions in the realization of the promise of God you certainly must project those conditions in the decree. This is inevitable. And the moment you make the promise, and also, therefore, the decree of God concerning the promise conditional, you have become Arminian. The Arminians teach that God has chosen with an infallible and unchangeable decree those that would believe in Christ. That is projecting the condition of faith into the decree. And that demands, of course, that also the promise and the realization of the promise is conditional. And this Arminianism we certainly must not have. Hence, we claim that the proposition of I, D, 2 of the Declaration is certainly true and correct and based upon our Confessions, namely: “That the promise of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, not a conditional offer of salvation to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.”

But there is more proof for this proposition.

The Declaration of Principles also quotes from the doctrinal part of the Form for Baptism as follows:

“For when we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized in the name of the Son, the Son sealeth unto us, that he doth wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God. In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy

sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.”

All this is God’s part of the covenant, not ours.

And that it is sure and unconditional is very evident from the language of this part of our Baptism Form throughout.

God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that is, the elect, that He doth make an eternal covenant of grace, that He adopts us for His children and heirs, that He will provide us with every good thing and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. This covenant God establishes alone. It is absolutely a unilateral covenant. He establishes it not on condition, of faith, but unconditionally.

Then, in baptism the Son sealeth unto us that He doth wash us in His blood from all our sins, He incorporates us into the fellowship of His death, and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins and accounted righteous before God. All this is the part of the covenant which the Son seals unto us. And He does so without any condition on the part of man. In other words, baptism seals the complete and full promise unto the elect.

Finally, according to the Baptism Form, baptism also seals unto us that the Holy Ghost will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us that which we have in Christ, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

We know how Heyns, also quoted by the *Liberated* evades the stringency of this plain language by separating in the Baptism Form the work of the Father and the Son from that of the Holy Spirit. According to him, when the Father assures us that He establishes His covenant with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and when the Son in baptism seals unto us that He washes us in His blood and incorporates us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, this must be regarded as an objective bequest to all that are baptized, and not only to the elect. But when in the last part of this same passage of the Baptism Form we read that the Holy Ghost assures us by this, holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, he wants to, emphasize that word WILL: implying that this is not sure to all, but that it depends on the question whether we will accept our covenant obligation by faith. Hence, also Heyns wants to exclude faith from the promise.

But this, of course, is a distortion of the meaning of the Baptism Form, as ought to be plain to all. We cannot so separate the work of the Father and the Son from that of the Holy Spirit. Besides, when the Baptism Form says that by baptism the Holy Ghost assures us that He will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us that which we have in, Christ, it certainly means that in baptism the elect have the indubitable promise that the Holy Ghost will give them the true and living faith. Faith, therefore, is not presented as a condition at all, but is included in the promise. Faith is not a condition unto the promise, but God promises unto us the, entire realization of the covenant, including faith.

And therefore, we claim that we teach nothing new, nothing extra-confessional, but only that which is based four-squarely on our Three Forms of Unity, when we claim that the promise of God is not an offer of salvation, nor a conditional offer to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.

We have more to say about this question, especially also in connection with the promiscuous declaration of the promise to all that hear the gospel.

But about this next time, the Lord willing. H H.

Chapter 2

A Particular Promise For the Elect alone

That the promise of the gospel is not “a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith,” is by no means contradicted, but rather confirmed by what is stated in Canons II. A, 5. There we read:

“Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.”

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, 1924, appealed to this part of the Confession to support its doctrine of common grace. According to this theory the promise of the gospel is a well-meaning offer on the part of God to all that hear, and is therefore grace to all to whom the gospel is preached.

But in this the Synod was utterly mistaken.

Note, first of all, how the promise of the gospel is here described: “. . . The promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

To be sure, the viewpoint here is different from that of the quotations we made before from the Canons and from the Baptism Form. It evidently refers to the promise as *preached*, rather than to the promise essentially. And as such the promise is heard in a saving sense, received, and appropriated, only by faith. In the second place, do not overlook the fact that the promise is here presented not in all its contents, but only as everlasting life. It has in mind only the promise of the goal, and not that of the means to reach the goal. Hence, it is said that the promise is that they who receive it shall have eternal life and not perish, and, that it concerns only those that believe in Christ.

Now the question is: does the preaching of the promise, according to this canon, make the promise a conditional offer, dependent on any prerequisite which man must fulfill in order to obtain the promise? Or does also this canon, when read in the

light of its context, present the promise as an unconditional oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation in Christ through faith?

The promise might indeed be said to be a conditional offer, if it, that is, the promise, or even the preaching of the promise, did not include more than the goal of eternal life.

But this is certainly not the case.

The promise of God, and even the preaching of the promise, also includes all that is necessary to reach that goal. It includes the gift of the Holy Spirit: and therefore, it includes the application of all the benefits of salvation to the elect. The promise includes the gift of faith. That this is the meaning is plain at once if we read Canons II, A, 5 in the light of what follows in the same chapter.

In Art. 7 we read: “But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God, given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own:”

And in Art. 8: “For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father; that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it is the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever.”

Here, too, it is evident that according to the Reformed Confessions the promise is all-inclusive. For to be sure, the promise of the gospel is a declaration of the eternal will of God to save the elect. It is, according to this article of the Canons, the declaration, of the will of God that He should redeem out of every nation, tribe, and tongue all the elect, and them alone; that He should confer upon the elect the gift of saving faith, and upon them alone; that He should confer upon the elect, and upon them alone, all the saving gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ purchased for them,

that He should purge them from original and actual sins, and should lead them infallibly to everlasting glory. Such is the, eternal will of God, and such is the declaration of the Promise in the gospel, as we have it in Scripture. It is, therefore, all-inclusive.

Hence, Canons II, A, 5, in the light of the context, cannot possibly mean that the promise of everlasting life is a conditional offer. But it teaches:

1. That the preaching of the promise is as to its contents particular: the promise of eternal life is not for all that hear the gospel. Nor is the promise for all that are baptized. But it is particular, that is, for all that believe in Christ.
2. That God includes in the promise the gift of faith Which He bestows only on the elect.
3. That therefore the promise is an oath of God by which He leads the elect infallibly to salvation. Only the elect believe. The promise is only for them. And them God leads infallibly to everlasting life and glory.

To this Canons II, A, 5 adds:

1. That this particular promise must be proclaimed generally, or promiscuously, to all that hear the gospel. The gospel is proclaimed by men, and therefore it cannot be preached to the elect alone: And even if it were possible that men could preach only to the elect, this certainly is not the will of God. According to the revelation of Scripture it is evident that it is the will of God that not only the elect, but also the reprobate, shall hear the preaching of the gospel, in order that God may be justified, and sin may become revealed as sin indeed.
2. That it must be proclaimed together with the command to repent and believe. The expression “the command to repent and believe” is by no means the same as saying “the condition of faith and repentance.” When we speak of a condition, the implication is that, God offers the sinner something which he can receive providing he first fulfills the condition of faith and repentance. But a command is unconditional. Unbelief is sin. And not to repent means to walk and continue to walk in, the way of sin. The natural man has no right to live in unbelief and sin before God. Hence, God commands him to believe and to repent, unconditionally. And by the preaching of the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe, the sin of the natural man is sharply revealed and aggravated, and God is justified when He judgeth. Faith however, is a gift of grace. And by that gift of faith the believer fulfills his part of the covenant. He does believe and repent indeed. He walks in a new obedience, and by faith cleaves to the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and

trusts in Him and loves Him with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, forsakes the world, crucifies his old nature; and walks in a new and holy life.

And finally, this same canon teaches that this gospel is preached wherever and to whomever God sends it, and that, too, according to His good pleasure. Even the gospel is not preached to all men. Many there are that never hear the gospel. This is true of thousands upon thousands of heathen, that lived and still live outside of the pale of Christendom. And besides, it is true of many children that die in infancy and are nevertheless saved without hearing the preaching of the gospel, because they, as well as the adults, are included in the covenant of God.

In the meantime we have already proceeded with our discussion of the Declaration of Principles to what is found under II, B. There the Declaration states:

“That Christ died only, for the elect, and that the saving efficacy of the death of Christ extends to them only. This is evident from the Canons of Dordrecht, II, A, 8.”

Ad then we quote from the confessions this same eighth article of Canons II, to which we already referred above. From this article we briefly conclude in the Declaration:

“1. That all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone.

“2. That God’s promise is unconditionally for them only: for God cannot promise what was not objectively merited by Christ.

“3. That the promise of God bestows the objective right of salvation not upon all the children that are born under the historical, dispensation of the covenant, that is, not upon all that are baptized, but only upon the spiritual seed.”

Let us briefly elucidate these three items quoted from the Declaration.

As to the first of these three items, the truth of this ought to be evident to all that can read and are willing to subscribe to the Reformed Confessions. That all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone, is literally stated in so many words in the article of the Canons to which we referred above. For the article states that it is the most gracious will and purpose of God the Father:

“that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation.”

And again, the article states that: “it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing, and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his presence forever.”

This point, therefore, needs no further explanation.

As to “2” this reflects upon the Heynsian view of the promise. According to Heyns, and also according to the Liberated God’s promise is an objective bequest to all the children that are baptized. It is compared to a testament in which a father has bequeathed a certain sum of money which is deposited in the bank, and which every one of his children, head for head, may draw from the bank upon his decease. So God has written the names of all the children, head for head, that are baptized, and that are born in the historical line of the covenant in His testament, sealed by the death of Christ. They, in other words, all have a check in their pocket, which they may cash in the bank of heaven. This promise God seals, that is, swears by an oath unto all the baptized children in the sacrament of baptism. Such is the meaning of the objective promise to all the children that are born in the line of the historical dispensation of the covenant. So far the Liberated agree with Heyns. That this is true is evident from the quotations we made in our last number of the *Standard Bearer*, the quotations from Dr. Bremmer in the *Reformatie* and from Prof. Veenhof in his Appel.

[For Schilder see Part 3, A. 1 “Schilder and ther Declaration”

For Bremmer see Part 4: Appendix, B, 1,

For Veenhof see Part 3, B. Response to Schilder, Chapters 1 and 3 - TCM]

According to both Heyns and the Liberated, however, there is a condition Attached to this promise. This condition is faith and obedience, or repentance. They differ, as we have pointed out repeatedly, at least Dr. Schilder differs, in regard to the question of preparatory grace. According to Heyns, all baptized children have sufficient grace either to accept or reject: the promise, to bring forth good fruits of repentance or stinking fruits of unbelief. It is this preparatory grace that distinguishes the baptized children from the children of the world, according to Heyns. The liberated, as far, as we know, do not subscribe to this particular theory of Heyns.

However, they stand before the question, which has never been answered, whether or not faith is included in the promise of God. That it is, is very evident from the doctrinal part of the Baptism Form, where we read:

“In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by, this holy sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.”

The application of all that we have in Christ certainly includes the gift of faith. It therefore is undoubtedly part of the promise of God to us. But if this is true, how is it possible that faith can be a condition unto the promise? Is the condition of faith a prerequisite unto the gift of faith? Evidently this is absurd. But if faith is not included in the promise, the question is: where does it come from? For there is no gift of God which is not promised us. Yet, the Liberated insist that faith is a gift of God, and that it is not of us. This problem, then, they have never solved. And therefore, we would like to have them answer the question: is faith as a condition, a prerequisite unto the promise of faith?

In distinction from all this the Protestant Reformed believe and maintain on the basis of the Confession, including the Baptism Form:

1. That, God cannot promise what is not objectively merited by Christ. And according to Art 8, He merited all the blessings of salvation for the elect only. Atonement is particular, limited only to the elect. There is; therefore, to use the figure of the testament or the bequest that is deposited in the bank, no capital for all the children that are baptized in the bank. God does not issue false checks. The promise, therefore, and all the blessings of salvation, are for the elect alone.
2. This promise includes the gift of faith. This also is literally stated in the article. from the Canons which we quoted above: “that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for I them by his death.”
3. Faith, therefore, is not a condition, but belongs to the fulfillment of the promise, and is a God-given means or instrument whereby the elect may lay hold on and appropriate the promise of eternal life and glory.

And therefore we conclude

“that the promise of God bestows the objective right of salvation not upon all the children that are born under the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, not upon all that are, baptized, but only upon the spiritual seed.”

The Declaration continues:

“This is also evident from other parts of our confession, as, for instance:

“Heidelberg Catechism, Qu. 65: ‘Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.’”

“And in Qu. 66: ‘What are the sacraments? The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, he may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, viz., that he grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross.’”

“If we compare with these statements from the Heidelberger what was taught concerning the saving efficacy of the death of Christ in Canons II, A, 8, it is evident that the promise of the gospel which is sealed by the sacraments concerns only the believers, that is, the elect. ”

This last statement also ought to be very, evident. The point we wish to make here is that the promise is unconditionally not for all, neither for all the children that are born of believing parents, but only for believers, that is, for the elect. Now Art. 8, of Canons II, A, emphasized “that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation.” And again, in the same article we read that it was the will of God to redeem “all those, and those only who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death.”

Now Qu. 66 of the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the sacraments, and tells us that they are “appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, he may more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, viz., that he grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal.” And the question is: who are meant by the personal pronoun *us* in this answer of the Heidelberg Catechism? Does that, refer to all that are born under the historical dispensation of the covenant, in other words, to

all that are baptized? Or does it refer to believers, and therefore, to the elect? The answer is plain: the latter only can be meant. And therefore, both baptism and the Lord's, Supper are sacraments which God has appointed for the purpose of sealing unto His own people, the believers, the elect, the promise of the gospel. And therefore the promise of the gospel is only for them.

But there is more in the Declaration this point. It continues:

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

“That in this question, and answer of the Heidelberger not all the children that are baptized, but, only the spiritual children, that is, the elect, are meant is evident. For:

“1. Little infants surely cannot fulfill any conditions. And if the promise of God is for them, the promise is infallible and unconditional, and therefore only for the elect.

“2. According to Canons II, A, 8, which we quoted above, the saving efficacy of the death of Christ is for the elect alone.

“3. According to this answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Holy Ghost; the author of faith, is promised to the little children no less than to the adult. And God surely fulfills His promise. Hence, that promise is surely only for the elect.”

I want to place all the emphasis in this connection on the element that the promise is unconditional. For if it were not, a little child, an infant, could never be said to have the promise of God.

Let us take for example an infant at the moment that it is baptized, say a child of two weeks old. The question is: does that little child have the promise that he is redeemed from in by the blood of Christ? Does God promise to that infant that the Holy Ghost will dwell in him, and that God through the Holy Spirit will give unto that infant the true and saving faith, and, therefore all the benefits of salvation? Or,

as the Baptism Form has it, does God assure to that child that the Holy Ghost will dwell in it and sanctify it to be member of Christ, and apply unto it all that which it has in Christ, namely, the washing away of sins, and the daily renewal of its life, until it shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal? Moreover, let us presuppose, as certainly is very well possible, and as certainly we may assume that in the covenant it is most generally the case, that God fulfills His promise of salvation and the Holy Spirit unto that child, either before or during or immediately after baptism. Then it must be *very* evident that the promise which God gave to that child is absolutely unconditional. That Child certainly cannot hear the gospel. It cannot hear or understand the demand of repentance and faith. Hence, to that little infant the promise of God is surely unconditional. If we don't want to fall into the error of the Baptist, then we certainly must maintain and teach that faith and repentance are not conditions unto the promise and unto our entering into the covenant of God, but that the promise of God is unconditional. Suppose, moreover, that that same infant dies when it is a half year old. Then God will surely realize all the benefits of salvation to that child that has never been able to fulfill any conditions whatsoever.

Nor can you possibly maintain that although the promise is unconditional for little children, it nevertheless becomes conditional when the children grow up and become adolescents and adults. To be sure, when that child grows up and comes to years of discretion and understanding, it will assume its part of the covenant of God, cleave to the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, love Him with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, forsake the world, crucify its old nature, and walk in a new and holy life. But that is not a condition, but is the fruit of the salvation which God according to His promise has first bestowed upon that child. There are not two different ways of salvation, an unconditional way for the child, for the little infant, and a conditional way for the adult. But there is only one way. And that one way is the way of sovereign grace which God bestows without any conditions upon all His elect. Hence, we maintain that the promise is not for all, not even for all the children that are born of believing parents, but that it is for the elect alone; for the spiritual seed, and: unconditional. H . H.

Chapter 3

Faith Included In The Promise, Confered According To promise

“Redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to infants no less than to the adults.”

Thus the Declaration of Principles quotes from the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 74.

Attend, please, closely to the meaning of these words, and you will surely acknowledge that the promise is not conditional and cannot possibly be.

What is meant, in these words by the promise?

Is it a prediction of what God will do in the future?

The answer is, and must be, negative.

For, first of all, it is a distortion of the term to say: a promise is a prediction. The promise, of course, includes a prediction and often does. Thus it is with respect to the promise of the first coming of Christ as well as with “the promise of His coming” the second time. But even then, the main idea is not a prediction, but a *promise*, a pledge, an oath of God that He will surely save His people, and, therefore, “is vowed only to the elect. The destruction of Jerusalem is also a prediction, so is the destruction of Babylon, but this surely cannot be called a promise to those cities. A promise, therefore, though it may be predicted as to its certain fulfillment, can never be called a prediction.

And that the promise is, indeed, an oath of God to lead the elect infallibly unto salvation is taught us in so many words in Heb. 6:16-18: “For men verily swear by the greater; and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew *unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel*, confirmed it by, an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled, for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

Secondly, that the promise meant in question and answer 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism, cannot refer to a prediction of what God will do in the future, but is a pledge of God that He surely will fulfill His promise and that, too, unconditionally, is evident from the fact that, in this answer, the promise is said to be for infants no

less than for the adults.

Now, in the first place, many of those little children die in infancy, and if the promise is a prediction, the fulfillment of which must wait until those that are comprehended in the covenant of God come to years of discretion and are in a position to fulfill the conditions, it certainly has no meaning for them.

But, secondly, it lies in the very nature of the covenant dispensation that God fulfills His promise of salvation in the majority, yea, in by far the majority of them, in infancy, before there can be any question of conditions. I say that this lies in the very nature of the covenant dispensation. Why would God place His covenant children in the sphere of His covenant, where the Word of God has its influence, where the child is brought into contact with the promise of the gospel, where the operations of the Holy Spirit are dominant, I say, why should God place His children in that sphere for the first few years of their life, in fact, until they can fulfill conditions, as *dead children*? I say, therefore, that it lies in the nature of the covenant dispensation, that God fulfills His promise, in by far the majority of cases, in infancy, In infancy He gives them His Holy Spirit, in infancy He regenerates them and implants into their heart the power, the faculty of faith, in order that from infancy they may be under the saving influence of the Holy Spirit and the gospel in the sphere of the covenant. The promise is, therefore, not a prediction of what God will do: in some future time, but an oath of God, an immutable pledge that He will lead the elect infallibly to salvation.

Besides, this is also a matter of general experience in the covenant of God. You ask any normal covenant child that belongs to the children of the promise, when he comes to years of discretion, whether he is conscious of any particular moment or time in his life when he was converted, or when he began to believe in the God of his salvation, and he will reply in the negative. But you ask him whether he believes that he is converted, and whether he has a sincere desire to walk in the way of God's covenant, he will just as surely answer positively. In other words, his experience is that, God fulfilled His promise unto him all his life-long, even before he was conscious of it, and surely before he could fulfill any conditions. It is, therefore, quite contrary to the general experience of normal covenant children to say that the promise of God is a prediction which God will fulfill in some future time, when the covenant child comes to years of discretion, and when he is capable of fulfilling conditions.

And what is the contents of the promise according to the 74th answer of the Heidelberg Catechism? It is "redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith." Also this shows very clearly that the promise is unconditional, and that faith is not a condition in order to obtain the promise. It

might conceivably be said that the promise is conditioned by faith, if it included only the redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, although even this is not true. But now the promise is said to include also the Holy Ghost as the author of faith, the very possibility of presenting faith as a condition to receive the realization of the promise is ruled out. For what is first: the effect or the cause? You answer: the cause. What is first: the author or that which he works? You say: the author. Very well. It follows: 1. that the promise includes the gift of the Holy Ghost; 2. that the promise includes the gift of faith; 3. that faith is the fruit of the realization of the promise, and cannot be a condition for receiving the promise. It is a means, a God-given means, whereby we may and do lay hold on all the blessings of salvation included in the promise of God. Faith cannot be a condition to receive faith.

That faith is nothing but an instrument or means whereby God brings us into saving contact with all the benefits of Christ, is the language of our Confessions throughout.

It is safe to adhere to the plain language of our confessions rather than to introduce all kind's of questionable innovations. That God actually fulfills His promise of the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, to, children as well as to adults, and that, therefore, little children have the faith before they can hear the preaching of the gospel, and before they can fulfill any, conditions, is also the conviction of Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, who, in his exposition of question and answer 74, writes as follows:

“But, say our opponents, the church ought to be satisfied with the profession of faith. This we admit, and we would add, that to be born in the church; is, to infants, the same thing as a profession of faith. Faith is, indeed, necessary to the use of baptism with this distinction. Actual faith is required in adults, and an inclination to faith in infants. There are, therefore, four terms in this syllogism, or there is a fallacy in understanding that as spoken particularly, which must be understood generally. Those who do not believe, that is, who have no faith at all, neither by profession nor by inclination, are not to be baptized. But those who are born of believing parents have faith as to inclination. We also deny the minor proposition; for infants do believe after their manner, or according to the condition of their age; they have an inclination to faith. Faith is in infants potentially and by inclination, although not actually as in adults. For, as infants born of ungodly parents who are without the church, have no actual wickedness, but only an inclination thereto, so those who are born of godly parents have no actual holiness, but only an inclination to it; not according to nature, but according to the grace of the covenant. And still further: infants have the Holy Ghost, and are regenerated by him. John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb, and Jeremiah is said to have been sanctified before

he came out of the womb. (Luke 1:15, Jer. 1:5) If infants now have the Holy Ghost, he certainly works in them regeneration, good inclinations, new desires, and such other things as are necessary for their salvation, or he at least supplies them with every thing that is requisite for their baptism, according to the declaration of peter. ‘Can any man forbid water to them who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? It is for this reason that Christ enumerates little children among those that believe, saying, ‘Who shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me.’ (Matt. 18:6) In as much now as infants are fit subjects for baptism, they do not profane it as the Anabaptists wickedly affirm.”

The Declaration, therefore, is perfectly correct, and stands entirely on the basis of the confession, when it states that “the promise is infallible and unconditional; and therefore only for the elect.”

The Declaration continues:

“The same is taught in the Netherlands Confession, Articles 33-35. In Article 33 we read:

“We believe that our gracious God, on account of our weakness and infirmities hath ordained the sacraments for us, thereby to seal unto us his promises, and also to be pledges of the good will and grace of God toward us, and also to nourish and strengthen our faith; which he hath joined to the Word of the gospel, the better to present to our senses, both that which he signifies to us by his Word, all that which he inwardly works in our hearts, thereby assuring and confirming in us the salvation which he imparts to us. For they are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God worketh in us the power of the Holy Ghost. Therefore the signs are not vain or insignificant, so as to deceive us. For Jesus Christ is the true object presented by them, without whom they would be of no moment.”

Now, notice in the first place, that this article of our Confession speaks of the sacraments in general, and, therefore, of baptism as,well as of the Lord’s Supper.

Notice, in the second place, that both the sacraments, baptism as well as the Lord’s Supper, are said to nourish and strengthen our faith. They, therefore, are certainly for believers. Without faith, the sacraments, to be sure, are not vain, no more than the preaching of the Word is ever vain, but they have no saving efficacy. They are a savor of death unto death.

Notice, thirdly, that the sacraments are said to seal, the promises of God. The

question now is: what is implied in these promises of God. Do these promises, that are signified and, sealed by the sacraments, only imply the objective salvation, redemption through the blood of Christ, or do they include the actual impartition of that salvation, regeneration, calling, faith, etc.. ? The latter, for the article plainly states that the sacraments also present to our senses “that which he inwardly works in our hearts; thereby assuring and confirming in us the salvation which he imparts to us.” In other words, the promise of God includes the gift of faith, and since faith is included in the promise, it cannot be a condition unto the promise. Moreover, since faith is wrought only in the elect, it is evident that the promise is not for all, nor for all the children that are born under the historical dispensation of the covenant, but for the elect alone.

God, therefore, fulfills His promise infallibly and unconditionally and in the elect only.

In article 34 of the same confession we read:

“We believe. and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law, hath made an end, by the shedding of his blood, of all other sheddings of blood which men could or would make as a propitiation or satisfaction for sin: and that he, having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, hath instituted the sacrament of baptism instead thereof; by which we are received into the church of God, and separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to him, whose ensign and banner we bear: and which serves as a testimony to us that he will forever, be our gracious God and Father. Therefore he has commanded all those, who are his, to be baptized with pure water, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:” thereby signifying to us, that as water washeth away the filth of the body, when poured upon it, and is seen on the body of the baptized, when sprinkled upon him; so doth the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerates us from children of wrath. Not that this is effected by the external water, but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God; who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass, to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is the devil, and to enter into the spiritual land of Canaan. Therefore the ministers, on their part, administer the sacrament, and that which is visible, but our Lord giveth that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing, and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts, and filling them with all comfort; giving unto us a true assurance of his fatherly goodness; putting on us the new man, and putting off the old man with his seeds.”

Now let us read this, first of all; in connection with what was said of the sacraments in general.

In the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 66 we read that the sacraments are visible signs and seals of the promise of the gospel. In the Netherlands Confession we read that the sacraments seal unto us the promises of God.

Again the question is: what is the promise? What is included in the promise? Does it imply only the objective bequest of salvation, or does it include also the application of that salvation, including, therefore, the gift of faith, by the Holy Spirit?

Evidently, according to the above quoted article of the Confession, it includes everything; the whole of salvation. For the promise that is signified and sealed in the sacrament of baptism means that “the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, doth internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerates us from children of wrath, unto children of God.” It signifies, moreover, the promise of “the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing, purging our souls from all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts; and filling them with all comfort; giving unto us a true assurance of his fatherly goodness; putting on us the new man; and putting off the old man with all his deeds.”

All this is, included in the promise of God.

The promise, therefore, includes faith.

And again I ask: How, then, can faith be a condition unto the promise? Is faith a condition for the gift of faith? Or is the act of believing a condition for regeneration? Is the act of faith a condition for God’s putting on us the new man and putting off the old man? All this is simply absurd. Hence, the promise of God is absolutely unconditional.

And by the same token, the promise of God is not for all, nor even for all that are born in the historical line of the covenant, but only for the spiritual seed, that is, for the elect.

That this is true is, besides, evident from the very wording of the above quoted articles. Do not overlook the fact these articles are part of a confession of faith. And confessions are not made by unbelievers, or by the reprobate, but by believers or by the elect. Now, that the believing Church speaks in these articles, that it speaks about the promises of God, and about these promises *being sealed to them* alone is very plain from the very wording of these articles. Throughout they use personal pronouns *we, us, and our*. God is *our gracious* God, He has ordained the sacraments

on account of our weakness and infirmities, to seal unto us his promises, and to be pledges of His good will toward us, as well as to strengthen *our faith*. By the sacraments He presents to our senses that which He inwardly works in *our* hearts, and confirms in *us* the salvation, which He imparts to *us*. By means of them He works in *us* the power of the Holy Ghost. By means of the sacrament of baptism we are received into the church of God; that we may wholly belong to Him. Baptism serves as a testimony to us that He will forever be our gracious God and Father, and it signifies that He regenerates us. In baptism our Lord giveth that which is signified by the sacrament, purging our souls from filth and unrighteousness, renewing our hearts, giving unto us a true assurance of his fatherly goodness, and putting on us the new man and putting off the old man with all his deeds.

Substitute for all these personal pronouns of the first person that of the third, or again, substitute for them the term all head for head,” or “all that are born in the historical line of the covenant,” and you will find that you corrupt the confessions. But substitute for them terms like “the believers,” or “the spiritual seed,” and, therefore, *the elect*, and you will preserve the truth of the confession, though, by doing so, you mar its personal note.

Hence, also from these parts of the Confession, it is evident that the promise of God is unconditional and, only for the elect.

And, therefore, the Declaration continues:

“That all this, washing and cleansing and purging of our souls of all filth and unrighteousness, the renewal of our hearts is only the fruit of the saving efficacy of the death of Christ and therefore is only for the elect is very evident. The same is true of what we read in the same article of the baptism of infants: And indeed Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for the adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that, which Christ hath done for them; as the Lord commanded in the law, that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ’s suffering and death, shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ. Moreover, what circumcision was to the Jews, that baptism is to our children. And for this reason Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ.”

If according to Art. 8 of the Second Head of Doctrine, A, in the Canons, the saving efficacy of the death of Christ extends only to the elect, it follows that when in this article of the Netherlands Confession it is stated that Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful than for the adult person, also here the reference is to the elect children.

Moreover, that the promise of the gospel which God signifies and seals in the sacraments is not for all is also abundantly evident from Art. 35 of the same Netherlands Confession, which speaks of the Holy supper, of our Lord Jesus Christ. For there we read:

“We believe and confess, that our Savior Jesus Christ did ordain and institute the sacrament of the holy supper, to nourish and support those whom he hath already regenerated and incorporated into his family, which is his Church.”

In the same article we read:

“Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless both are not received by all men: the ungodly receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of this sacrament. As Judas and Simon the sorcerer, both indeed received the sacrament, but not Christ, who was signified by it, of whom believers only are made partakers.”

It follows from that that both the sacraments, as well as the preaching of the ‘gospel, are a savor of death unto death for the reprobate, as well as a savor of life unto life. for the elect. Hence, the promise of God, preached of the gospel, signified and sealed in both the sacraments, is not for all, but for the elect only.

Thus teaches the Declaration.

There is more of this, but about this next time, D.V. H. H.

Chapter 4

Faith An Instrument of Grace, Not A Condition

I think that thus far I have clearly shown from the Confessions that the promise of God is unconditional, that it is meant only for the elect, whether you conceive of them as in the counsel of God or as believers, that is, as those in whose heart God efficaciously works faith; and that therefore faith is not a condition, but a mere instrument or means of God whereby the elect are brought into saving contact, with the promise of God.

We will now continue the Declaration, for it can only be beneficial that our churches are thoroughly acquainted with its truth.

The declaration continues as follows:

“And that the election of God, and consequently the efficacy of the death of Christ and the promise of the gospel, is not conditional is evident abundantly from the following articles of the Canons.

“Canons I, A, 10: ‘The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election; which doth not, consist herein; that out of all possible qualities and actions of men God has chosen some as a condition of salvation; but that he was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to himself, as it is written, ‘For the children being not yet born neither having done any good or evil,’ etc., it was said (namely to Rebecca) ‘the elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.’ Rom. 9:11,12,13. ‘And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.’ Acts 13:48.”

In the, first place, let me remark that in this article of the Canons the word *cause* occurs, which, according to Prof. Schilder, can refer only to time, and not to eternity. But in this article the word *cause* occurs evidently as referring to the eternal counsel of God: “The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election.”

But what I wish to emphasize in this connection is especially the fact that in this article for the first the the term *conditions* is put in the mouth of the Remonstrants. They taught that out all possible qualities and actions of men God has chosen some as a condition of salvation.” Now it is well known to what the Remonstrants referred by these conditions. They meant that foreseen faith and obedience and faithfulness and perseverance are conditions in the counsel of God unto salvation. And it stands

to reason that if foreseen faith on the part of man is a condition of salvation in the counsel of God, it must be so in actual reality. The Rev. J. G. Feenstra in his *“De Dordtsche Leerregelen”* writes on this article of the Canons as follows:

“The Remonstrants maintain very nicely the name: good pleasure. The Bible does the same thing. And they want to appear as angels of light. When they come on wooden shoes, you hear them come, and that may not be allowed. They taught, that the pleasure of God consists in this; that God out of all possible conditions chose the act of faith and obedience. Rejection of Errors, I, 3. That God did not demand heavier conditions is according to His good pleasure. That He reckoned the incomplete as complete, is according to His good pleasure. But the conditions remain. And with this the entire thought of the good pleasure is completely removed.”

And again he writes:

“The good pleasure of God excludes every condition, all merit and fitness. Good pleasure is unconditional. God chose out of the corrupt human race whomever He will. And He does not have to give account to us. And of no one did He ask counsel. We cannot check up on God. We may not criticize Him, nor may we defend Him, for both are sinful.”

This is indeed Reformed language, and clearly teaches that there are no, conditions on the part of man which he must fulfill in order to obtain salvation at all.

The Declaration continues:

“In Canons I, B, 2, the errors are repudiated of those who teach “That there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive and absolute”

The meaning of this is plain. It is based upon the same teaching of the Remonstrants that God elected on the ground of foreseen faith. Hence, they teach that election is in the first place! general and indefinite. This, of course, would include all men: in a certain sense all men are elected. For the death of Christ is meant for all men without distinction. There is no particular atonement. On the other hand, election is also called particular and definite, that is: God chose those of whom He foresaw that they would believe in Christ. But even this election is not decisive. It is either “incomplete, revocable, non-decisive and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive and absolute.” For when you once introduce

conditions into the salvation of man and into the counsel of God, you must keep that salvation and counsel conditional to the very end. It is not only election on foreseen faith which the Remonstrants taught, but that faith can be lost and the believer can become faithless. And therefore election is also based on foreseen obedience and foreseen perseverance. And therefore, it remains conditional until the end. Upon condition that man believes, upon condition that man walks in the way of God's precepts, on condition, therefore, of, his being faithful, and on condition that he perseveres unto the end, man is saved. The whole matter of 'salvation becomes conditional from beginning to end, once you have maintained the proposition that faith is a condition unto salvation.

The Declaration continues:

“And in the same chapter of the Canons, ‘B, 3, the errors are repudiated of those who teach: “That the good pleasure and purpose of God, of which Scripture makes mention in the doctrine of election does not consist in this, that God chose certain persons rather than others, but in this that he chose out of all possible conditions (among which are also the works of the law), or out of the whole order of things, the act of faith which from its very nature is undeserving, as well as its incomplete obedience, as a condition of salvation, and that he would graciously consider this, in itself as a complete obedience and count it worthy of the reward of eternal life.”

We will not repeat what we said before about the Arminian that faith according to the counsel of God is a condition of salvation. That this error is Arminian is very plain from the above article of the Canons. The Rev. Feenstra in the above quoted work writes:

“The Remonstrants teach:

“I. That God did not elect certain persons.

“II. That, God might have proposed several different *conditions*.

“III. That God has chosen *faith* as a condition.

“But:

“IV. Thus the merit of Christ becomes without effect.

“V. The Scriptures teach otherwise.”

The Declaration continues:

“Again, in the same chapter of the Canons I, B, 5, the errors are rejected of those who teach that:

‘faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness and perseverance are not fruits of the unchangeable election unto glory, but are conditions, which, being

required before hand, were foreseen as being met by those who will be fully elected, and are causes without which the unchangeable election to glory does not occur.”

Again, it is not necessary for us to repeat what we have said before. But I want to call your attention to the fact that when once faith is made a condition unto salvation, you have to continue to speak of conditions unto the very end. Not only faith, but also holiness, godliness, and perseverance are conditions that must be met unto the salvation of the people of God.

The Declaration continues:

“Finally, we refer to the statement of the Baptism Form: ‘And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in, Christ.’ That here none other than the elect children of the covenant are meant and that they are unconditionally, without their knowledge, received unto grace in Christ; in the same way as they are under condemnation in Adam, is very evident.”

The force of this argument is very evident. Our children are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam by nature. What does this mean? It means nothing else than that without their knowledge they are under the guilt of Adam, and born incapable of doing any good and totally depraved. This certainly is not an objective sentence of God, which they must accept in order to be actually under guilt and actually in corruption, but is actually reality. But in the same way, that is, without their knowledge, the children of the covenant are received unto grace in Christ. Also this cannot mean that they have an objective bequest on the part of God unto salvation, or an objective offer of the promise, of which all the children of the covenant in the dispensation of the historical line of the covenant are participants on condition that they believe and obey. Because, in the first place, as we have said before, children cannot fulfill any conditions. But in the second place, and what is more to the point in this connection, is the fact that if this were the meaning the comparison would not hold whatsoever. The comparison is between actual condemnation and actual corruption on the one hand, and actual grace in Christ on the other. And therefore: when the Baptism Form states that our children without their knowledge are partakers of the grace in Christ and receive that grace, it certainly must mean that they are partakers of actual grace, that they are regenerated and have the faculty of faith given to them by God. But that this cannot refer to all the children that are born in the historical line of the dispensation of the covenant, but only to the elect, is also plain. For in this sense, all the children of the

covenant head for head are certainly not received unto grace in Christ.

The Declaration continues:

“That faith is not, a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, but a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ. This is plainly taught in the following parts of our confessions.

“Heidelberg Catechism, Qu. 20: ‘Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No; only those who are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits , by a true faith.

“ Netherlands Confession Article 22: ‘We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which, embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him. For it must needs follow, either that all things, which are requisite to our salvation, are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith, have complete salvation in him. Therefore, for any to assert, that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides him, would be too gross a blasphemy: for hence it would follow, that Christ was but half a Savior. Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works: However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works which he has done for us, and in our stead, is our Righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.’

“Confer also Netherlands Confession, Articles 33:35, quoted above.

“Again, confer Canons of Dordrecht II, A, 8, quoted above.

“In Canons III & IV, A, 10 we read:

‘But that others who are called by the gospel, obey the call, and are converted, is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others, equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversions, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as he has chosen his own from eternity in Christ, so he confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the

power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of his own Son, that they may show forth the praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvelous light; and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord according to the testimony of the apostles, in various places.’

“Again, in the same chapter of the Canons, Art. 14, we read:

‘Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure; but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him; or even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will, consent to the terms of salvation, and actually believe in Christ; but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe, and the act of believing also.’

Let me first of all call your attention to the proposition which we mean to, prove by these parts of the Confession. It is this: “Faith is not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, but a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ.”

This is proved first of all from the quotation from the Heidelberg Catechism, Qu 20. For there we are taught that only those are saved who are ingrafted into Christ, and receive all His benefits by a true faith. The fact is that to be ingrafted into Christ is a passive idea. Man has nothing to do with it. We are ingrafted into Christ by a true faith through an act of God alone. And by that act of faith we receive all the benefits of Christ. It is true that in the German original we read: “Und alle Seine Wohlthaten annehmen.” That is “and accept all his benefits.” But this does not make one particle of difference. For, in the first place, unless we are first ingrafted into Christ, we certainly can never perform the act of faith whereby we accept the benefits of Christ. But, in the second place, according to the rest of the Confessions, as in Canons III & IV, Art. 14; even the act of faith is a gift of God. And therefore, in no sense of the word can faith be called a condition, but it is certainly a God-given instrument, whereby we receive Christ and all His benefits.

The same is true of the Netherlands Confession, Art. 22, where it is said that faith “is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness..” And once more in the same article: “Faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits.” Now it ought to be plain to all that can read and understand that condition and instrument are certainly not the same, but denote radically different conceptions; A condition is something, which man must fulfill in order to obtain salvation and to receive the promise. But an instrument is a God-given

means whereby we are placed into contact with the promise and with the whole of salvation. Faith, therefore, is certainly not a condition, but is an instrument according to the clear language of our confessions.

And the same is true of the articles of the Canons to which we referred above. God has chosen His own from eternity. And upon them He confers faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. And again, according to Art. 14 of this chapter of the Canons, faith is a gift of God that cannot be accepted or rejected by man at his pleasure, but is efficaciously wrought in him. Nor is it thus, that faith as a power or ability to believe is bestowed upon man, and that then, after he has received the power of faith, man is able by, the exercise of his own *free* will to consent to the terms of salvation and to actually believe in Christ. On the contrary, both the power of faith and the actual believing are gifts of God, which He works in the believer continually. That all this is certainly not the same as the proposition "faith is a - condition" ought to be plain to all that can understand the Confessions. " HH

Chapter 5

The Conclusion of the Declaration Concerning The Covenant, And Article 31

The discussion of the main contents of the Declaration of Principles was finished in my last editorial on the subject. What follows is chiefly in the form of conclusions that are based on the preceding part of the Declaration: For the sake of completeness I publish it here once more.

The Declaration concludes as follows:

- “III. Seeing then that this is the clear teaching of the confession,
 “A. We repudiate:
 “1. The teaching: -
 “a. That the promise of the covenant is conditional and for all that are baptized.
 “b. That we may presuppose that all the children that are baptized are regenerated, for we know on the basis of Scripture, as well as in the light of all history and experience, that the contrary is true.
 “2. The teaching that the, promise of the covenant is an objective bequest on the part of God giving to every baptized child the right to Christ and all the blessings of salvation.”

Here I may, perhaps, add a word of explanation to A, 1, b. The emphasis in this proposition must fall on the word all. We would have no principal objection to maintain that the *elect* infants are regenerated, although we cannot have certainty in this respect. We believe, in fact, that this is usually the case. But the presumption that *all* baptized children are regenerated is certainly untenable. It is quite contrary to the expressed teaching of Scripture that only the children of the promise are counted for the seed, and all are not Israel that are of Israel. It is contrary to all the history of the covenant, which illustrates very plainly that thousands upon thousands, in the old dispensation as well as in the new, violate the covenant of God and do not become partakers of the promise. And, therefore, we certainly cannot presuppose anything that is so evidently in conflict with Scripture and experience.

The rest of the above conclusions have been sufficiently demonstrated from our Confessions.

The Declaration continues:

- “B. And we maintain:
 “1. That God surely and infallibly fulfills His promise to the elect.
 “2. That when He so fulfills His promise and establishes His covenant, the elect are not mere stocks and blocks, but obliged and willing to fulfill their part of the

covenant, to love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind .and soul and strength, to forsake the world, to crucify their old nature, and to walk in a new and holy life.

“3. That the ground of infant baptism is the command of God, and the fact that according to Scripture He establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations.

In 2 above the Declaration refutes the accusation, always directed against those who maintain the truth of sovereign: grace and absolute predestination, that the latter deny the responsibility of man. If the promise of God is unconditional, so that man has to do nothing in order to obtain the promise; nor has to comply with any prerequisite in order to remain heir of the promise, you make of man, so say our opponents, mere stocks and blocks They forget that the work of grace never violates, man’s moral nature. Grace does not destroy man’s responsibility, but rather causes him to feel all the more deeply his responsibility before the God of His salvation.

This is the teaching of our Confessions

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us in question and answer 64 as follows: “But does not this doctrine make men careless and profane? By no means: for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruit of thankfulness.”

In Canons III, IV, A, we read :

“But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature, endowed with understanding and will, nor did is’ which pervaded the whole race of mankind, deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death; so also this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor take away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign; in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. Wherefore unless the admirable author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which, in a state of innocence, he plunged himself into ruin.”

Again in Canons V, A, 12 we confess:

“This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting on believers a spirit of pride, or rendering them carnally secure, that on the contrary, it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering and in confessing the truth, and solid rejoicing in God: so that the consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice in gratitude and, good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture, and the example of the saints.”

Again, in Canons V, A, 13

“Neither does renewed confidence of persevering produce licentiousness, or a disregard to piety in those who are recovered from backsliding; but it renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord, which he hath ordained, lest by abusing his fatherly kindness, God should turn away his gracious countenance from them, to behold which is to the godly dearer than life: the withdrawing whereof is more bitter than death, and they in consequence thereof should fall into more grievous torments of conscience.”

And, in Canons V, B 6, they repudiate the errors of those:

“Who teach: that the doctrine of the certainty of perseverance and of salvation from its own character and nature is a cause of indolence and is injurious, to godliness, good morals, prayers, and other, holy exercises, bet that on the contrary it is praiseworthy to doubt. For these show that they do not know the power of divine grace and the working of the indwelling Spirit. And they contradict the apostle John, who teaches the opposite with express words in his first epistle: *‘Beloved now are we the children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him, for we shall see him even as he is. And everyone that hath this hope on him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.’* I John 2:2,3. Furthermore these are contradicted by the examples of the saints, both of the Old and of the New Testament, who though they were assured of their perseverance and salvation, were nevertheless constant in prayers and other exercises of godliness.”

All these passages plainly teach that, while grace is surely sovereign and unconditional, this sovereign grace does not destroy, but rather increase and enhance man’s responsibility. ..

The Declaration continues:

“IV. Besides, the Protestant Reformed Churches :

“A. Cannot condone the action of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, whereby:

“1. They imposed certain doctrinal decisions upon the churches synodically, making these decisions binding upon the churches before they had the right to protest.

“2. And whereby they deposed many local office bearers.

“B. And they believe and maintain the autonomy of the local church.

[This section of the declaration was revised, the reference to the split in the Netherlands

was replaced by a reference to the spilt in 1924, the issue of article 31 being the same - TCM]

This applies to the Christian Reformed Church in our country as well as to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. Also the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 made their doctrinal decisions binding, and demanded of us a promise to express agreement with these decisions, or at least to acquiesce in them and never to teach anything against them. This we would not possibly promise for the simple reason that the well-known -three points were, according to our deepest conviction contrary, to Scripture and the Confession. Under such a promise, it would have been impossible for us to preach. Besides, also the Christian Reformed Church, in 1924, violated the principle of the autonomy of the local church by deposing office bearers, as well as speaking of the broader gatherings as “the proper ecclesiastical authorities.” The Protestant Reformed Churches maintain the autonomy of the local church and acknowledge no, higher authority than the consistory. It is a well-known fact that also the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands violated this principle.

And although we quite fundamentally differ with the Reformed Churches, maintaining Art. 31, of the Netherlands, in respect to the question concerning the promise of the covenant, we are glad to agree with them on the important church-political principle of the autonomy of the local church.

Thus far the declaration of principles proper.

There is however, a postscript, which: reads as follows:

“If Synod adopts the above proposition, we advise:

“1. That Synod subject this entire document to the approval of the churches.

“2. If no objection is offered to adopt this at our next Synod.

“3. To adopt this in the meantime as a working hypothesis for our mission committee and for our- missionaries in the organization of churches.”

;

And herewith I close my discussion of the Declaration of Principles.

The reader cannot have doubted that I favor the adoption of this Declaration by our next synod. All the dust that has been raised about it has only served to convince me more deeply that it is high time that our churches adopted it as an expression to all that want to join our churches of what we have always believed and still believe to be the truth according to our confessions.

It contains nothing new.

It merely and simply represents what we have always believed.

No one among us has succeeded to show, with any semblance of an argument, that this is not the case.

Remember that the Declaration is nothing else than a form to be used by our mission committee and our missionaries as a basis for the organization of churches.

If our next synod should dare to reject it, I see no longer any hope for the future of our Protestant Reformed Churches as remaining distinctively Reformed.

Hence, “with malice toward none,” I shall fight for it.

H. H.

Part 3: A Response to Schilder and the Liberated Churches

Dr. Schilder And The Declaration

By Herman Hoeksema

In several issues of *De Reformatie* my friend Schilder (O yes, he is still my friend, although I do not agree with him on the question of the covenant and the promise) wrote about the Declaration of Principles.

I first planned to let him finish his series of articles and not to interrupt his argument. But seeing that some of us are getting impatient (see *Periscope* in the last S. B., which is hardly peri-scope) and almost suggest that I intend to ignore what my colleague in the old country wrote on the matter, I will reply now to his criticism, and ask the printer to send him an airmail copy of this issue of *The Standard Bearer*.

Much of what Dr. Schilder wrote is not to the point, and we, therefore, can safely eliminate it from our discussion. To this belongs, in my opinion:

1. All that the brother wrote about supralapsarianism. The confessions are definitely infralapsarian. And although I personally am supralapsarian (which is my privilege), yet the Declaration is based, not on any private conviction or conception, but on the confessions only.
2. All that he wrote about his repudiation of the preparatory grace theory of Heyns. We have never accused the Liberated of teaching this particular heresy. Yet, we maintain that their view of the covenant and of the promise is Heynsian and that it implies the teaching of common grace applied to the covenant. See one of my editorials below.
3. All that he wrote about theologians in the past that taught that faith is a condition. I grant all of it. And I can quote some more of other theologians. But we are not concerned with private opinions, but with the Declarations of Principles. This is based only on the confessions. And these teach plainly (1) that faith is not a condition but (2) a means or instrument whereby we are ingrafted into Christ and appropriate all his benefits.

I challenge my esteemed friend and colleague to deny this.

There remains really only two items in the articles of Dr. Schilder to which I must reply. The first concerns his criticism of our use of the term cause and fountain of our salvation. The Declaration of Principles states that "election . . . is the sole fountain

and cause of all our salvation.”

To this Dr. Schilder objects.

Writes he (*De Reformatie*, vol. 26, no. 6):

First of all, a small item. The piece (Declaration, H.H.) commences with the declaration: ‘that election . . . is the sole fountain and cause of all our salvation.

“Is this correctly expressed a binding piece?

“Naturally, we probably expressed ourselves in the same way; in a loose article, or little talk. We will blame no one, if he expresses it that way, “*But when you establish something and make it binding*, we say: wait a minute. Is it, indeed, precisely expressed, when it is said: election cause and *fountain*?

“I do not believe it. If you want to be precise; it should have been election is the ground. A decree is never the cause of its execution nor the *fountain of it*. Cause and *fountain* fall in time, and are also themselves implied in the decree.”

Thus far Dr. Schilder.

It would be easy to correct the Declaration in this fashion, if it were, indeed, a correction, All we would have to do would be to substitute *ground* for cause and *fountain*.

And it would, indeed, have been a loose and thoughtless way of formulating a Declaration of Principles by a whole synod, if they had not carefully distinguished between ground on the one hand and *fountain* and cause on the other.

But this is not the case.

My friend Schilder must not have the impression that the delegates to the synod of 1950 were slouches, that did not know the meaning of terms, or that did not carefully weigh them before they employed them. Even though it is true that it did not take long to draw up and to adopt this proposed declaration, do not forget that it represents years of Protestant Reformed thought, and that the terms are very carefully chosen.

The same is true with regard to the terms fountain, cause, and *ground*. The ground of

all our salvation is Christ. The *fountain* and cause of all our salvation is the decree of election.

This is the language of our confessions, and the Declaration of Principles means to speak that language, and nothing else.

For proof of this, I refer to Canons I, A, 6: “That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree (*id ab aeterno decreto provenit*). Now, it ought to be plain that something does not proceed from a ground, but from a source or fountain. Hence, we maintain, with the declaration, that the decree is not the ground of the gift of faith, and, therefore, of all our salvation, but the source or fountain.

And as to the term *cause*, I refer to Canons I, A, 10. There we read: “The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election.” Now, in the first place, if the *beneplicituum Dei*, the *eudokia Theou*, the good pleasure of God, is the sole cause of election (*causa vero hujus- gratuita electionis*), election is -surely the cause, of all our salvation. And, secondly, to maintain, as does colleague, Schilder, that fountain and cause *fall* in time certainly is, not confessionally Reformed language. The confessions place cause, not in time, but in eternity.

I challenge my friend and colleague to disprove this.

I am afraid that, not the Declaration, but he himself was writing rather, hastily and thoughtlessly when he wrote the above quoted sentences.

We are, however, more interested in what Dr. Schilder writes about the promise and about faith as a condition unto the promise.

Writes he (*De Reformatie*, Vol. 26, No. 5):

“A. Do you mean,” by condition, something that, would bind God? “Then we say. unconditionally: unconditionally be the slogan.”

“B., Do you mean, by condition, something for *which* God *must wait*, before He can go further? Then we say unconditionally: unconditionally be the slogan.”

“C. Do you mean, by condition: something that *we must fulfill to merit something*? Then we say unconditionally: unconditionally be the slogan.”

“D. Do you mean, by condition: something *that God firmly linked with something else*, to make plain to us, that the one thing cannot come without

the other, and that we cannot be assured of the one thing, unless we have also become assured of the other? Then we say unconditionally: conditionally be the slogan.”

At the close of his article Dr. Schilder writes:

“I think, that colleague Hoeksema will agree with us in all this.

“But for this reason we appeal to him. He is a keen theologian (thanks, amice! H.H.) and he hates, when it comes to the point, all foolish binding. Let him cooperate to prevent all ambiguous and impractical declarations as so many impediments on the way to unity, etc.”

And yet, I cannot agree with my esteemed colleague, and that exactly because I want to avoid all “ambiguous and impractical declarations.” I want to be very clear, sharp, and to the point, when it concerns the definition of theological terms.

O, how sorry I am, that all these things were not discussed between us as deputies for correspondence, rather than to confer, behind our back, with the Revs. De Jong and Kok, who were not authorized, neither, judging from the letter of Prof. Holwerda, capable to speak for our churches! The Lord willing, we are coming next summer, if the world situation permits. We have reservations on the boat for the twenty-fourth of June and plan to remain in the Netherlands till the beginning of September. That is if they still want to see us, and if they still desire correspondence in *spite of our doctrinal differences*. Otherwise, they better let us know, and we will cancel our reservations.

Now, let me return to the subject.

In the first place, I want to say that, of course, I agree with the negative propositions A, B, and C. But I want to add one more proposition. It is similar to C with this difference that I want to stop at “fulfill” and omit, “to merit something”. The proposition then reads: “We do not believe in conditions which we must fulfill.” Period.

I will presently explain the reason for this negative proposition.

But, first, I must criticize my colleague’s own definition of “condition”. To my mind it is ambiguous. It can denote different notions., The brother writes that a condition “is something which God has firmly linked to something else” etc.

Very well. Let us test this definition. Cause and effect God has firmly linked together. Colleague Schilder surely does not mean this by condition. Hence, the

definition is ambiguous. Yet it is important that we use clear terms.

Work and reward are also firmly linked together by God. Yet, my friend Schilder does not mean that faith is a work rewarded by a God. Hence, the definition is guilty of ambiguity.

Means and end are also firmly linked by God. Yet, brother Schilder does not want this implication of this definition, for then faith is a means (according to our confessions) and not a condition at all. Again, the definition lacks clarity. Yet, we must clearly define our terms.

After all, is there any definition of "condition" that is clear, not only, but that also is conveyed to the mind of anyone that hears the term, except the following: "A condition is a prerequisite which one must fulfill or comply with in order to receive something or to have something done unto him!?"

Now, apply, this to faith, and I claim that you sail in Arminian waters, and are not Reformed.

We must, therefore; have a clear definition of terms before I can agree with my colleague across the ocean.

But what about a conditional or unconditional *promise*.

About this, next time, D. V, H . H:

Dr. Schilder And The Declaration, continued

In the present issue of the *Standard Bearer* I have not much space left for my reply to Dr. Schilder. But I must call attention to a bit of reasoning that, to my mind, is rather confusing, and because it is confusing is also dangerous, especially because it concerns some very specific terms of the confession. Dangerous it is, because. Dr. Schilder presents those terms of the confession in so uncertain and ambiguous a light that no one knows anymore what is their contents, and that anyone can, apparently, read his own meaning into them:

I had almost written that my colleague in the old country is juggling the terms, but since this word has the connotation of intentional deception, I will not use it.

The reader will remember that Dr. Schilder criticized the statement, in the Declaration of Principles that *election is the sole fountain and cause of our salvation*. He very definitely stated that he did not believe that these terms were correct. Cf.

the last *Standard Bearer*.

I called his attention to the fact that both these terms occur literally in the confession. But before I did so some other reader of *De Reformatie* called his attention to the same mistake.

Now, what does he do? Does he admit that he made a mistake, and that when he wrote as he did above, he did not think of it that the terms of “fountain” and “cause” were confessional terms? On the contrary, he attempts to explain the terms in such a way that, while he, apparently, still does not believe that they are correct, he, nevertheless, is in harmony with the contents of the confession.

I will quote and translate only the essential parts of what he writes in this connection:

“One might ask: but is not that objection imaginary? Do not the Canons also say, I, 9, that election is the fountain of all saving good?

“To be sure, it stands there, and for that reason I stated immediately that no one that uses this term shall be, troubled by us . . . (By the way, this statement is very clearly not true. Dr. Schilder certainly did not write that it was for *that reason*, i.e., for the reason that the term “fountain” is a confessional term, that he would not trouble anyone that used it. Fact is, he did not think about the confession, and, therefore, unwittingly criticized it. How could he possibly trouble anyone for using a purely confessional term? H.H.).

“But when one wants to bind and sharpen and wants to fasten people by a sharper expression to a new binding, then we say: pardon, it says ‘fountain’ (precisely what the Declaration says,’ H H.). And fountain or source; (fons) signifies, if you want to make a sharp distinction, very often, consciously, something quite different from ‘cause’ . . . (True enough, but “cause,” of which colleague Schilder stated that it can refer only to time, also occurs in the confession with reference to God’s eternal good pleasure. And who please, is trying to bind people to any sharper dogmatical expression? We certainly do not, but simply use the terms of the confession, Hence, all this argumentation is nul and void).

“That means, therefore, that I have nothing against the word ‘fountain’, and nothing against the word ‘cause’ (He did though, in his first writing about this matter: he did not believe that the terms were correct, and blamed us for our slouchy terminology, HH), although this does not occur in this passage of the

confession of Dordt (but it nevertheless, does occur, H.H.), as long as you allow me to say, what *I, speaking more precisely, want to understand by it; and from this it will have to appear whether I agree with the CONTENTS of the Confession.*? (I underscore, HH.).

“But one must not fasten me, in a more defined expression with sharper binding to the word; the term ‘cause’. (The Declaration is not guilty of this, H.H.) ; *for then it is possible that, he that uses it, takes, it up erroneously, and that then it is in conflict with the contents of the confession; and that he that repudiates it exactly therewith protects the contents of the confession over against errors of a later date.*” (I underscore, H.H.).

I maintain that in the underscored sentences there lurks a great danger. They really imply that terms have no objective meaning, that, when our confession says one thing it may mean something entirely different; when our confession speaks of fountain and cause it may mean ground, when one faithfully uses the terms of the confession he may militate against its contents, and when one argues against the terms of the confession he may defend its contents! In other words, the terms of the confession have no objective significance, their meaning is so ambiguous, obscure, and uncertain, that anyone can read his own meaning into it.

When Schilder reads in the confession the terms cause and *fountain*, he says that, speaking more precisely, they mean ground, and he criticizes the simpletons that want to bind the people to the words of the confessions.

But does he not understand that, on this basis, we cannot have confessions?

If we may juggle terms in this fashion, words mean nothing anymore. I think that Dr. Schilder stands on dangerous ground here.

But let me, in conclusion, remind the reader once more of the history of this little but important skirmish.

1. We, on our part, did not, in the Declaration of Principles, insist upon any sharper accentuation or binding to any dogma, but simply used the terms of the confession.
2. Dr. Schilder declared those confessional terms incorrect, and wanted to put the term ground instead. That, according to him, is a more precise and, sharper term than cause and *fountain*.
3. Exactly because of those confessional terms in the Declaration, he accuses us of wrongfully binding the people.

4. Instead of admitting that he erred, and that he never thought of the confessions, he makes things worse by depriving the terms of the confession of all objective meaning.

A dangerous business H. H.

“The Stocking Is finished”

By Herman Hoeksema

Under, the caption “*De Kolis Is Af*” (The Stocking is Finished), Dr. Schilder published an article in *De Reformatie* of Nov. 17, 1951, on which he certainly must expect a reply in the *Standard Bearer*, and which I certainly cannot afford to pass up without comment.

The main thrust of the article, as I understand it, is that the relationship between the *Gereformeerde Kerken* (Art. 31) in the Netherlands and our churches is finally and definitely severed, and that, on their part, at least, no further attempts will be made at correspondence. And the blame for this situation is placed, of course, entirely on us, the Protestant Reformed Churches. As the reader will expect, the immediate occasion for the writing of this article by Dr. Schilder is the passing of the Declaration of Principles by our last Synod.

I will not take the trouble to quote and to translate the entire article. This is not necessary, and it would take too much space in our paper. But we will reflect on a few items, and at the same time review the history of our correspondence with the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands. And the readers may judge where the blame lies. Dr. Schilder writes that the stocking is finished. But I would say that the knitting of the stocking was a complete failure, and that the failure must be blamed not on our churches, but on the churches in the Netherlands. Instead of knitting a stocking, we tangled up the whole business. And the best that can be done is to unravel that tangle and start from the beginning, that is, if the (Liberated Churches in the Netherlands still desire correspondence with us. And in spite of the history we made in the last couple of years, I still think that a certain form of correspondence between our churches, is desirable, and that not only for us, in fact, not in the first place for us, but also, and in the first place, for the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands. For although Dr. Schilder writes that I have entangled myself in a network, I suppose he means: of confused doctrines; and again, I suppose he refers to the Declaration of Principles, I maintain, and I am ready to prove it, that we as Protestant Reformed Churches maintain the purest form of Reformed truth, and that moreover that purest form of Reformed truth, as principally expressed in our Confessions, is declared in the Declaration of Principles.

Dr. Schilder writes that he has clearly shown that the Declaration was not necessary, that it is not the correct interpretation of the Confessions, and that it is based on misunderstanding. And he writes also that before long he will publish what he has written, about the Declaration in pamphlet or book form, so that everyone may buy it. I promise him that I will pay attention to that pamphlet or

book, whatever it is. And he can expect my answer. I would be willing to give him, some advice in regard to its contents, but I suppose that would be too late.

As to the rest of the article, I will begin my reflections by referring to the paragraph in which Dr. Schilder writes about the conferences we had when the brother was here in 1947 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He writes (and I translate):

“And when after a very broad and patient final conference colleague Hoeksema himself made a motion to put a period after the theological discussions, declaring (after we were heard, also in rebuttal): that is reformed, then we returned cheerfully to the Netherlands. We thought : good, there are still people that have a feeling for the divine prohibition, to help with pleasure to extend the number of denominations.”

And now Dr. Schilder writes about that conference, it is well that we obtain a complete picture of the discussions that were carried on in those meetings. The first of these conferences was held on Oct. 16, 1947. The second lasted three days, from Nov. 4 to Nov. 6. At the first of these conferences I was able to be present only part of the time, due to, my sickness. The second conference I attended from the beginning to end.

Now in those conferences I presented thirteen very definite propositions on the subject of the covenant the promise. And these propositions I will now quote. Here they follow.

I. The idea of the covenant is not:

- a. The promise.
- b. A contract.
- c. The way of salvation.
- d. An alliance between two parties against a third.

II. But it is the communion of friendship between God and His people in Christ Jesus.

- a. The highest revelation of God's own life as the Triune God. God is one in Being and three in Persons.
- b. Proof:
 - 1) Scripture speaks of an eternal covenant.
 - 2) The tabernacle and temple are the dwelling place of God with men.
 - 3) Abraham is called the friend of God.
 - 4) Enoch and Noah walked with God.
 - 5) Texts as Ps. 25 :14, II Cor. 6 :16-18, etc.
 - 6) The end of all things is: the tabernacle of God with men. Rev. 21:3.

7) The center of this communion of friendship between God and His people is the incarnation.

III. This was the idea of the covenant in paradise. No covenant of works.

IV. God alone establishes His covenant and maintains it. He does this on the basis of the merits of Christ and through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Unconditional

V. The fruit of the establishment of God's covenant with us is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our powers, forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.

VI. The promise of the covenant God realizes only in the elect even as it is meant for them alone. Rom. 9:6-8,15; Heb. 6 :16-18.

VII. The dispensation of the covenant runs in the line of the generations of believers.

a. In that line the promise is administered by the church to all without distinction. All are baptized; instructed in the way of the covenant, come under the preaching, and are subject to the discipline of the church. All, therefore confront, the responsibility to love the Lord their God, to forsake the world, etc.

b. The reprobate, however, violate the covenant of God, as Esau, and thereby aggravate their judgment.

c. The elect, however, in whom God realizes His promise are saved and by grace come to stand in the world as of the party of the living God.

VIII. The elect children of the covenant are usually regenerated from infancy:

a. The promise of God is fulfilled in them.

b. God places them from infancy in the sphere of the preaching.

c. Experience plainly teaches this.

IX. The meaning of "sanctified in Christ" in the first question of the baptism form is subjective :

a. That is the only meaning of the phrase in the Bible.

b. It stands over against "conceived and born in sin."

c. This interpretation is historically correct.

X. No separation can be made in the first part of the Baptism Form between the work of the Father and the Son; on the one hand, and that of the Spirit, on the other.

a. The Father seals unto us that He establishes an eternal covenant of grace with us.

b. The Son that He washes us in His blood from all our sins.

- c. The Holy Spirit assures us that He will apply unto us that which we have in Christ.
- d. All this is applicable only to the elect.

XI. The thanksgiving in the Form also has in view only the elect.

- a. The forgiveness of sin.
- b. Membership in Christ.
- c. Adoption unto children.

XII. Children of the promise in Rom. 9 means the elect seed of the covenant.

XIII. What is usually called the covenant of redemption or the counsel of peace has no ground in Scripture, but is the covenant between Triune God and Christ as the Mediator, or the Servant of Jehovah.

Although it was far beyond my power at the time, yet I managed to discuss these propositions for approximately four hours in both conferences. And now I will quote what I wrote in the Standard Bearer concerning these, propositions, and especially concerning the reply by Dr. Schilder at the time. About the first conference, that of Oct. 16, I wrote as follows:

“In the afternoon Dr. Schilder replied to these propositions, but my strength “was still too limited to attend the afternoon session.

“According to reports, however, he seems to have emphasized that our differences were not a question of churches but of theologians. For the rest it was largely a matter of terminology and emphasis.”

On the second conference, that of Nov. 4 to 6, I wrote as follows:

“The first day of this conference Dr. Schilder spoke. He elaborated on his view of the covenant, especially emphasizing the covenant as a historical institution. He explained his idea of the parties in the covenant, elaborated especially on his conception of the conditions in the covenant, on the relation between promise and demand, and rejected the view of the late Prof. Heyns in as far as he proposes a subjective covenant grace for all the children of the covenant. Dr. Schilder spoke freely, and I am sorry that he did not briefly summarize his view in the form of definite propositions.”

And again, in the same conference, I proposed my second set of propositions, propositions 8 and 13 above. And concerning this I wrote as follows.

“The afternoon of the same day, that is, the 5th of November? and the forenoon of the next day was occupied by Dr. Schilder’s reply to those propositions.

“On the whole, we had very interesting and instructive meetings.

“The differences between the Liberated Churches and us, as they were brought out in the discussion, concerned especially the following points:

“1. First of all, the definition of the covenant. According to us the idea of the covenant is essentially that of friendship and fellowship between God and His people in Christ; the Liberated Churches, although they do not define the covenant, nevertheless, lay all emphasis on promise and demand.

“2. In our view the promise of the covenant is for the elect only; according to the Liberated Churches the promise is for all that are born in the covenant line, although this must not be understood in the Arminian sense, since also they emphasize the truth that God Himself must fulfill all the conditions of the covenant.

“3. The Liberated Churches speak of parties in the covenant, although they admit that in the real sense man cannot be a party over against God; we prefer to speak with the Baptism Form of parts rather than of parties.

Now Dr. Schilder, in the paragraph which I quoted and translated above, once more states that at the close of his reply I must have said: “That is Reformed.” I have called his attention to this error before, and now I will repeat it emphatically, and hope that Dr. Schilder will take note of it that I did not say: “That is Reformed,” but that I said, “He is Reformed.” (The difference is plain to all that can read. If I said, “That is Reformed,” I would have subscribed emphatically to all that friend Schilder said at the conference, and that meant that I would have subscribed to the Heynsian idea of the covenant, which in my conviction is far from Reformed. But we must remember, in the first place, that we had a very friendly discussion with Dr. Schilder, although we agreed to differ. In the second place, we were undoubtedly all somewhat under the influence of Schilder’s charming personality, and in his entire talk he emphasized repeatedly that our differences were no differences of principle, but rather of terminology. Besides, at the time I received the impression that Dr. Schilder himself did not entirely agree with the Liberated view of the covenant. I cannot definitely state why I received that impression, and I am sorry that Dr. Schilder, did not leave something black on white in the form of definite propositions which we could criticize today. I remember that during the conference one of our ministers approached me and said, “When you speak, we all know what you mean;

but when Schilder speaks, I don't know what exactly he is driving at." I remember, too, the sharp remark which the Rev. G. Vos made during that same conference, virtually accusing Dr. Schilder of Arminianism. And certainly, the Rev. Ophoff was not satisfied, and wanted to ask Dr. Schilder some very pointed questions, for which, however, he was too late, because the meeting had adjourned when he came in. And therefore, friend Schilder must never write again that I said at the end of his reply : "That is Reformed." For I never did. But I do remember that I said, "He is Reformed," understanding that statement in a general sense, and certainly not in the specific sense in which we as Protestant Reformed Churches, since 1924, are Reformed. That I do not regard the Liberated conception of the covenant Reformed, Dr. Schilder knows very well. And he was aware of that even before he came to this country in 1947. For immediately after the war, as soon as we could have correspondence together, I wrote friend Schilder a long letter, stating in unambiguous terms what I thought of his stand, and asking him how it were possible that he could so have changed that he now adopted the Heynsian view of the covenant, and that, in a speech at the conference at the Hague, where the *Acte der Vrijmaking* was signed, he could make a plea for union with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, (The Free Reformed in North America -TCM) which before the war he always considered as walking in the way of disobedience.

Now in the main those thirteen propositions which I defended at our conferences certainly represented the doctrine as had always been maintained in our Protestant Reformed Churches, especially over against Heynsianism. How then could Dr. Schilder when he returned to the Netherlands, advise his people everywhere, when they immigrated to this country or to Canada to join the Protestant Reformed Churches? Surely, we desired correspondence. But correspondence does not necessarily mean an organic union. The differences between us were rather fundamental, although Dr. Schilder called them differences in terminology. Of this we were not convinced. But; as I said, Dr. Schilder advised his people to join the Protestant Reformed Churches when they came to America, although we stood in no relation as sister churches as yet, and therefore could not receive attestations from them, or they from us. The result was that when we labored in Canada among the immigrants, we did not at once organize them into Protestant Reformed Churches, but first thoroughly instructed them, so that they knew the differences in doctrine between their churches and ours. Only when they were sufficiently indoctrinated and understood our position, and agreed with our truth, did we organize them into churches in our communion. And, even after those churches were organized; like Hamilton and Chatham," we did not receive membership papers from any Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, and did not receive prospective members into the communion of our churches until they had first been instructed in regard to the truth as taught in our Protestant Reformed Churches. Naturally, this caused trouble. For evidently in the Old Country the people had received the impression that when they

came to America, they would be received without question and without condition as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. That they labored under such an impression certainly was not our fault, but was the fault of Dr. Schilder, who, according to reports, had advised all the people of the Liberated Churches to join the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. But once more the differences in regard to the doctrine of the covenant and of the promise were too great and too fundamental to permit members from the Liberated Churches into our communion, Hence, we demanded that they, promise to submit to our instruction, and in the meantime not to agitate against our doctrine. This was honest and fair to all concerned. We did not excommunicate any brethren and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ and bar them from the table of communion. But we wanted to preserve the Reformed truth in its purest form, the truth as we have always maintained it in our Protestant Reformed Churches. The result is, first, the sad history of Hamilton, and now the even worse history of Chatham. Certainly, that the stocking was not knitted and properly finished was not our fault.

Nor was it our fault that the stocking of correspondence was not properly knitted officially, but became one entangled mess. Let me relate the history.

In the early part of 1948 (I forget the date) the Committee of Correspondence of the Protestant Reformed Churches addressed a letter to the deputies for correspondence of the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands, suggesting correspondence between the two churches. This letter was originally composed by the Rev. J. de Jong. I received that letter in California, where I was still recuperating from my attack of thrombosis. I did not agree with the contents of the letter, but I signed it on condition that the Rev. G. M. Ophoff, the third party of the committee, would also be willing to sign it. The latter, however, at first was not willing at all, because he too did not agree with the contents of the letter. But under repeated pressure he signed his name to the document, and so it was sent to the deputies for correspondence in the Old Country. However, when the work of the committee for correspondence was reported at the Synod, of 1948, the latter condemned that letter, and decided to rewrite it and to send a different letter to the same deputies for correspondence in the Netherlands, and to their Synod that was to be held at Amersfoort the same summer. I write this because not the letter from the deputies of correspondence, but the letter from the Synod of our churches is therefore the only official document which the Synod of Amersfoort could consider. In that letter of our Synod we did not ask for complete correspondence, but we asked that the matter concerning correspondence would be thoroughly discussed before correspondence was finally established.

The Synod of the Reformed Churches (Art. 31) convened that same year at Amersfoort, acted upon our request, and decided: 1) To empower the deputies for

correspondence with foreign churches to get into contact with the Protestant Reformed Churches, in order to prepare the relation of correspondence between these churches. 2) That the deputies for correspondence with foreign churches would have to serve the following synod with advice. And 3) that in the meantime, the ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches may be admitted to the pulpits of the Reformed Church (Art. 31) of the Netherlands, to speak an edifying word. Several delegates of the Synod voted against this proposal of the committee of pre advice, and at least 7 or 8 of them requested that their negative vote be recorded in the minutes. Among the latter were such well-known figures as the Rev D. van Dijk, Prof. Holwerda, and the Rev. van Raalte of Neede. To my mind, it certainly was not very wise of the Synod to open the pulpits of the Reformed Churches, (Art. 31) of the Netherlands for our ministers before the relation of complete correspondence was established.

But what happened further? For more than a year we never heard anything from the deputies for correspondence with foreign churches of the Netherlands. In fact, officially we did not hear of them until November, 1949. That was a mistake. Those deputies should have sought contact with our Committee of Correspondence as soon as possible, so that at least We could report something officially to our Synod of 1949. But, as I said, we never heard of them. That the Synod opened their pulpits for our ministers was the first wrong stitch in the stocking. That the deputies for foreign correspondence did not get into contact with our Committee for Correspondence was the second wrong stitch. And the whole thing became one entangled mass when in the meantime, in August 1949, the letter written by Prof. Holwerda to the immigrants in Canada was brought to our attention.

That letter revealed: 1) That instead of transacting ecclesiastical business in an ecclesiastical way, and therefore, instead of contacting officially our Committee of Correspondence, the Committee for Foreign Correspondence in the Netherlands decided to transact the business of the churches unofficially by meeting behind the back of the Committee for Correspondence of our churches with the Revs. de Jong and Kok. 2) That the fears of those that had objections against correspondence with our churches, such as van Dijk, van Raalte, Holwerda, and others, were mysteriously allayed. 3) That the impression was created that no definite interpretation of the Confessions was maintained and binding in the Protestant Reformed Churches. 4) That the impression was made that there was ample room for the. covenant view of the Liberated in our Protestant Reformed Churches, and that therefore the immigrants could make free propaganda for the Liberated view in our churches. 5) That only on that basis the immigrants were advised to join the Protestant Reformed Churches, but at the same time that, if the conception of such men as the Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff were maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches, they should never join.

This was not knitting a stocking, surely not the stocking of ecclesiastical correspondence, but was working on a hopeless and tangled mass.

On our part, in the light of all this history, and especially in the light of our experience with the Liberated in Canada, the Mission Committee felt the need of a definite statement which might be used by them and by our missionaries as the basis for the organization of our churches. That need was filled by the Declaration. And that Declaration was passed by our last Synod.

Let not Dr. Schilder therefore say that the stocking is finished. It must be entirely unraveled, until we come to the first false stitch, and then start knitting anew.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize once more that the stocking is not finished. And if Dr. Schilder feels that because of the stand of our churches as revealed in the Declaration of Principles he does not want to unravel the tangle and start knitting anew, it suits me. Nevertheless; I want to state in that case that I am disappointed in him, and for the rest say; "Vale, Amice Schilder." H. H.

**Promise and Prediction
(Conditional Theology)**

By Herman Hoeksema

Introduction

In *Concordia* of Jan. 17, 1952, the Rev. B. Kok begins to launch an attack upon the Declaration of Principles adopted by our last synod, defends the proposition that the promise is conditional, and makes an attempt to introduce into our churches, principally, the whole liberated theology.

All this I hope to prove in future articles.

The Rev. Kok does not do all this personally, but hides behind the name of Dr. K. Schilder.

But this cannot make principal difference. He translates with full approval, with strong recommendation, without one word of criticism, what Dr. Schilder writes. He even states that one who would translate all the articles of Dr. Schilder in which he attacks the Declaration of Principles would do our churches a great service.

He is, therefore, fully responsible.

When, therefore, in future articles, I attack Dr. Schilder, the reader must understand that the Rev. Kok compels me to hide behind the name of that Liberated theologian to attack the theologian of Holland, Mich. H. H.,

Promise and Prediction

Chapter 1

Schilder, Veenhof And The Liberated Viewpoint: Conditional Theology

To understand the article of Dr. Schilder which the Rev. Kok translated without any criticism or comment in *Concordia* (Jan. 17, '52), we must remember and constantly bear in mind that he writes as a Liberated theologian. Otherwise we can never understand the article, and especially why he is in such emphatic need of conditions. Strange to say, Dr. Schilder since he was here the first time, and therefore approximately during the war, changed his entire conception about the covenant and the promise and now embraces the Heynsian conception, except in as far as that subjective preparatory grace of Heyns is concerned. I first was in hopes that he really did not fully agree with the Liberated theology, but gradually it has become more and more evident that he is in complete agreement with it.

This implies that there is rather a fundamental difference between him and us as Protestant Reformed people.

When he speaks of the covenant, he does not mean the same thing as we do. He definitely needs parties in the covenant, while we speak of parts, and no parties.

When he speaks, of the promise, he means something quite different from what we mean by it. For him the promise is for all the children of the covenant, head for head and soul for soul, elect and reprobate, Jacob and Esau. For us the promise is only for the elect. For Schilder the promise is only an objective bequest. For us it includes all the blessings of salvation, as they are applied to the elect by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of promise. For Schilder, therefore, the promise is necessarily conditional, For us, that is, for all truly Protestant Reformed people, it is unconditional.

In the light of all this we can also understand the emphasis of Dr. Schilder on the false distinction between promise and prediction. Writes he:

“But now comes the fine point of distinction: God does give us promises, but no predictions. Thus He does not say to N. N.: you shall sometime go to heaven, and to another N.N.: you shall forever remain without.

“Therefore He gives a promise, with a command, even as it is taught us in the Canons of Dordt: the promise comes with the command to believe and repent.

And thus at the time of baptism He says: He that believeth in Me shall not be ashamed; for them that honour Me I will honour; unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness; them that seek Me early shall find Me. And he who would call this Arminian, does not, in my opinion, read his Bible correctly, by means of which, nevertheless, the Arminians have been defeated.”

Now as far as the last clause is concerned, it is true, of course, in a way, that the Arminians have been defeated by Scripture, but certainly not by reading Bible texts. In the Canons of Dordrecht they interpreted Scripture and composed very many doctrinal and dogmatical statements. You cannot defeat Arminians by merely quoting Bible texts. But as far as the above quotation is concerned, let me call your attention, first of all, to the fact that Dr. Schilder makes the common error of quoting Canons II, 5 apart from the rest of the Confessions, as if in that article we have the presentation of a definition of the promise and of the whole promise of God. At the last Synod I called the attention of the brethren to the danger of committing that very common error, that is, of isolating certain parts of the Confessions and separating them from the whole. I warned that in this way one can make the Confessions themselves speak Arminian language. Recently a friend of mine called my attention to the fact that this same warning has been issued before. I quote from the explanation of The Netherlands Confession by W. H. Gispen, 1886 :

“We believe, however, that not only the offer of salvation and the urge of the Holy Spirit to receive the proffered salvation, is a gift of God and the work of His grace, but also that the will to accept it, the will to stretch out the hand to the proffered alms is the work, the gift of God. *We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith;* We do not deny that the death of the Son of God is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world. Nor do we deny that the promise of the gospel must be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, with the command to repent .and believe, and that the guilt of the unbelief of many does not lie in failure or insufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ, but lies entirely in themselves . . . But we would certainly fail to speak the whole truth, if we would mean to maintain that this presentation expresses the *full, the whole truth*. For this is not so. He who lays a one sided emphasis upon these truths, runs into great danger to approach the extreme limit of Remonstrantism, and may transgress that limit more quickly perhaps than he himself wishes to do.” pp. 158-159.

This indeed is almost the same sentiment as I expressed at the last Synod.

But let us return to the quotation from Dr. Schilder.

He writes that “God does give us promises, but no predictions.” We must carefully analyze this brief sentence, in order to find out what the writer means. First of all, then, we ask the question: what in the sentence does the pronoun us mean? It is evident from the context that Dr. Schilder does not refer to the elect, as is so often the case in the Confessions. In fact, it is very well possible to apply this pronoun us to all men, without distinction, as, for instance, is the case when Canons II, 5 states that the promise of the gospel must be declared and published to all nations and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction. But at any rate, we can state that particularly all the children of the covenant, head for head, soul for soul, elect and reprobate, are meant. To them all the Lord does not give predictions, but He does give his promises. Dr. Schilder would no doubt subscribe to what Prof. Veenhof writes in his *Unica Catholica*:

“In His holy, glorious covenant language the Lord, calls the children of the covenant not only His children, but He also gives unto them the promises of the covenant.

“He promises them also, that He will be their God.

“What these promises of the covenant are you may read in the inimitably tender language of the Baptism Form, what the covenant God has promised: the Father, that He adopts us as His children and heirs; the Son, that He washes us in His blood; the Holy Spirit, that He will sanctify us as members of Christ. Thus are the promises of the covenant. All this the Lord promises to the children of the covenant.

“And these promises are meant for *all* the children of the covenant.

“Here we may make no separation; we may not say that it means for the one and not for the other God promises *all* the children of the covenant all the blessings of His salvation. Therefore also to them that are not regenerated. Also to them that never are regenerated.

“Also to a covenant child that will be lost these promise are given.

“But when such a one later in life wantonly breaks with the covenant and with the God of the covenant and turns his back to Him, he receives no part in the ranks of the heirs of grace.

“Through his own disobedience to the God of the covenant and of his fathers

he himself despised the blessing and rejected it. In spite of the fact, that the Lord had promised him much, he closed for himself through his disobedience the gate of heaven.”

And a little later:

“Our children are children of the Lord.

“They belong to the Lord from their birth on. The Lord views them as ‘my children.’ He has a right to them. They may not live as they please!

“When they sinfully depart and turn their backs to the Lord, their sin is greater than that of one who never belonged to the covenant, for it is the sin of disobedience, the breaking of the covenant.

“Then finally the same stage is reached as in a family, in which a son forgets himself sometime that he is disinherited by the father.

“He made himself unworthy of the inheritance ! . . .

“And when later the departing covenant child would say that God after all did not give him the benefits of the covenant, then the word must be applied to him: ‘It is your own fault; you did not want it any different...’

“Also to this lost child the Lord promises His salvation, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He promises this and means it seriously and promises it honestly.”

That in all this there is no mention of election and there is certainly no room for reprobation is plain to all that can read. I do not say that either Veenhof or Schilder deny the sovereign counsel of election and reprobation outright. But I do maintain that in their covenant conception it is left out of view altogether. God promises to all the children of the covenant all the blessings of His salvation, forgiveness of sins and eternal life; and when they do not receive them, this is to be attributed only to the fact that they close for themselves the gate of heaven. How, with such a view, the brethren in the Old Country can escape the indictment of Arminianism, I fail to understand.

[Veenhoff, evidently also, means regeneration in the broader sense, through the means, rather than the immediate or narrow sense -TCM]

But at any rate, this is the implication of the pronoun ‘us’. when Dr. Schilder writes

that God gives us promises, but no predictions.

The next question concerning this statement is: what does Schilder mean when he writes that God gives no predictions to them?

To this I would answer that God does not address them by their natural name, N.N., John, Peter, William, etc., and thus assure them that they shall go either to heaven or to hell. This is evident from the sentence: "Thus He does not say to N.N.: you shall sometime go to heaven, and to another N.N: you shall forever remain without." He does give N. N., John, Peter, William, promises; but He does not assure them by a sure prediction that they shall be saved, or go to heaven.

And now what is perhaps the most important question: what does Schilder mean by the promise? Here we hit upon the element of conditional theology, and, at the same time upon the most inexplicable contradiction in their entire view.

Does Schilder by promises mean the entire promise, including the application of the blessings of salvation by the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith? That is impossible. For in that case he would make God a liar; The Holy Spirit and the gift of faith are certainly absolutely unconditional. To deny this is to become Pelagian and Arminian. To say that God promises faith on condition of faith is a contradiction in terms. And to say that God promises His Holy Spirit on condition of walking in the way of obedience is the same contradiction, if not Pelagian. That cannot be the meaning, therefore. We remember that even Heyns does not dare to say this, and for that reason makes a separation in the doctrinal part of the Baptism Form between the promise of the Father and of the Son, on the one hand, and of the Holy Spirit, on the other. The promise of the Father is that He wills establish an eternal covenant of grace with us; and adopts us for His children and heirs. The promise of the Son is that He incorporates us into His death and washes us in His blood from all our sins. But the promise of the Holy Spirit is that He WILL apply the blessings of salvation to us, presupposing, of course, that we will never receive them from the Holy Spirit unless we also will it. I do not know whether Schilder would subscribe to this view of Heyns. But certain it is, that he cannot refer to the whole promise of God when he says: "God gives us promises." He refers evidently to the partial promise of future glory and salvation, as is also the case in Canons II, 5. Hence, in the conception of Dr. Schilder here the promise does not include, but excludes the gift of faith. He would undoubtedly interpret Canon II, 6 in this way, that God connects the promise of salvation, the promise of eternal, life in the future with the demand of faith and obedience, and therefore on condition of faith and repentance.

Thus, I think, we can understand what Schilder means when he says that God gives us promises, but no predictions. All he has is a conditional promise to all, without

any assurance that all will receive the benefits of the promise.

It makes no difference whether or not he tries to save himself by emphasizing that God fulfills Himself all the conditions (This, in the first place, is nonsense, because a condition which God fulfills can never be presented as a condition which man must fulfill. And in actual fact the common people in the church will never understand this, but always maintain that a condition is a prerequisite which they themselves must fulfill. In other words, in the light of this doctrine they always feel that they are responsible not for their sin or disobedience but for their own salvation it is up to them to close the gate of heaven, and therefore also to keep it open) for this is not the question.

The question is whether the promise includes the gift of faith and of the Holy Spirit, or not.

Does God promise all the subjective blessings and application of the benefits of salvation, including the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith, to all the children of the covenant? Heyns says: No, the Holy Spirit only promises that He *will*, not that He *does*, apply all the benefits of salvation to till the children of the covenant. And I dare say: Schilder is bound to say the same thing. Faith is a condition, a condition that is demanded of us together with repentance. And if faith and repentance are conditions of the promise, faith cannot be included in the promise.

This, it seems to me, is the chief difference between Schilder's conditional promise and the Protestant Reformed conception of the promise; Schilder's promise does not include the gift of faith. For if God promises faith to all, all will certainly be saved. But we say: Yes, the promise includes faith. But for that very reason we say: The promise is not for all, but only for the elect, and is absolutely unconditional.

Now let us turn to Scripture and to the Confessions, in order to prove that the distinction between promise and prediction is thoroughly false. In fact, it is a mystery to me how Schilder can ever maintain such a distinction. To my mind; practically all the promises in Holy Writ are at the same time predictions. And all the predictions are promises.

To prove this is almost quite unnecessary. Nevertheless, I will refer to a few passages at random to corroborate my contention. First of all, I will point to Genesis 3.15, the well-known protevangel, the mother of all promises: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." That in these words of Scripture we have a prediction, a prediction of the battle of the ages between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, a prediction, too, of the final victory in Christ Jesus our

Lord, Who shall crush the head of the serpent, is very evident. But that at the same time we have no mere prediction, but also a promise of God is well-known and is also very evident from the words themselves, as well as from Question and Answer 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism. God here promises enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. That enmity is positively friendship of God. And that friendship of God is certainly the realization of the promise in the hearts of the Seed of the woman. And that this is also the meaning of the Heidelberg Catechism is evident from Qu. 19: "Whence knowest thou this? From the holy gospel, which God himself revealed in paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by his only begotten Son." According to the Catechism, the holy gospel is the same as the promise. And when it is said, that this holy gospel, or promise, was revealed in paradise, the reference is without any question to Genesis 3:15, the mother of promises. Hence, we have in these words of Scripture both a prediction and a promise. The promise is a prediction, and the prediction is a promise.

The same is true of all the passages in Scripture that speak of the establishment of the covenant. In Gen. 6:18 we read: "But with thee will I establish my covenant." And again, in Gen. 9:9: "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you." Notice, that here too we have both a prediction and a promise. The promise is that God establishes His covenant. And the prediction is that He will continue His covenant in the line of the generations of Noah. But again, there can be no separation between promise and prediction. Again, in Genesis 15:18 we read: "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Here too we have a promise and a prediction. And really, the promise and the prediction are essentially identical. And from the context it is also very evident that both the prediction and the promise, the establishment of the covenant and the realization of the covenant-promise, depends on God alone. There are no parties in the covenant, although there are parts. I say this is evident from the context, as is well-known. In the context God appears to Abraham in a vision. And in the vision. Abraham asks the Lord: "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" Abraham, therefore, is eager to know how he can be sure that he shall inherit the promise. And the promise is the land of Canaan; but the land of Canaan is at the same time the final glory, according to Hebrews 11. For he looked for a better country, that is, an heavenly. And in answer to the question, God points him to the absolute certainty of His covenant as it is established by God alone. For he is directed (always in the vision) to take an heifer of three years old and a shegoat of three years old and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove and a young pigeon. He divides them, except the doves, and puts them in juxtaposition over against one another. These animals are undoubtedly symbolic of God's covenant, not as a

contract, nor as a way of salvation, but as an eternal bond of friendship between God and His people in Christ. But the point to which we must call special attention in this connection is that God passes through the pieces of the animals that are placed in juxtaposition over against one another *alone*.

When men establish a covenant between themselves, it always is an alliance between two or more parties, with mutual stipulations and conditions and promises. And hence, when in olden times a covenant was, symbolically ratified by the divided animals, all the parties of the covenant would pass between the pieces, signifying no doubt that they would be faithful to the covenant thus ratified even unto death. But this is not the case with the covenant which God establishes with Abraham. That covenant is not bipartisan, but God is His own party in the covenant. It is not bilateral, but unilateral. This is indicated by the fact that God alone passes through the pieces. Abraham was no party at all in the establishment of the covenant of God. In fact, when God passed through the pieces under the symbol of a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, Abraham was still in a deep sleep.

It is true that when God established His covenant with Abraham, he became of the party of the living God. But man is never a party in relation to God. That Abraham was of the party of the living God is to my mind clearly symbolized in the text when he drove away the vultures that came down upon the carcasses to devour them. Thus, then, we have in this passage a beautiful revelation of the covenant and promise of God as depending not on Abraham and God, but on God alone. And thus Abraham has an answer to the question: "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" But also here you have very clearly both a promise and a prediction.

The promise is the land of Canaan, and therefore the city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, or the heavenly country. That Abraham actually looked upon the promise in that light is very evident from Hebrews 11:9,10: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." And again, this is also evident from the same chapter, vss. 13-16: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now, they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." Surely, Abraham had the promise. But at the same time, the promise of God was a prediction, the prediction of the final heavenly tabernacle of God with men in the New Jerusalem and in the new heavens and the

new earth. You cannot separate promise and prediction. Prediction is the promise, and the promise is prediction.

Thus it is in all the passages of Scripture that refer to God's covenant. In Genesis 17:7 we read the well-known words: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." That these words are both a promise and a prediction is plain in itself. The promise is that God will establish His covenant with Abraham. The promise is, too, that of his seed. And the prediction is that God will continue His covenant in the line of Abraham's generations, and that it will be an everlasting covenant, so that its final realization shall be in the, tabernacle of God with men. But take these words in the connection with the promise to Abraham in Gen. 12 :2,3 in connection with Heb. 6:13-18 In the former passage we read: "And I will make thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." That also have you have both a promise and a prediction, and that, besides, the promise and the prediction are absolutely sure and both pertain only to the heirs of the promise that is, the elect, is evident from the reference to these words in Heb. 6:13-18: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying thee I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." O, to be sure, God gives no predictions to N.N. to John, Peter, and William. But neither does He give, promises to N.N., but only to His people. And His people are certainly not all that live under the outward dispensation of the covenant, but only to the elect, Unto the heirs of the promise, unto whom God . . . shows the immutability of His counsel by an oath, does He give His promises: But again, let Schilder not say that the promises are no predictions. For in Scripture they are always identical. And always both refer only to the elect.

Read also in that beautiful covenant psalm, Psalm 89, that sings of the everlasting mercies of God to His covenant people, how promises and predictions are combined and inseparably connected: "For I have said, Mercy shall be built up forever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations." vv. 2-4. And again: "Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help on one that is mighty; I have

exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm shall also strengthen him. The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings. of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for ever more, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.” And again, after the psalmist has stated that God, will visit that covenant seed with His rod if they forsake His law and walk not in His statutes and judgments, he continues: “Nevertheless, my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once I have sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven.” Promise? O yes. Prediction? To be sure. Inseparable connection between both? Without a doubt. And both unconditional and certain, based only on the faithfulness of God? Absolutely!

Let me quote a few more passages. For the Scripture is full of promises and predictions that are identical and inseparable from one another. In Isa. 43:1-7 we read: “But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the holy one of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life; Fear not: For I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.” Beautiful predictions and glorious promises! But neither are for all, but only for the elect. They were precious in God’s sight from before the foundation of the world and because they were precious in the sight of God from all, eternity, they are honorable, and God has loved them and loveth them forever.

One more passage from Isaiah. In Isaiah 44:1-5 we read, “Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel whom I have chosen: Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and

thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Again you have here glorious promises which are at the same time predictions. And again, both these promises and predictions are not for all, not for N.N., not for John, Peter and William. But they are only for the elect of God, whom God has chosen from before the foundation of the world.

I must continue next time. But when once more my spirit enters into the truth of this material, I can not help saying to Kok and Schilder and the Liberated: You can have all the conditional theology you want. But let me preach and embrace the truth that God's promise is only for the elect, and absolutely unconditional.

HH

Promise and Prediction
Chapter 2

**The promise For The Elect alone,
Spiritually addressed According To Scripture**

The last time I called attention to the paragraph of Dr. Schilder's article, translated in *Concordia* by the Rev. B. Kok, which I consider the heart of the entire article. I will quote it once more.

“But now comes, the fine point of distinction: God does give us promises; but no predictions. Thus He does not say to N.N.: you shall sometime go to heaven, and to another N.N.: you shall forever remain without.

“Therefore He gives a promise, with a command, even as it is taught us in the Canons of Dordt: the promise comes with the command to believe and repent. And thus at the time of baptism He says: He that believeth in Me, shall not be ashamed; for them that honor Me, I will honor; unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness; them that seek Me early shall find Me. And he who would call this Arminian, does not, in my opinion, read his Bible correctly, by means of which, nevertheless, the Arminians have been defeated.”

This, to my mind, is the heart of the entire article. I may say in passing that Dr. Schilder seems to think that by referring to the texts he quotes from Scripture he defeats Arminianism. But this I deny. The Arminian also teaches: “He that believeth in me shall not be, ashamed.” But the question is: who are they that believe in Him? Where does that faith come from? And even then one has to be careful? for even the Arminian will confess that faith is a gift of God. And therefore, one must ask the final question: but to whom does God give that faith? Then finally it will be exposed whether a man is Arminian or Reformed. For the Arminian will say that faith is a gift of God to whoever will receive it; while the Reformed man confesses that faith is a gift of God sovereignly bestowed upon the elect alone. The same is true of the other texts. Surely, we all confess with Scripture: “For them that honor Me I will honor,” the Arminian as well as the Reformed. But again the question is: who honors God? And the answer of the Reformed man certainly is: not the natural man, but only the believer, who has received the gift of faith from God, and that is the elect. Again, both the Arminian and the Reformed confesses with the Word of God: “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.” But again, according to Scripture the upright are they that have been delivered from the power of sin and death by sovereign grace, and therefore, the elect. For them only arises

light in darkness. And finally, the same is true of the text, “Them that seek Me early shall find Me.” But again, if we say no more, we speak only half a truth, even though we appeal to Scripture. For who seek God? Certainly not the natural man, but only those that have first been sought and found by God, and therefore, although it is true that those who do not seek God certainly shall not find Him, yet the seeking is not a condition which man must fulfill in order to find God, But rather the designation of the way in which the sovereign grace of God leads His own rational-moral children to find Him.

But let me call your attention to the fact that in all these texts the promise is not to N.N., to Peter, William, or Charles, but to those that believe, that is, the elect; to those that honor God, that is, the elect; to the upright, that is, the believing, regenerated elect; to those that seek, and that therefore have been found of God, that is the elect.

Before I proceed to show from Scripture that there is no distinction between promises and predictions and that neither promises nor predictions are for N. N., but that both are only for the elect, I would like to give a brief summary of my former editorial, in order to bring to mind concisely and clearly the contents of that former article, and at the same time to show in what respect we, the Protestant Reformed people, differ fundamentally from the view of Dr. Schilder and the view of the Liberated.

Briefly, then, I tried to bring out the following points.

1. Schilder makes a distinction between promises and predictions. We claim that promises and predictions are identical. Promises are predictions, and predictions are promises in Holy Writ.

2. Schilder makes God promise salvation to N.N., Peter, William, Charles, etc. In this respect Dr. Schilder agrees with a certain minister from the Liberated Churches in the Old Country with whom I had a bit of correspondence at the time when we still sent packages to the Netherlands. Concerning the promise he wrote me that he taught all his young people that they all had a check in their pocket. The check, of course, was the pledge of salvation and eternal life on the part of God to them all. If now they would only go to the bank and cash that check, they would receive the promise and the salvation indicated on the check. In a letter I wrote to him, I asked what was written on the check. Did one read on that check: “I Jehovah God, promise eternal life to believers?” Or “I, Jehovah God, promise N.N., Peter, William, or Charles eternal life?” In another letter he replied that the latter was the case, so that if Peter had that check in his pocket, he could read on that check: “I, Jehovah-God, promise you, Peter, eternal life.” And when in another letter I asked him how

that was possible, since God did not fulfill His promise and since there was no capital in the bank, except for the elect he answered me that that was a mystery. It belonged to the secret will of God, and we have to do with the revealed will. In our first conference which we had with Dr. Schilder after the war, I told that story. And he could hardly believe that the story was true. Nevertheless, principally he agrees with that Liberated minister: For now he writes himself that the promises are for N.N., although no predictions are for them. We, on the other hand, maintain that no promises are for N.N., but only for the believers, that is, the elect.

3. Dr. Schilder evidently presents the promise as excluding faith, as is evident from his appeal to Canons II, 5. We, on the other hand, claim that the promise includes faith. For God promises the Holy Spirit, the author of faith. And therefore God pledges by the promise that He will give faith to the elect.

4. For Dr. Schilder the promise is conditional, conditioned on faith, repentance and obedience. Again, the appeal is to Canons II, 5. On the other hand, we who claim that the promise includes faith, insist that it is unconditional, for the simple reason that it is nonsense to say that faith and obedience are a condition unto faith.

5. For Schilder faith is a condition unto the promise. For us faith is an instrument which God sovereignly works in our hearts according to His promise.

6.. For Schilder, as well as for Veenhof unbelief closes the gate of heaven. For us the gate of heaven was never open to the reprobate, that remains in his sin and unbelief. And seeing that it was always closed to him, unbelief cannot possibly close it.

Such is, in brief, the difference between the view of Dr. Schilder and the Liberated, and us as Protestant Reformed believers. At bottom it, is a question of God's absolutely sovereign predestination, both His election and reprobation. I do not say that Dr. Schilder is Arminian: for even, in the article which was translated by the Rev. Kok in *Concordia* he emphatically confesses to believe in the sovereign grace of God. But I do maintain that I cannot square his conception of the promise to all with the pure Reformed view of God's sovereign grace. And I do maintain that if Dr. Schilder insists on his conditional promise for N.N., he must maintain that there is common grace (all have the promise) within the sphere of the covenant. And secondly, I cannot understand the difference between his conception and the Christian Reformed theory of a well-meaning offer of grace and salvation on the part of God to all that are in the covenant. If Dr. Schilder is still interested, I would like to have him comment on the above remarks.

And now, I will continue to prove from Scripture, this time especially from the New Testament, that the distinction between promises and predictions is false, that

neither promises nor predictions are according to the Word of God ever for N.N., but that they are both for the elect.

For this proof I refer the reader in the first place to the beatitudes, which are found in the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

There we read: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven is here promised to the poor in spirit. That promise is both the pledge of a present reality and of a future blessing: It is, therefore, both a promise and a prediction. This promise and prediction is not for N.N., for Peter, William and Charles, etc. But it is for the poor in spirit. And the poor in spirit are those who by the grace of God know their own poverty of spirit. They are, therefore, the believers. And again, they are the elect. Both the prediction and the promise is for them only.

The beatitudes continue: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." In the light of the context, and in the light of all Scripture, it is very evident that the reference is here not to those that naturally mourn, but to those that mourn because they are poor in spirit. They mourn because of their sin and unrighteousness and imperfection. And perhaps we can add too that they mourn because they are still in the flesh and in this present world. And the promise to them, which is at the same time a prediction, is that they shall be comforted. Again, also in this text the promise is not to N.N., but definitely to the elect alone. And so is the prediction of future comfort and glory.

This Again, in the third beatitude we read: "Blessed the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." A gain there is in this text a blessed promise. But the promise lies for its realization in the future, and therefore is at the same time a prediction. But this promise and the prediction are not for N.N., but only for the meek, that is, without any question, for those that suffer for Christ's sake meekly and patiently in the present world. And once more: that promise is for the elect alone.

In the fourth beatitude we read: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Who are they that, do hunger and thirst after righteousness? Certainly not N.N. Surely not natural man. He hungers and thirsts to be sure, but not after righteousness, but after the things of this world. It is only those that have been translated by the sovereign grace of God from death unto life, and have been called from darkness into light, in other words, again the elect that so hunger and thirst after righteousness. And the promise is that they shall be filled. Surely, that promise includes a present boon: for already they are filled by faith with the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. By faith and hope they already possess the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But on the other hand, this lies for its ultimate

realization still in the future. And therefore the text reads: "They shall be filled." Again we have here a promise and a prediction. But neither the promise nor the prediction is for N.N., but only for those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, and therefore, only for the elect.

In the fifth beatitude we read: "Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy." Certainly, this cannot mean that anyone shall obtain mercy on condition of his being merciful himself. For in that case no one would ever receive mercy. A promise of mercy for N.N. on condition that he is merciful certainly is void of all meaning. But the merciful are those that have first been touched by the mercy of God. Because they have tasted the mercy of God and experienced His mercy, they are merciful. And to them the promise is that they shall obtain mercy. Already they have obtained mercy, for God's mercy is absolutely first. But when in turn they themselves reveal mercy to the brother, they lay hold on the promise of God that they shall obtain mercy, when God blesses them with everlasting perfection in eternal glory. But again, the point is that also in this beatitude there are no promises, neither predictions, for N.N., but only for those that are merciful by the grace of God, and therefore, for the elect only.

Again, in the sixth beatitude we read: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." This is again a promise and a prediction, or, if you wish, a promise in the form of a prediction. It is, of course, impossible to see God, that is, to ever look on His face with pure delight, except for those that are pure in heart. But who are the pure in heart? They are, of course, those who by the grace of God have principally been cleansed from all sin and pollution in their deepest heart, and therefore, once, more, the elect. And again. I want to emphasize that also here there are no promises and no predictions for N.N., but only for the People of God.

Finally, in the seventh beatitude we read: "Blessed the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." It is not necessary for me in this connection to say that the peacemakers are not to be found at the conference tables of the nations, but those who have received the peace of God that passeth all understanding in their hearts, and therefore, fundamentally they seek the only peace there is, peace with God and peace with one another in Christ Jesus their Lord. And again, the promise is at the same time a prediction: they shall be called the children of God. They are known as children of God even now. And they reveal themselves as children of God even in this world. But in the final and public adoption unto children and heirs, they shall certainly be called children of God in perfection. And therefore, also here we have a promise and a prediction. And the promise as well as the prediction is only for the children of God, for the elect, that are the only peacemakers in the world.

Just a few more passages from Holy Writ I will quote, in order to show that

promises and predictions are always the same in Scripture, and that there are neither promises nor prediction: for anyone but believers, that is, therefore, the elect. The first passage I refer to is Matthew 11:28: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” In this verse we have the promise of rest. And rest is, of course, both a present blessing as well as a future boon. It includes rest for the soul in the future. Now to whom is this promise given? Is it given to N.N., that is, to Peter, William, and Charles, etc.? Certainly not. For in the first place, those to whom the promise is given are here designated as those that labor and are heavy laden; and this certainly cannot be said of all men, at least not in the spiritual sense of the word. To be spiritually laboring and heavy laden undoubtedly means to be burdened under sin and laboring with the impossible task of acquiring righteousness by one’s own effort and works, and a realizing that the task is impossible. But what is more important is that the Lord promises rest to those that come unto Him. And to come unto Christ is a spiritual act of faith. It implies that one realizes that he is empty of all righteousness, that Christ is the fulness of righteousness for the sinner, that therefore one longs for Christ as the fulness of his own emptiness, and finally that one appropriates Christ and all His benefits. And who are they that thus come to Him? They are the elect. They are those whom the Father draws before they can possibly come to Him. For thus we read in John 6:37: “All that the Father giveth unto me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” And again, in vs. 39: “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” And once more in vs. 44: “No .man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” And the same truth is expressed in vs. 65: “And. he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father.” The promise and the prediction or rest is therefore not given unto N.N., but only unto those that come to Christ and, therefore, unto the elect, whom the Father gives unto Christ.

In this connection, although I will refer to the Confessions later on, I must nevertheless quote Art. 8 of Canons III, IV: “As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in his Word, what will be acceptable to him; namely, that all who are called should come unto him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.” Also in this article the promise, therefore, is not to N.N., but to those that come to Christ, that therefore are drawn by the Father, and that are chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world.

Finally, I refer to: the promises and predictions that are found at the close of every one of the seven letters that are sent to the seven churches of Asia Minor, recorded in the Book of Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3.

In 2:7 we read: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” That here you have a promise in, the form of a prediction, or you can also say: a prediction in the form of a promise, and that therefore promise and prediction are exactly identical is clear to all. But again, neither the promise in the form of a prediction, nor the prediction in the form of a promise is addressed to N.N., but only to him that overcometh, to the believer that perseveres. And since perseverance is the fruit of God’s preservation, that promise and the prediction both are addressed to the elect. Moreover, the entire address is to him “that hath an ear” to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. It is therefore addressed to him that has a spiritual ear. And the spiritual ear is a gift of grace, and again, is given only to the elect.

Again, in vs. 11 we have the promise: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” Also here there is a promise which is positively expressed in the preceding verse : “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Also this promise is in the form of a prediction. And again, the prediction is in the form of a promise. But also here the promise is not to N.N., but to him that hath an ear to hear, to him that overcometh, and to him that is faithful unto death. And all these terms, according to the whole Word of God, refer only to the believers, and therefore, only to the elect.

In vs. 17 we read: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” Here again you have both a promise and a prediction. And again, the promise is only to the believers and to the elect, that have ears to hear and that overcome in the battle of faith.

In vs. 26-29 of the same chapter we read: “And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Again the promise and the prediction are not to N.N., but only to the faithful believers, and therefore to the elect. It is addressed to him that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. All this is true only of the believers, and therefore, only of the elect.

Again, in 3:5, 6 we read : “He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his

name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear; let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. This in fact is principally addressed to the few names that are at Sardis that have not defiled their garments and that have the promise that they shall walk with Christ in white, vs. 4. They are the ones that overcome. And they are the same that have ears to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Also here it is evident that we have a promise and a prediction, and that neither of them is addressed to N.N.

In vss. 12 and 13 of the same chapter we read: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Here also you have a glorious promise in the form of a prediction, that is addressed to him that overcometh and to him that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. It is certainly not addressed to N.N.

And the same note is heard in the promise and the prediction to the church of Laodicea, which is found in Rev. 3:20-22: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him; and he I with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear; let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," Here is a present promise as well as a future prediction. The present promise is that Christ will come in and sup with him that hears His voice and opens the door of the church. The prediction is that Christ will grant to him to sit with Him in His throne. But both the promise and the prediction are not to N.N., but only to the believers. It is to those that hear the voice of Jesus as He stands at the church door of Laodicea and knocks, and that open the door to Him. And it is to those that overcome and that have ears to hear, what the Spirit saith to the churches.

I can, of course, adduce many more passages from Holy Writ. But this is quite sufficient. The distinction which Dr. Schilder makes between promises and predictions is absolutely untenable. And his statement that there are promises for N.N., but no predictions, cannot possibly be maintained in the light of Scripture. And the same is true of the threats in Scripture, and of everlasting destruction. Dr. Schilder says that there are no predictions in Scripture for .N:N. that he will go to hell. And that is, of course, true, no less than there are predictions in Scripture that Tom, Dick, or Harry will go to heaven. But no more than there, are promises in Scripture to N.N., no more are there threats of destruction and everlasting damnation in Scripture for Tom, Dick, or Harry. Just as in Scripture those for whom are the promises are mentioned by their spiritual name, so also those for whom are

the threats of wrath and destruction are not designated by their natural name, but are denoted as fools, wicked, unrighteous, ungodly, and workers of iniquity.

Also this is very evident from Holy Writ. It is really not necessary for me to quote specific passages from Scripture to prove this. But for completeness sake I will quote a few texts at random. In Psalm 5:4-6 we read: "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man." This is the very opposite of the promise. And just as the promise is not for N.N.: so the threats of destruction are not for them either. They are called by their spiritual ethical name. They are the foolish, the workers of iniquity, those that speak leasing, bloody and deceitful men. They are, therefore, the reprobate, the very antithesis to the elect.

In Psalm 7:11, ff. we read: "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors. Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate."

In psalm 37:9, ff. we read: "For evil doers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming," etc.

In Ps. 73 we read of the foolish and of the wicked, who prosper in the world, in whose death there are no bands, and whose strength is firm, who are not in trouble as other men, nor plagued like other men. Pride compasseth them about as a chain, and violence coverth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness. They are corrupt and speak wickedly concerning oppression. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. And the psalmist is grieved at all this, until he enters into the sanctuary. Then he beholds that God did set them in slippery places, and casteth them down into destruction. They are brought into desolation in a moment, and they are utterly consumed with terrors. When the Lord awakeneth, He shall despise their image. All this is not said concerning the ungodly as N.N., as Tom, Dick, and Harry, but concerning them in their character as ungodly and foolish and wicked. And so it is said in Ps. 92 that the wicked spring as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, but that it, is the intention of the

Lord even in their prosperity that they shall be destroyed forever. But. I will not quote more. Dr. Schilder knows just as well as I do that this is the fundamental note in all Holy Writ, both in the Old Testament and in the New. Never does Scripture have any promises for N.N., but the promises are always for the elect. Nor does the Bible speak of any threats of wrath and punishment and destruction for N.N., but always these are designated as the wicked and the ungodly.

Promise and Prediction
Chapter 3

Schilder, Veenhof and Baptism

But perhaps Dr. Schilder was thinking particularly of the sacrament of holy baptism when he wrote these words. In baptism the individual child receives the sign and seal of the righteousness which is by faith on his forehead. And the individual child is certainly called, by his natural name. Does this then not imply that God gives His promise to N.N. in baptism?

This is indeed what Prof. Veenhof writes and strongly emphasizes in his well-known *Appel*. Writes he: (I translate -HH)

“For whenever a genuine baptism takes place, when therefore a little child is baptized according to God’s command and in the manner which He ordained, then the real baptizer is the great eternal God Himself !

“This indeed we must especially know and maintain; this must so fill our heart, that we see it by faith: God, our God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself baptizes the little infants in the church! A minister is only a man, through whom God Himself administers baptism. The minister is of no account. Is it of interest to you perhaps, who is the mail man that delivered a letter to you? Of course not. When you take a letter out of the mailbox, you don’t even think about the mail man! If the epistle is only a genuine letter, written by him or by her! Then we say: a letter from him, from her! And that is sufficient for us, more than sufficient. “And therefore, because that is the case with regard to baptism, we say with all our power and in all seriousness: We received our baptism from God Himself and from Him alone. God Himself baptized us!

“If this were not the case, the act of the minister would simply be mockery. He would have done nothing else than to speak a few powerless little words and splash with a little water!

“But it is not thus!

“When a child is baptized, the Lord Himself approaches that little child. He Himself sprinkles the water on its little head, and says very really and very personally: John, Mary, Anna, I, the Lord Himself, baptize thee, immerse thee in My holy Name. Thou art now of Me!

“Added to this is something else. Or rather, added to this is very much!

“Baptism, which is given by the Lord Himself, always remains of power, every day, every hour, until our death, yea, in all eternity. The case is really thus that the Lord baptizes us continually. After He sprinkled us with water when we were but a few days old, He keeps that water, so to speak, always fresh and living and powerful on our forehead. And the words, which He at that time spoke, He continues to speak throughout all our life! Every second Jehovah repeats: Carl, William, Mary, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Or rather: Jehovah does not repeat that word : *He continues to say it, it remains of unbroken power, it continues to come unto us in all seriousness and grace out of His heart.*”

And a little further:

“What now is this baptism?

“What does God say, what does He do when He baptizes us?

“This can be expressed very simply: baptism is a seal!

“To understand clearly what this sentence means, we must thoroughly understand and always maintain, that the Lord was pleased in His marvelous love to give to *all* the children of believers His *promise*. Or to express it differently: it pleased Him to give to all the children a glorious pledge. He says namely to all those children, head for head, day in day out, seriously and uprightly: I am the Lord your God. I establish my covenant with you. I wash you of all your sins in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. My Holy Spirit will dwell in you. Briefly: I promise you the complete forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation: all the treasures and riches, which I will and am able to give to men.”

Is this, perhaps, what Dr. Schilder means when he writes that there are no predictions, but promises for N.N.? This, of course, is the Heynsian view of the promise. And it appears that Dr. Schilder agrees with him.

But let us see whether this be true.

In the first place, I want to call your attention to the fact that certainly the sacrament of baptism cannot mean more or express more than the promise of the gospel. Now, as we have seen, the promise of the gospel is never to .N.N., but always to believers, which is saying the same thing as to the elect. The gospel certainly

never addresses Carl, Anna, Marie, Tom, Dick, and Harry by their natural name as being heirs of the promise. God certainly never says to them: I promise you that I will be your God forever, that I establish with you my everlasting covenant, that I incorporate you into Jesus Christ, that I wash away your sins and give you everlasting righteousness and life, that I give you my Holy Spirit to apply all the blessings of salvation unto you, until ye shall arrive in the assembly of the elect in life eternal. On the contrary, the gospel always addresses the elect by their spiritual name, as those that are poor in spirit, that mourn, that hunger and thirst after righteousness, that are meek, that are pure in heart, that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that therefore may be assured that they are elect. In fact, when any minister would say to any individual, say that his name is Carl: “Carl, in the name of God I promise you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life,” without knowing anything about Carl as to his spiritual condition, such a minister would simply speak an untruth in the name of God. Is it possible, then, that through baptism God speaks thus to every individual child, head for head and soul for soul? I insist that this is impossible, and contrary to the Word of God.

But Dr. Schilder and also Prof. Veenhof would say undoubtedly that they do not mean this. According to them the promise which God gives through baptism to any individual child is not unconditional, but conditional. The fulfillment of the promise, although sincere on the part of God and even, according to Veenhof, spoken to that individual child in His everlasting love and grace depends on the question whether that child will believe and assume his covenant obligations and so fulfill his part of the covenant. This too Prof. Veenhof writes in his *Appel*, as follows:

“It stands to reason that we may not forget for one second that God speaks His Word of promise never alone and never in separation from something else. “He says with and in the promise always also something else. “When He gives His promise, He calls us at the same time to love Him with all our heart, to believe His Word in child-like faith, and to walk in His ways. When the Lord says to Abraham: I am the *Lord your God*, then He adds, as it were in one breath: *Now walk always before my face and be upright.*

“But this command, this demand, does not make the promise poorer or weaker!

“No question about it!

“The demand which by the Lord is always being entwined in His promise and which comes with the promise is exactly a calling to believe *His promise* and therefore to trust in the promise and to live out of the promise.”

The promise, according to Prof. Veenhof and also according to Dr. Schilder, is therefore conditional.

Let us see where this lands us. In the first place, it must be very evident that if this is true and the promise of God is conditional, it certainly can mean absolutely nothing for that little child, for the simple reason that an infant of say, eight days old cannot possibly fulfill any conditions. He knows nothing of conditions. And therefore if it be true that God says to that little infant, say his name is Carl, "Carl, I am your God forever. I establish my everlasting covenant with you. I wash you from all your sins and iniquities, I give you eternal life and righteousness. I will give you my Holy Spirit, to dwell in you and to apply all the blessings of salvation to you, on condition that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and that you love me with all your heart and walk before me and be upright." Then I say: that little infant has no promise of God at all. Then it means nothing to him before he has come to years of discretion and can fulfill the conditions required. In that case we must really repudiate infant baptism and refrain from administering that sacrament until one is capable of fulfilling the conditions.

But there is more.

Prof. Veenhof emphasizes that it is not the minister that baptizes, but God Himself. It is not the minister that speaks, but God Himself, when He says to Carl: "I will establish my everlasting covenant with thee. I will be thy God forever. I love thee with an everlasting love. I give thee my Word of promise in my eternal grace. I incorporate thee in Jesus Christ. And, I give thee the living faith. I cleanse thee from all thy sins and forgive all thy transgressions. I give thee my Holy Spirit. And I apply unto thee all the blessings of salvation, sanctifying thee in Christ Jesus, until thou shalt appear in the assembly of the elect in life eternal." Now, mark you well, it is not the minister that speaks these words, but God. And the Word of God is surely always efficacious, in distinction from any word of man. If this were true, therefore, it follows that Carl is surely saved. But according to Prof. Veenhof, Carl is not necessarily saved, but only conditionally. In other words, grace is not necessarily efficacious; and the Word which God speaks may be made of none effect by Carl, that is, by mere man.

But there is still more. Prof. Veenhof does not hesitate to include the Holy Spirit and His work in the promise of salvation which is addressed by God to Carl. And this promise, according to Veenhof, is conditional. From this it follows that also the promise of the Holy Spirit is conditional. And we ask: conditional upon what? Can man before He has, been regenerated and before the saving faith has been implanted in his heart, do anything at all to make himself worthy of the promise? This would lead us right into the error of Arminianism and Pelagianism. We know

what Heyn's solution is to this question. He distinguishes between the work of the Father and the Son on the one hand, and the work of the Holy Spirit on the other, and separates them. The promise, according to him, then means: the objective bequest that God establishes His covenant of grace with us, makes us His children and heirs, provides us with every good thing, and averts all evil or turns it to our profit; that God the Son incorporates us, into His death and washes us from all our sins. But when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit, he emphasizes that the Spirit WILL dwell in us and apply all blessings of salvation to us.

But whether this will be realized depends upon the covenant child himself when he comes to years of discretion; And he invents the theory of a certain preparatory grace; as we well know, that enables the covenant child either to accept or to reject the promise. I do not know how Veenhof, and for that matter also Dr. Schilder, solves this problem. And I have never seen a solution of it. It is again the same problem: is the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith included in the promise that is given to every child, head for head and soul for soul? And is this promise of the Holy Spirit conditional upon anything that man must do or can do? This, of course, is the Pelagian solution. But if this is not the case, and if, Prof. Veenhof and also Dr. Schilder admit that the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith are first and absolutely unconditional, so that man can do absolutely nothing in order to obtain that Holy Spirit; and if they still insist that God nevertheless promises His Holy Spirit and His grace and the gift of faith to every individual child that is baptized, the inevitable question is: does God lie? For it is absolutely certain that there is carnal seed among the spiritual seed of the covenant, that there are reprobate under the dispensation of the covenant. And it is also absolutely certain that God will not fulfill His promise, will not give His Holy Spirit, and will not give His grace and the gift of faith to the reprobate, but only to the elect.

I wish that Dr. Schilder would answer this question, and explain to us how the promise of God can be to N. N., to Tom, Dick, and Harry, even though it be a conditional promise.

On our part, we would offer the following solution.

In the first place, I would insist that the promise of God, which includes the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the promise of God's grace, and the promise of the gift of faith, is absolutely unconditional and only for the elect. Then, and then only, can we maintain that little infants have the promise of the Holy Spirit and the promise of the gift of faith.

In the second place, I would insist that God never lies, but surely fulfills His every Word of promise, so that He actually gives the Holy Spirit and implants the gift of

faith in the hearts of all the children that belong to the spiritual seed of the covenant, that is, the elect.

In the third place, I would emphasize that it is God's own command and revelation that He establishes His covenant in the line of the continued generations of believers; that therefore, as in the Old Testament the generations of Abraham were circumcised, so in the new dispensation the generations of believers must be baptized.

In the fourth place, however, we must maintain that not all that belong to the carnal seed of Abraham and that belong to the carnal seed of believers are also to be counted as the spiritual seed. For this is very evident from Rom. 9:6-8: "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect: For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the promise are counted for the seed."

Finally, it is the will of God, therefore, that not only the children of the promise, but also the carnal seed, not only the elect, but also the reprobate shall come under the dispensation of the covenant and under the dispensation of the promise. God certainly does not lie when He brings the carnal children under the seal of baptism. For after all, baptism, like circumcision, is a seal of the righteousness which is by faith. In baptism therefore God does not give the promise to every child, head for head and soul for soul, but only seals the inseparable connection between faith and righteousness. In baptism, therefore, He declares that the believer in Christ shall certainly be justified and receive all the blessings of salvation. And that believer in Christ is the spiritual seed only, that is, the elect. And if you ask the question: why then does God continue His covenant in the line of generations so that even the carnal seed comes under the dispensation of the covenant and of the promise, so that even the reprobate come into closest contact with the promise? my answer is: God wills that they shall become manifest as profane, as violators of His covenant. It is in the sphere of the dispensation of the covenant; that sin becomes manifest as sin in the highest sense of the word. And it is from those that live under the dispensation of the covenant that Antichrist, the Man of Sin, must come, and that the measure of iniquity must be filled.

This is also my answer to the question: why must Esau be firstborn? Why must he whom God hated have the birthright and be placed by God in the position of the elect, of him whom God loved?

But, and it seems to me this is the chief difference between us and Dr. Schilder and the Liberated, if we do not see and do not want to see that God cuts the sharp line of

election and reprobation right through the dispensation of the covenant, we certainly will never agree on the question concerning the promise. H.H.

Promise and Prediction
Chapter 4

A Response From
The Reformed Confessions

The readers will kindly understand that this editorial was written and setup, before I heard of brother Schilder's passing. H.H.

We will now turn to our Reformed Confessions, in order to examine them with a view to the question whether they, perhaps, make the distinction between predictions and promises such as Dr. Schilder makes, and whether promises, in distinction from predictions, are indeed for N.N., for Tom, Dick, and Harry.

I am afraid that many of the Reformed people, and this certainly includes also the Liberated, are not very well acquainted with their own Confessions except, perhaps, the Heidelberg Catechism. And even the leaders of the. Liberated, with their contention that the promise is for all the children that are born under the dispensation of the covenant and that it is conditional, do not preferably quote the Confessions in support of their view.

In all his criticism on the Declaration of Principles Dr. Schilder did not once refer to the Confessions. He did indeed allege that the Declaration of Principles represented the supralapsarian view of the counsel of God, although the basic contention of that Declaration, namely, that the promise of God is unconditional and for the elect only, has nothing whatever to do with the question of supra and infra, but is deduced directly from the infralapsarian Confessions.

He also criticized the contention of the Declaration that election is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation, instead of which he suggested that election is not the cause or fountain, but the ground of our salvation. In this he made an error, for the Confessions literally speak of cause and fountain. But for the rest, I do not remember that in all his criticism Dr. Schilder referred to the Confessions whatsoever. And this, of course, is at the same time a fundamental weakness of his criticism: for the Declaration means to be nothing but an expression of the truth as it is found in our Reformed symbols.

But this in parentheses.

We will now turn to the Confessions themselves, to discover whether they really support the view of a conditional promise for all the children that are born in the dispensation of the covenant.

I will begin with the well-known and often quoted part of the Canons of Dordrecht that speaks of the promise of everlasting life. I refer to Canons II, 5, a part of the Confessions to which also Dr. Schilder preferably refers as defining the real promise of the gospel.

We read there:

“Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.” Canons II, 5

It is striking indeed that also the Synod of the Christian Reformed Churches, 1924, appealed to this same part of the Confessions to maintain their “puntje van het eerste punt” (the heart of the first point), that, namely, the preaching of the gospel is grace for all that hear. Not being able to find any Kuyperian common grace in the Confessions, they made the error of presenting the gospel as a well-meaning offer of grace and salvation, well-meaning on the part of God, to all the hearers. In other words, by the very force of circumstances they were deflected into Arminian waters.

But how about this part of the Confessions? Does it indeed teach the distinction between predictions and promises, so that there are no predictions for N.N., for Tom, Dick, and Harry, but there are promises for them? In other words, is the promise of the gospel here presented as for all, and as a conditional promise?

To be sure, this article does sustain the contention of Schilder that there are no predictions for N.N. And we may just as well state at once that such a doctrine is not and could not possibly be found in any of our Confessions, no more than it is ever met with in Holy Writ. The article certainly does not state that N.N. shall have eternal life, or that N.N. shall perish.

However, note too that there nevertheless is in this article a prediction in the form of a promise, or, if you wish, a promise in the form of a prediction. That prediction and that promise is contained in the clause, “whosoever . . . shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” This is a promise, for it is stated in the very same article that this is the promise of the gospel. But at the same time it is a prediction, as the future form of the verb plainly indicates. One can also say on the basis of Scripture that one that believes in Christ *hath* eternal life; and in that case it is a statement of a present fact. But here the promise of the gospel is given in the form of a prediction, of a good that is to be attained and expected in the future. We may certainly put this

promise in this form: “Whosoever . . . shall not go to hell, but shall go to heaven.”

But note now, in the second place, that this promise in the form of a prediction is not given as a conditional promise to N.N. God does not issue checks on which it is written: “I, Jehovah God, promise you, Tom, Dick, and Harry, eternal life,” a promise that for its realization depends on the willingness of him who received it to go to the bank and cash the check. The promise is not to N.N., but to the believers. For: “The promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

And this brings us to the question: who are the believers? This question must of course be answered in the light of all our Reformed Confessions. I insist that no one has the right to isolate this part of the Confessions and separate it from the whole. Then indeed you can make the Confessions speak Arminian language. Also the Arminian has no objection to the definition of the promise as contained in Canons II, 5, provided you separate this part from the rest of the Reformed symbols. They also state that he that believeth shall surely be saved. And they even have no objection to maintain that faith is a gift of God, and that it is all of grace. And therefore we must certainly read this part of the Confessions in the light of the rest.

I will not take space at this time to quote the Confessions on this score at length. I will only refer to the same chapter of the Canons, Articles 7 and 8.

In Article 7 we read: “But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God, given-them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own.”

And in Article 8: “For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last, bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.”

Here, then, you have the answer to the question: who are the believers? In one word, they are the elect. Hence, the promise here is not to N.N., it is not for Tom, Dick, and Harry. But it is only for those that are ingrafted into Christ, that embrace all His benefits by a saving faith, the believers. And therefore, the promise according to Canons II, 5, in the light of all the Reformed symbols, is only for the elect.

And just as you cannot possibly make the promise of the gospel according to Canons II, 5 a general promise for all, or at least a promise for all the children that are born under the covenant, so you cannot by any stretch of the imagination make this promise a conditional promise, which after all is the same as a well-meaning offer of salvation, and which, by the way, would place the promise exactly out of reach of every sinner. For no sinner can possibly fulfill any conditions in order to receive or attain to the promise of eternal life. But it is not presented as conditional in this part of the Canons. Even the form of the language is not conditional. "The form is rather that of general relative clause: "Whosoever believeth in Christ crucified," (*ut quisquis credit in Christum crucifixum*). And, *quisquis* does not introduce a conditional sentence, but a general relative clause. It denotes therefore that there is no exception but that all who are included in those who believe in Christ will surely have eternal life.

Besides, let me remind you that faith, in our Confessions, is never, presented as a condition, not even unto the full and final realization of the promise. It is always presented as an instrument or means, and that too a God-given instrument, whereby we are ingrafted into Christ and whereby we receive all His benefits of mere grace.

We maintain, therefore, that in Canons II, 5:

1. There is certainly no mention of a prediction to N. N.
2. That in the same article there is mention of a prediction of eternal life, but not to N.N., but to believers.
3. That this prediction is at the same time the promise of the gospel, and that also the promise of the gospel is not to N.N., but to the same believers.
4. That in the light of all the Reformed symbols the believers are the elect, and none other.
5. That the promise to them is not conditional, but is an oath of God according to which He leads the elect infallibly to salvation.

But you say: what about the last part of this same article. This last part reads: “This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.”

Does not this last part make the promise of the gospel conditional, conditional, that is, upon faith and repentance? And may we not say that in this sense the promise of the gospel is to N.N.?

My answer is: positively not! Mark you well, this part of the article does not speak of the promise of God to N.N., to Tom, Dick, and Harry. But it speaks of the general *preaching* of the promise to all nations and to all men promiscuously, that is, without distinction. And according to the article, this preaching must be accomplished by the command to repent and believe. And, mark you well, the scope of this preaching is not determined by man, but by God, Who sends this gospel to whomsoever He wills.

But what is the meaning of this last part?

In answer I will remind you, first of all, of the truth that there is no preaching of the gospel, except as it stands in the service of the efficacious Word of God through Christ. Man cannot preach, unless it pleases God through Christ to speak His word efficaciously through him. His word is powerless. Only the Word of God is quick and powerful and efficacious. Even though a mere man announces the gospel, and even though that word which he announces is based upon the Holy Scripture, it will have no effect upon the hearers, either to hardening or unto salvation.

In the second place, the call to repent and believe must go forth to all men and to all nations promiscuously for the simple reason that the hearers are all moral and rational and responsible creatures. They have not the right to assume and keep on assuming an attitude of unbelief over against the Word of God. All men are obligated to repent.

In the third place, do not forget that only where this announcement of the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe, stands in the service of the efficacious Word of God that announcement can have effect. And the effect is always two-fold: it serves as a savor of death unto death, as well as a savor of life unto life. And thus, by the command to repent and believe, in the service of the efficacious Word of God, the reprobate sinner is hardened, his judgment is aggravated, and God is justified when He judges. On the other hand, through this same preaching of the promise, together with the command to repent and believe, and standing in the service of the efficacious Word of God, the elect are brought to repentance and to a

conscious, lively faith in Christ Jesus, and thus they have the right to embrace the promise that whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

H.H.

**A Response to Schilder's:
Extra-Scriptural Binding**

By Herman Hoeksema

Chapter 1

**Very Clear!
Defining “Conditions”**

The articles that appeared in the *Refomatie* by Dr. Schilder against the “Declaration of Principles” are now published in brochure form under the title “Bovenschriftuurlijke Binding – Een Nieuw Gevaar” that is, “Super-scriptural Binding- A New Danger.”

On page 2 of this brochure Dr. Schilder writes:

“Lately I received many letters from America, also concerning the question of the well-known “Declaration;” it was intentional, that I did not answer these epistles (although they did me much good): one must never be able to say that I have tried to drive a wedge between colleague Hoeksema and his own people which were always united with him in hearty love. My opinion about the declaration I openly expressed when it was deemed publicly necessary. But for the rest I await tranquilly what will be developed or be destroyed yonder.”

I can well believe these words of Dr. Schilder (I write about him now as a past author, and therefore it is not necessary for me to say always “the late Dr. Schilder”), as long as the Declaration was not officially and synodically adopted. At that time I could look upon the articles of Dr. Schilder in the *Reformatie* as advice to our churches. And those articles and that advice were carefully considered and studied, and by them we have benefited, although mostly negatively. But now, after the Declaration has been officially adopted by our last synod, and Schilder publishes those same articles in brochure form, I cannot help but doubt that his intention was not to drive a wedge into our churches. But let that be: we cannot judge motives.

When I read again what Dr. Schilder wrote about the Declaration of Principles as it now appears in, brochure form, I find it rather difficult to criticize him, for the very reason that there is no logical line in his writings whatsoever. Dr, Schilder always had many words, and he wrote evidently very easily, just as also, in his lectures he spoke very readily, without much preparation, and therefore frequently without much of a logical line in his speech. In my opinion he was rather an analytical mind

than a synthetic. He could sift words and terms, and criticize them, and say, "If I may understand the term in this sense, I can agree with it; but if in this sense, or another sense, I cannot agree with it." This he does also in his brochure. Besides, he jumps from one subject to another and returns to the same subject in different parts of his brochure. All this certainly makes not for clarity, and makes it somewhat difficult to criticize the contents of his pamphlet.

All the more amazing it is, to find that at the very beginning of his criticism of the Declaration of Principles he makes the remark that the Declaration is not clear, and that because of that fact it can never be a binding declaration. Writes he on pages 9 and 10, that the immigrants in Canada cannot and may not let themselves be bound to the Declaration of Principles, because:

"They cannot do this because the thing is not clear; and we believe therefore that they may not do it either . . . One can contradict what is proposed as a binding formula or accepted declaration on two grounds. The first may be: this declaration is factually untrue. For no one may bind himself or another to what is untrue. The second ground can be: this declaration is unclear, confusing, the choice of words is not lucid."

Now I maintain that the Declaration is very clear, so clear in fact that in our churches all understood it, whether they were opposed to adopting it or whether they were heartily in favor of it. I never heard any complaint in our churches that the Declaration was not clear.

But it is Dr. Schilder who in his brochure muddles matters, and is not only very confused, but also misrepresents our conception of the promise as well as that of the Liberated.

Of this I wish to give a few examples.

On pp. 13 ff, Dr. Schilder writes about conditions, and about the conditional promise of God. There he first of all warns us against the use of dictionaries to determine the meaning of a word. With this, of course, I cannot possibly agree. And by taking the stand that we must not consult dictionaries to determine the significance of a term, Dr. Schilder of course makes room for the possibility of making his own definitions. But he also says that it is better to search in theological works of the fathers that have composed the Confessions. And he writes:

"The question is: how must we understand that term 'Condition' (condition) can signify a ruling, a state (toestand), ordinance (ordening), institution (inrichting). It can also signify sundry other meanings."

Now I have repeatedly said that the only meaning the word condition can possibly have and does have; both in theological works and in the minds of the Reformed people, is that of *prerequisite*. When we speak of a conditional promise, we mean a promise that depends on a prerequisite which the one to whom the promise is made must fulfill in order to receive the promise. This is by no means ambiguous, but is very clear, is language which everyone can understand. And it is in this sense that the Declaration speaks of an unconditional promise.

This is the meaning of the term in our confessions.

When we read in Canons I, B, 2 that the Arminians teach that there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life, the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite, and that the definite election is either “incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute,” it is very evident that they mean by the term *conditional* something that is previously required of man in order to be chosen unto eternal salvation. And that something is faith, foreseen faith, or at least the will to believe. *Condition* here simply means a prerequisite.

This is still more clear in Canons I, B, 3, where we read that the Arminians teach: “That the good pleasure and purpose of God, of which Scripture makes mention in the doctrine of election, does not consist in this, that God chose certain persons rather than others, but in this, that he chose out of all possible conditions (among which are also the works of the law), or out of the whole order of things, the act of faith, which from its very nature is undeserving, as well as its complete obedience, as a condition of salvation.” Also in this article it is very plain that the term *condition* simply means a prerequisite which man must fulfill in order to be saved.

And this is still more lucid in Article 4 of the same chapter of the Canons, where we read that the Arminians teach: “That in the election unto faith this condition is beforehand demanded, viz., that man should use the light of nature aright, be pious, humble, meek and fit for eternal life, as if on these things election were in any way dependent.” You must understand that it is not the question now whether or not anyone believes in those so-called Arminian conditions; but only whether the term *condition* means prerequisite, and nothing else. And that this is indeed the meaning of the term is evident from the fact that the Arminians here teach “that this condition is beforehand demanded. Literally, therefore, the term *condition* here means prerequisite.

Once more, this is also evident from the same chapter of the Canons in Article 5, where we read that the Arminians, teach: “That faith, the obedience of faith,

holiness, godliness and perseverance are not fruits of the unchangeable election to glory, but are conditions, which, being required beforehand, were foreseen as being met by those who will be fully elected, and are causes without which the unchangeable election to glory does not occur.” Again I want to emphasize that it is not a question whether anyone believes in these Arminian conditions, but the sole question is whether in the Canons the term condition means prerequisite. And here the Canons speak of conditions which are required beforehand and which are met by those who will be fully elected. Literally, therefore, in the Canons the term *condition* means nothing else than prerequisite.

The same is true of Canons II, B, 3, where we read that the Arminians teach: “That Christ by his satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that he merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.” To prescribe conditions in order to receive something is certainly the same as a prerequisite.

And finally, the same meaning of the term is evident from Chapter V, B, 1 of the same Canons, where we read that the Arminians teach: “That the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which (as they declare) man before his decisive election and justification must fulfill though his free will.” Here too, the term *condition* means nothing else than a prerequisite which man must fulfill.

It is evident therefore, that in the terminology of our Confessions the term *condition* means a prerequisite which man must fulfill in order to obtain salvation.

Now let us see how Dr. Schilder defines the term *condition*. I find this definition on page 14 of his brochure.

After he has repudiated various definitions of conditions, such as, that a condition is something that could bind God, or that a condition is something for which God must wait before He can go further, or that a condition is something which we must fulfill in order to merit anything, he himself defines condition as follows:

“A condition is something which God has connected with something else, to make clear to us, that the one thing cannot come without the other, and that we cannot be sure of the one thing, unless we are at the same time assured of the other.”

I ask the reader: is this a clear definition of condition?

On the contrary, I claim that this is a very ambiguous and vague and utterly meaningless definition. This is evident already from the fact that Dr. Schilder does not even state, at least does not state definitely, the genus of the definition, the main term, that which must be defined. And this certainly is a prerequisite in all proper definitions. The genus in Dr. Schilder's definition is "SOMETHING." And the term *something* certainly denotes that we do not know what it is: it may be anything. It may be a tree or a house or a cow or a clog or a mountain or an ocean or an abstract concept, like independence or love or mercy, or anything whatsoever.

But this something, then, Dr. Schilder defines as that which God has connected with something else. This, therefore, is the species of the definition. Also this species may denote all kinds of concepts. It certainly may denote that God has connected the means with the end, such as the means of faith with the final salvation. And to this, of course, we can subscribe: God certainly has connected the final salvation with the means of faith. It may also mean the connection between cause and effect. God has connected the shower of rain with the dark cloud, a connection of cause and effect. But no Reformed man would make the statement that faith is the cause of our salvation. So God has connected the sprouting of the seed with the cause of rain and sunshine, the end of death with the cause of cancer or tuberculosis. But it is nonsense to speak of these causes as conditions. Cancer is no condition of death, but simply the cause. In fact, in this definition we may even find the Arminian conception of condition. God according to the Arminian has connected faith, or will to believe, or the good use of the natural light, with the end of salvation: and in that sense, of course, condition is simply a prerequisite which man must fulfill in order to obtain salvation.

But the definition continues, and tells us that God has connected the one thing with the other, to make clear to us that the one thing cannot come without the other. Also this is not clear whatsoever. An effect cannot come without a cause. A conditional promise of man cannot come without the prerequisite being fulfilled. And the end cannot come without the means. What does Dr. Schilder mean? Clear? To me it is all very confusing and ambiguous.

And finally, Dr. Schilder states in this definition that God has connected the one thing with the other in order to make us know that we cannot be sure of the one thing unless we are also sure of the other. In itself, this may be true: we cannot be sure of final glory unless we are sure of our justification. And we cannot be sure of justification, except by faith. And we cannot have faith, except when we are regenerated by the Spirit of God. Does that mean that regeneration is a condition of faith, and faith is a condition of justification, and justification is a condition of our

entering into final glory? I should say not! Regeneration is not a condition, but is the God-wrought source in us of all the subjective blessings of salvation. And faith is not a condition unto justification, but is the means whereby God ingrafts us into Christ by Whom we are justified. And justification is not a condition unto eternal life, but is the legal ground of our everlasting glory.

Now, please compare with this so-called definition of Dr. Schilder the simple definition which I always gave of condition: a condition is a prerequisite which man must fulfill in order to obtain the promise of God, and compare too what the Declaration of Principles has on this score:

“That the preaching of the of gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation in the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.”

And again: “That God’s promise is unconditionally for them (elect) only: for God cannot promise what was not objectively merited by Christ.”

I am not asking now whether the one or the other is true, but only whether the one or the other is clear, so that everyone can understand what we mean. And I claim that, while the Declaration uses clear language, for everyone to understand, Dr. Schilder’s definition muddles matters up. I would pity the church that would be bound by such a formulation.

Chapter 2

Defining The Promise, The Promise Includes Faith

But Dr. Schilder has more to say on this point.

In paragraph 7 on pp. 16 ff., he discusses what he calls a “good condition theory.”

In that paragraph he makes the distinction between promises and predictions, to which I have already referred. God does not say to N.N., to Tom, Dick, and Harry: “You will go to heaven;” and to another N.N., “You will remain eternally outside.”

Of. the utter untenableness of this distinction between promises and predictions I have already written. All the promises of God are also predictions, and the predictions are promises. But neither the promises nor the predictions are for N.N., for Tom, Dick, and Harry, but for the elect, for the believers, for those that are hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

And then Dr. Schilder refers to the Canons of Dordrecht, II, 5, to find there evidently, as he does throughout his brochure, a definition of the promise. Always, according to him, the promise comes with the demand of faith and repentance.

This I most strenuously deny, for then you could not possibly have the promise of God in baptism to little infants. Besides, I deny that in Canons II, 5 we have a definition of the promise. And finally, I deny that Dr. Schilder in paragraph 7 gives a fair and true representation of Liberated theology in regard to the promise of God. In order to make all this clear I will quote him literally.

“And now the conclusion: why should we establish such terms, with which no man can do anything? This entire passage concerning ‘unconditional’ is being introduced by the remark:

“a. Faith is not a preceding demand;

“b. Faith is not a condition to salvation, no preceding condition.

“But with this we all agree. At least if we well understand it. For it says: faith is not a preceding demand, but a gift of God. Every meaning put in the word condition, in the sense that by it would be meant: it is not given, but it comes of ourselves, is heartily rejected by us all! How can one think differently? Why should we then accept that word: preceding demand? As if, faith were a demand the fulfillment of which must precede God’s decree? Or even must

precede God's maintained, or approximate, or subsequent decree to save us? All that is Remonstrant folly; with which we in the Netherlands will have nothing whatever to do.

“But we do say here indeed; taught by all this interpretation misery: why does one not express himself more clearly? Faith is not a preceding demand? NO, if the meaning is something as when I say: the work of a laborer must PRECEDE, before his employer gives him his wages. And again: NO, if the idea is something like this: the girl must first have pleased the young man, before he proposes to her. Faith does not precede the decree of God concerning our salvation. Nor does it precede God's calling. Of course not. But it certainly precedes our attainment of full salvation. For it even precedes our regeneration according to Article 24 of the Confession. The A does not precede the B in the decree in order to make an alphabet. But it does precede in the life of those whom the Lord according to the common rule will lead to salvation.”

All this Dr. Schilder closes with the remark that “colleague Hoeksema will undoubtedly agree with us in all this.”

But I do not.

In the first place, I certainly do not agree with what Dr. Schilder states about Article 24 of our Confession. If he means that in that article we are taught that faith precedes regeneration in every sense of that word, I most strenuously disagree with him.

But this is not my most important objection. My most important objection is in the sentence: “Faith precedes indeed our attainment of the full salvation.”

Taken all by itself, we can certainly agree with this statement. But when we take all this in connection with the entire argument, we can not only not agree with Dr. Schilder, but we also maintain that he nevertheless here defends an Arminian conception of the promise of God, while at the same time he does not do justice to the Liberated theology concerning that promise. Let us not forget that Dr. Schilder in the connection is combatting our position that the promise is unconditional. Instead, he proposes what he calls a “good condition theory.” That is his purpose. I can put his argument clearly in the following syllogism:

1. The promise of God is the final and full salvation. (This is not true: for the promise contains much more.)
2. Faith precedes that final salvation. (With this, of course, anybody can

agree.)

3. Hence, faith is a condition to that promise. (Again, with this we cannot agree at all. That something precedes something else does not mean that it is a condition to something else.) .

Now let us examine that syllogism.

First of all, the promise of God is the final salvation. This statement is as un-Reformed as it can possibly be. It certainly is not according to the Reformed Confessions. It is certainly true that the promise includes that final salvation. And it is also true that in Canons II, 5 that final salvation as included in the promise of God. But it is by no means true that the promise of God is limited to this final salvation.

This is really the crux of the whole matter. With this stands or falls our whole Protestant Reformed conception of the promise. And that Protestant Reformed conception is simply the conception that is taught in all of our Confessions concerning the promise of God. And therefore, it is very important that we see this. And I will devote a little time and space to make this clear from our Reformed Confessions.

Note: Schilder says that the promise of God is the final salvation.

The Confessions say that the promise of God includes our whole salvation, objective and subjective.

This I intend to show.

I refer, first of all, to Q. 22 of the Heidelberg Catechism, where we read: "What then is necessary for a Christian to believe?" And the answer is: "All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic, undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us." Notice, that in this answer of the Heidelberg Catechism mention is made of the promise of the gospel: "all things promised us in the gospel." It is also plain from this answer that the entire contents of our faith are included in that promise of the gospel. In the succeeding Lord's Days these contents of our faith are further exposed along the line of the well-known Apostolic Creed. In that whole creed, therefore, we find the contents of the promise of the gospel. That Creed speaks of God the Father and our creation, of God the Son and our redemption, of God the Holy Ghost and our sanctification. And the promise of the gospel is further explained in the succeeding Lord's Days of our Heidelberg Catechism as it interprets and expounds the various articles of the Apostles' Creed. That promise of the gospel therefore includes that the Almighty Father-Creator is my God and Father for

Christ's sake. It includes that He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body, and that He will turn all evils that befall me in this present world to my advantage. That promise of the gospel includes that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, died on the accursed tree for our sins, and rose again on the third day for our justification. It includes that the same Christ is seated at the right hand of God to realize all the promises of God unto His people. It includes that Christ is my Redeemer and my Savior, my Prophet, Priest and King, Who redeemed me body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtained for me the favor of God, righteousness, and eternal life. All this is included in the promise of the gospel. And not only the objective realization of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who died and rose again and is seated at the right hand of God, is included in that promise. But in the same promise is also included the gift of the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of promise; Who is given me in order that He may make me partaker of Christ and all His benefits, so that I am and forever shall remain a living member of the church, so that I have the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the resurrection and everlasting life by mere grace. Again, all this is included in the promise of the gospel, according to the Heidelberg Catechism. Certainly, this is a much broader conception than that which is presented in Canons II, 5. And Schilder certainly does not do justice to the concept of the promise of the gospel in the Heidelberg Catechism, when he says that the promise is the final and full salvation, a concept of the promise which he needs in order to maintain his conception that faith is a condition unto the promise of God. You will understand, however, that if we take the promise in this more comprehensive, confessional sense of the word, faith is not a condition unto the promise, but faith itself is included in the promise.

But there is more.

I also refer you to Questions 65, 66, 69 and 70 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

In Q. 65 we read: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence, doth this faith proceed?" And the answer is: "From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." Now I want to emphasize that in this part of the Heidelberg Catechism the Holy Ghost is presented as the author of faith: He alone works faith in our hearts, even though it is through the preaching of the gospel. And let us remember too that according to the rest of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Holy Ghost is included in the promise of the gospel. It is therefore very evident that not only the Holy Ghost, but also faith is included in that promise, not only; but moreover, it is also evident that the promise of the gospel, which includes faith, is absolutely unconditional, and therefore only to the elect, unless we would make the gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by God, itself conditional. And this would be Arminian indeed.

In Q. 66 we read: “What are the sacraments?” And the answer: “The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof he may the more fully declare and seal unto us the promise of the gospel, namely, that he grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the Cross.” Notice that according to this answer the promise of the gospel is sealed to us, that is, to the confessing believers; to no one else but to the believers, and therefore, to the elect, is the promise of the gospel sealed. And what is according to this answer of the Heidelberg Catechism the promise of the gospel? Is it according to its contents only a future boon, the attainment of the full and ultimate salvation? Or does it also include a present blessing? The answer is: The latter. Here too the promise of the gospel is presented broader in scope than is the presentation of the promise in Canons II, 5. For here not only life eternal, but also the forgiveness of sins is mentioned as included in that promise.

In &. 69, 70 still. more elements of the promise of the gospel are mentioned. There we read: “How art thou admonished and assured by holy baptism that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is real advantage to thee?” And the answer: “Thus: That Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am certainly washed by his blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which filthiness of the body is commonly washed away.” And in Q. 70: “What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?” And the answer: “It is to receive of God the remission of sins, freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which he shed for us by his sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblameable lives.” All this, mark you well, is included in the promise of the gospel which is sealed to us by the sacrament. The promise, therefore, includes the washing away of sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ, according to Q. 69. And this is further explained in the answer to Q. 70 by saying that in baptism is sealed to us freely the remission of sins and this renewal; that is, the regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and sanctification to be members of Christ, so that we die unto sin and lead holy and unblameable lives. All this God promises us in the gospel, according to the Heidelberg Catechism. And therefore, I say once more that Schilder is certainly mistaken when he says that the promise of the gospel is our ultimate and final salvation. It includes much more. As I said before, in Canons II, 5 we have no complete definition of the promise of the gospel.

Chapter 3

The promise According To The confessions, Includes Faith As An Instrument

In our discussion of the brochure of Dr. Schilder we already touched upon the subject of the term promise as it occurs frequently in our Confessions.

This discussion we will now continue.

Qu. 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of infant baptism. It instructs us that infants are to be baptized, “since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult.” The promise, therefore, includes the remission of sin by the blood of Christ. But what is more important, it also includes, according to the 74th question of the Catechism, the Holy Ghost as the author of faith. This indeed is very important for the subject under discussion at present. For it certainly makes the promise of God unconditional and for the elect alone. As has been stated before, it is the conception of the Liberated that the promise is for all the children that are baptized, head for head and soul for soul. But that this is not the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism ought to be very plain from this question on infant baptism. For, in the first place, according to this answer the Holy Ghost is promised to the infants no less than to the adult. And certainly, the promise of the Holy Ghost cannot depend on any condition which we must fulfill. The Holy Ghost must operate within us before we are able to fulfill any conditions whatsoever.

This is the Reformed conception. Arminians may teach that the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to all that will receive it, or that will use the light of nature aright. But this certainly is not Reformed. Besides, according to this answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Holy Ghost is promised to infants, that are not able to fulfill any conditions whatsoever, Besides, the answer stresses the fact that the Holy Ghost is promised to the infants as the author of faith, which means, of course, that God promises to the infants that He certainly will work faith in their hearts. Faith, therefore, is included in the promise. And it nonsense to say that God promises faith to those that believe. And it is equally nonsensical to state that God promises faith to those that will not reject the promise of faith. From all this it follows that according to the 74th question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, the promise is unconditional and is meant for the elect alone.

It is certainly not Reformed to appeal exclusively to Canons II, 5. in order to obtain a

Reformed definition of the promise of God, even though in that passage of the confessions the promise is not for all, but for the believers, that is, therefore, for the elect.

Lord's Day 28 deals with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In the answer to Qu. 75 we read:

“That Christ has commanded me and all believers, to eat of this broken bread, and to drink of this cup, in remembrance of him, adding these promises: first, that his body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and his blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes, the bread of the Lord broken for me, and the cup communicated to me; and further, that he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ.”

Also here mention is made of the promise, or of promises, in the plural. And also in this answer it is evident that the promise is only for the believers, that is, therefore, for the elect. This is evident from the very first clause in this answer: “Christ has commanded me and all believers.” It is evident also from the personal pronoun me in the rest of the answer. Besides, it is evident that the promise here includes much more than future salvation. It includes all the blessings implied in the atonement of Christ. The body of Christ was broken for me, and His blood was shed for me. Such is the promise. Further, it is included in the promise that God will strengthen and nourish my soul to everlasting life.

This is also further explained in Qu. and A. 76, where we read: “What is it then to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ?” And the answer: “It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin, and life eternal; but also, besides that, to become more and more united to his sacred body, by the Holy Ghost who dwells both in Christ and in us.” Note how much, according to this answer, is included in the promise of God. It implies the pardon of sin, life eternal, the Holy Ghost, and union with Christ.

And also in Qu. and A. 84, the question about the preaching of the gospel as a key of the kingdom of heaven, the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ's merits is implied in the promise of the gospel. And surely, that this promise is presented here as meant only for the believers does not mean that faith is a condition to receive the promise. For as we have said repeatedly, according to our Confessions the Holy Ghost and faith are included in the promise itself.

In Art. 22 of our Confessio Belgica or Netherlands Confession, we read: “We believe, that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him.” If we read this in connection with the rest of our Confessions, it is evident that the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is included in the promise. He, the Holy Ghost, “kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits.” And once more I wish to point out that it is impossible, and it is nonsense, to maintain that the Holy Ghost so operates in our hearts that we receive the saving faith on condition of faith.

The gift of faith, and therefore, the promise, cannot be conditioned by faith on our part, for the simple reason that faith is included in the promise. God promises faith. Besides, in the same article it is stated literally that faith is nothing but a means or instrument, and, therefore, certainly not a condition. Dr. Schilder may say that a condition is merely something that precedes something else. But although means may precede the end, means and conditions are two entirely different concepts. This is plain from the words of the article: “However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works which he has done for us, and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.” Faith, therefore, is not a condition, but an instrument whereby we embrace Christ and stand in communion with Him.

In Art. 33 of the same Confession we are told that God seals to us His promises through the means of the sacraments:

“We believe, that our gracious God, on account of our weakness and infirmities hath ordained the sacraments for us, thereby to seal unto us his promises, and to be pledges of the good will and grace of God toward us, and also to nourish and strengthen our faith; which he hath joined to the word of the gospel, the better to present to our senses, both that which he signifies to us by his word, and that which he works inwardly in our hearts, thereby assuring us and confirming us in the salvation which he imparts to us. For they are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God worketh in us by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Again, this article speaks of the promises of God. What are these promises? As to their contents they are further described in Art. 34, which speaks of holy baptism. It

is not necessary for me to quote the entire article, for it is rather lengthy. But as to the contents of the promise of God, it informs us that it includes that “we are received into the church of God, and separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to him whose ensign and banner we bear.” It includes further the promise that God will “forever be our gracious God and Father.” Further, it implies the washing away of our sins through the blood and Spirit of Christ: “So doth the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath unto children of God.” It therefore includes: the gift of grace that is called regeneration and the assurance of adoption unto sons of God. Further, the contents of the promise of God in this article are described as follows: “the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing and purging of our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts, and filling them with all comfort; giving unto us a true assurance of his fatherly goodness; putting on us the new man, and putting off the old man with his deeds,” In other words, all the riches and blessings of grace are included in the promise of God.

And as to the baptism of infants, the article states: “And indeed Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that, which Christ hath done for them.” Now mark you well, that the Reformed Confessions over against all Arminians maintain the doctrine of particular atonement. Christ did not die for all men, but only for the elect. Nor are all the children that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant elect children, as we well know from Scripture and experience. It follows, therefore, when we read in this article that “Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful than for the adult persons,” not all the children of the faithful are meant, but only the elect children. For Christ shed His blood only for the elect, according to all the Reformed Confessions. And since the sacrament of baptism is one of the seals of the promise, it follows too that the promise is not for all but for the elect only.

Chapter 4

The Promise According To The Confessions Includes all the Blessings of Salvation

We are still discussing the concept *promise* as it so frequently occurs in the Reformed Confessions. In order to obtain a true idea of the promise, according to the Reformed conception, we must not limit ourselves to Canons II, 5, but consult the whole of the Three Forms of Unity.

Let us recall that in the Heidelberg Catechism, Qu. 66, it is stated that sacraments are holy visible signs and seals appointed of God for this end that by the use thereof God may more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel. In the light of this statement let us further consult the Netherlands Confession. In Article 35, which speaks of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, we read: "We believe and confess, that our Savior Jesus Christ did ordain and institute the sacrament of the holy supper to nourish and support those whom he hath already regenerated, and incorporated into his family, which is his Church." Now, if the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as well as the sacrament of baptism, is ordained by God to seal unto us his promise, it ought to be plain from these words that the promise of God is not for all, but only for the elect. This is plainly stated here, because the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is ordained for those whom he hath already regenerated. And according to the same article, this life of regeneration is peculiar only to God's elect.

Moreover, as to the contents of the promise which is sealed in the supper of the Lord we read:

"Now, as it is certain and beyond all doubt that Jesus Christ hath not enjoined to us the use of his sacraments in vain, so he works in us all that he represents to us by these holy signs, though the manner surpasses our understanding, and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Ghost are hidden and incomprehensible. In the meantime we err not, when we say, that what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body, and the proper blood of Christ. But the manner of our partaking of the same, is not by the mouth but by the spirit through faith. Thus then, though Christ always sits at the right hand of his Father in the heavens, yet doth he not therefore cease to make us partakers of himself by faith. This feast is a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself with all his benefits to us, and gives us there to enjoy both himself and the merits of his suffering and death nourishing, strengthening and comforting our poor comfortless souls by the eating of his flesh, quickening and refreshing them by the

drinking of his blood.”

This is the contents of the promise of the gospel. It includes the application of all the merits of Christ to us, the nourishing and strengthening and comforting of our souls, and the quickening and refreshing of them. And that the promise of the gospel, as signified and sealed in the sacrament, is not received by all that partake of the sacrament in the outward sense of the word is also evident from the rest of the article. For there we read:

“Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless both are not received by all men: the ungodly indeed receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of the sacrament.”

The ungodly, certainly receives the outward sign. This is true not only of the Lord’s Supper, but, of course, also of the sacrament of holy baptism. But he never receives the thing signified. Just as in the preaching of the gospel the ungodly may hear with the natural, external ear the promise of God, but receives it to his condemnation, so also in the Lord’s Supper the ungodly receives the bread and the wine, but not the essential thing, the realization of the promise of God to him. He certainly does, not receive the promise of the Holy Ghost. Nor is that promise of the Holy Ghost meant for him. The promise is meant by God only for the elect.

Now let us turn to the Canons of Dordrecht. As we have stated repeatedly, Canons II, 5, does not mean to be a definition of the complete promise of God. Nor, in fact, does this part of the Canons speak of a conditional promise.

The full promise includes the whole of salvation, objective and subjective. It includes the gift of the Holy Spirit. It includes faith. And it includes the application of all the blessings of salvation in Christ to the elect.

All this is plainly emphasized in Canons I, 6, 7. In article 6 we read:

“That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree, *‘For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,’* Acts 15:18. *‘Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will,’* Eph. 1:11. According to which decree, he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe; while he leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men, equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of

God, which though men of perverse, impure and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.”

One of the arguments against the Declaration of Principles adduced by Dr. Schilder is that it is supralapsarian. Now even if this were the case, we have nothing to be ashamed of. Nevertheless, we here state that Dr. Schilder is mistaken. The confessions, especially the Canons of Dordrecht, are based upon the infralapsarian view of election. And the Declaration is based foursquarely upon those confessions. This does not mean that personally we do not hesitate to go beyond this infralapsarian conception, but it does mean that the Declaration of Principles is according to the Reformed Confessions as we have them pure and simple. The quotation which I made above speaks of “the righteous discrimination between men, equally involved in ruin.” This is *infra*. But this does not affect whatsoever the presentation of the promise of God as it is in the Declaration of Principles. *Supra* and *infra* have nothing to do with this question.

Faith is a gift of God according to His own decree, and it is flowing from His decree that He bestows faith upon some, and not upon others. It certainly is not Reformed to present the matter as if the promise were conditioned by faith. For, in the first place, as has been said repeatedly, faith is included in the promise. And that promise of faith God bestows only upon the elect. And if we say that the rest do not receive the promise because they reject it in unbelief, we certainly speak the truth, but we do not speak all the truth. For we must add that they cannot believe because they are not of Christ’s sheep. And the ultimate cause of their unbelief, although the approximate Cause is in their own sin, is nevertheless in the fact that God, – to speak in infralapsarian language, – passed them by, according to His decree, with the gift of faith. The promise, which includes the promise of faith, is not for all, but for the elect only. And that promise is not conditional, but strictly unconditional.

The same is true of Article 7 of the same chapter of the Canons. There we read:

“Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out, of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction; a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation.”

Here too we have the presentation of the infralapsarian view of the counsel of God. God chose His elect from the human race “which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction.” That is pure

infralapsarian language. And to it we have no objection whatsoever as far as the Declaration of Principles is concerned. For even that infralapsarian language expresses very plainly that the promise is an oath of God for the elect only, and that it is unconditional. This ought to be very plain from the rest of this article, which reads:

“This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally: to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of his glorious grace.”

Now, mark you well, that all this is the promise of God according to the decree. The promise in the decree includes the effectual calling, drawing into the fellowship of Christ by His Word and Spirit, true faith, justification, sanctification, preservation and glorification. All this is contained in the promise of God as that promise appears in God’s decree. And as it is in God’s decree, so it is and must be in reality. For what God decrees He also Himself performs. And therefore, the promise in the decree is the same as the promise in its execution. If the promise in the decree is absolutely free and sovereign, only founded upon God’s own sovereign will, it must be the same in its execution. If the promise in the decree is for the elect only, it is also for the elect only in reality. If the promise in the decree is absolutely unconditional, as it appears from this article, it must be unconditional in its application. For what God decrees He also fulfills. And He fulfills it in the very manner that He has decreed it.

This is exactly our difference with the Arminians. The Arminians also speak of election, for they cannot deny that the Word of God emphasizes this doctrine throughout. They also teach that election is the source of all our salvation and that only the elect are saved. But, – and this is the difference between Reformed truth and the Arminian heresy, – according to the Arminians election is conditional: they speak of a conditional election. And because they speak of a conditional election, they also speak of a conditional promise. And this error our fathers emphatically condemned and repudiated in the same Canons.

But to this we must call your attention next time, D.V.

Chapter 5

According To The Confessions, Conditional Theology Is Arminian

For the Arminians everything is conditional. They speak of a conditional election, and therefore they also speak of a conditional gospel and a conditional promise.

But this entire conditional theology is refuted by our Reformed fathers. O, yes, at the Synod of Dordrecht our fathers were well acquainted with the term condition. They also knew that the term was employed by some Reformed theologians. Anyone that consults the Acts of the Synod of Dordrecht knows that the term was used even by some of the theologians that delivered their opinions to the Synod on the five articles of the Remonstrance. It is all the more striking, therefore, that the term was very studiously avoided, and that it never once occurs in a Reformed sense in the Canons of Dordrecht as they were finally adopted. They were evidently very much afraid of the term. And not only did they avoid the term, but they emphatically condemned it.

The whole doctrine of a conditional election is refuted in Canons I, B, 2 and 3. There we read that the true doctrine concerning election and reprobation having been explained, our fathers reject the errors of those:

“Error: Who teach: That there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other. particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, nondecisive and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive and absolute. Likewise: that there is one election unto faith, and another unto salvation, so that election can be unto justifying faith, without being a decisive election unto salvation.”

It is not difficult to understand what this means. The Arminians taught that in last instance salvation is after all dependent upon the will of man, and that therefore also election itself is conditional, contingent upon the freewill of the sinner. God chose on the basis of foreseen faith, or at least, on the basis of the will to believe. By complete, irrevocable, decisive and absolute election the Arminians meant election unto final salvation. But this final salvation is always dependent upon the *will* of man to persevere unto salvation. There, however, is also a revocable and incomplete election, which is not decisive, as, for instance, the election unto justifying faith. When God in His eternal counsel has foreseen that a man is willing to believe, He chose him unto that justifying faith. But even that faith depends for its continuance upon the will of man. And therefore it is possible that God chose a man unto justifying faith without choosing him unto final salvation. Election, therefore, is conditional. It is first of all contingent upon the will of man to believe. But even after

God has chosen the man that is willing to believe, election is still conditioned by the will of man to persevere. The whole of election, and therefore necessarily the whole of the way .of salvation, is conditioned by the will of man. ‘That is the meaning of article 2 of Chapter I, B.

Of similar conditions Canons I, B article 3 speaks, in which the Arminians teach:

“That the good pleasure and purpose of God, of which Scripture makes mention in the doctrine of election, does not consist in this, that God chose certain persons rather than others, but in this that he chose out of all possible conditions (among which also the works of the law), or out of the whole order of things, the act of faith which from its very nature is undeserving, as well as its incomplete obedience, as a condition of salvation.”

O yes, even the Arminian will not deny that faith is a gift of God. Nevertheless, faith is a condition unto salvation. And do not forget that according to the Arminians the question whether God will bestow that gift of faith upon anyone does not in last instance depend solely upon God’s sovereign election, but upon man’s own will. Whether a man will receive the gift of faith from God is itself conditioned by the question whether he will use the light of nature aright.

These conditions remain conditions throughout the whole way of salvation according to Arminianism. Faith and sanctification and perseverance are all conditions which man must fulfill in order to reach final salvation. Man according to the Arminians is always first. Whether man shall enjoy any part of salvation and shall finally persevere, depends on the question whether he will receive faith to persevere. And the will to receive the faith to persevere is not of God, but is after all of man’s own choosing. If he does not choose to receive faith to persevere, he will not receive it. Are we surprised that in spite of the fact that the fathers of Dordrecht were well-acquainted with the term *condition*, they nevertheless carefully avoided it in their confessions? And apart from any other considerations, it is certainly safe for us to follow their example and not to speak of, conditions whatsoever. At any rate, the promise of God is for the elect alone, and is strictly unconditional.

Now let us turn to Canons II, 5-8. To II, 5 we have already called your attention, and we do not have to repeat what we said on this score. In Art. 6 it is emphasized that the *sin* of impenitence and unbelief is not owing to any insufficiency in the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, but is wholly imputed to the unbelievers themselves. The sin of unbelief is not God’s but man’s, God is never the author of sin. The sinner, therefore, is himself responsible for his sin and unbelief. But this does by no means imply that he is also responsible for the work of God. Responsibility for unbelief does certainly not imply ability to believe. The unbeliever is incapable of faith

without the grace of God. This is emphasized in Art. 7, where we read:

“But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God, given then in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own.”

And this is further emphasized and interpreted in Art. 8, where we read:

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

Is not this language very clear?

Does it need any special interpretation to deduce from this paragraph of the Canons the truth that the promise of God must needs be unconditional, and is for the elect alone?

Is it not very evident from this part of the Canons that God according to His promise leads the elect infallibly unto salvation?

Schilder alleges that our conception of the promise and of unconditional salvation must be explained from our supralapsarian conception.

Nothing can be farther from the truth.

I want to emphasize in this connection that the Confessions, and especially the Canons, are infralapsarian. And I am very willing to subscribe to this infralapsarian presentation of the truth, although I am personally convinced that the supralapsarian conception of the counsel of God is certainly more Scriptural. Infra is

supposed to be milder and softer than *supra*. At any rate, it presents the historical view of God's counsel, while *supra* emphasizes the ideal order in the counsel of God, as Scripture indeed also does very often.

Note now, that in Art. 8, which we just quoted, we certainly have a complete presentation of the promise of God as it is in the decree of the Most High and as it is actually executed in time; When in Art. 5 of the same chapter of the Canons we read that "the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life," we may find in Art. 8 what is the exact scope of this "whosoever believeth." That scope is limited to the elect alone. For them alone, according to this article; Christ died. To them alone the saving efficacy of His death extends. Upon them alone He bestows the gift of justifying faith. They alone are redeemed, and to them alone are given all the blessings of salvation. Upon them alone He confers the gift of justifying faith, together with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Them alone He purges from all sin, both original and actual. Them alone He preserves even unto the end. Them alone He leads unto final glory infallibly. That is, the promise of God in all its fulness, as presented in Art. 8 of the Canons; it is for the elect, and for them alone.

That is the reason why I emphasized, and wish to emphasize it once more, that you cannot and may not isolate Canons II, 5 from the rest of the Canons and from the rest of the Confessions. We cannot and may not base a definition of the promise upon one article of the Confessions alone, but must necessarily base it upon the whole of the Three Forms of Unity. I must still call attention to one of the most beautiful documents that is left us by our Reformed Fathers. But this must wait till the next installment of this series. H.H.

Chapter 6

The Baptism Form And The promise

At the close of my last article on the current subject I said that I would refer to the Baptism Form, which according to my conviction is one of the most beautiful and clearly Reformed documents which have come down from our fathers.

In treating the contents of this Baptism Form we must remember that I am still discussing the question of a conditional promise as maintained by Dr. Schilder in his brochure written against the Declaration of Principles. He wants to make the distinction between predictions and promises, and to maintain that while predictions are general, promises are for N.N., but at the same time are conditional.

At the same time I will in the present article also bear in mind the bold statement made by the Rev. Kok in the Sept. 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer* in which he wrote: "Bearing this in mind, there is no one who would dare to maintain that God ever promises salvation unconditionally to anyone, no more than He did to Abraham, the father of believers."

I, for one, not only dare to maintain this, but I maintain that unless God promises salvation unconditionally to the elect, salvation becomes an absolute impossibility.

It is this truth which I will try to show from our discussion of the Baptism Form.

Already from the very first paragraph of this Baptism Form it should be very evident that unless God promises salvation unconditionally, without any prerequisite which man must fulfill, it becomes an impossibility that anyone should ever be saved. For there we read:

"That we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, in so much that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, except we are born again."

Now in the rebirth, or regeneration, the sinner is absolutely passive and is absolutely incapable of meeting any conditions. God regenerates him unconditionally. To this we will refer later in our discussion.

More important, however, for our purpose is the beautiful second part of our Baptism Form, which treats of the significance of baptism in general. There we read:

“Holy baptism witnesseth and sealeth unto us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For when we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth, and sealeth unto us, that be doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit.”

Notice, in the first place that it is God that establishes His covenant with us. This is the language of Scripture throughout. If it were a covenant between two parties, as in the case of a covenant between men, this would be absolutely impossible. When we read that God establishes His covenant with us, it certainly means that He alone fulfills all the elements that are necessary to realize His everlasting covenant. In the establishment of this covenant there cannot possibly be any conditions which man must fulfill in order to enter into that covenant. It has always been Reformed, and not specifically Protestant Reformed, to maintain that at least in the establishment of the covenant it is unilateral, one-sided. Man can do absolutely nothing unto the, establishment of God’s covenant with him. He cannot possibly perform any conditions. And, as salvation and the covenant are inseparably connected, I maintain that when God establishes His covenant with us, He promises all the blessings of salvation, and that too unconditionally to the elect.

Secondly, let us note that the covenant which God establishes with us is an eternal covenant. This means that the covenant of God has nothing to do with any contingency or conditions which man must fulfill, either to enter into the covenant or to remain in the covenant. The covenant is God’s covenant. It is established by Him. It is eternal, and eternally established with us, and can never be disannulled. Also this truth, that God’s covenant is an everlasting covenant, and that it can never be broken, that God will surely maintain it unto the end, is abundantly testified by Holy Writ.

Thirdly, we read in this part of the Baptism Form that God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us that He adopt us for His children and heirs. Also this adoption unto children of God is an element of our salvation. When God promises, that is, when He witnesses and seals unto us that He will adopt us for His children and heirs, He promises salvation to us. Is this adoption, perhaps a conditional adoption? Is it perhaps dependent upon anything that we must do in order to obtain it, or even in order to remain in the state of, adoption? God forbid! For first of all, God has adopted us unto His children in His eternal counsel of election. For thus we read in Eph. 1:4-6:

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,

that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

And no one, not even Dr. Schilder or the Rev. Kok, would dare to maintain that this predestination unto the adoption of children was conditional, for that would be too plainly Arminian.

Moreover, this adoption unto children was objectively realized in Christ, in His cross and resurrection, whereby He obtained the right for all the elect to be children of God and heirs of everlasting salvation. No one will dispute that the adoption unto children and heirs belongs to the salvation, nor will anyone ever dispute that God promises this salvation unconditionally. It is true that this objective adoption unto children must be received by us by a true faith; but to this element we must call your attention in the third part of this paragraph of our Baptism Form.

Fourthly, notice that the Baptism Form in this section tells us that God the Father witnesses and seals unto us that He will provide us with every good thing and avert all evil, or turn it to our profit. This includes, mind you, everything that belongs to our way unto salvation in this present life. He *will* provide us with every good thing, that is, with every thing that belongs to the means of our salvation: for only that is a good thing that is conducive to our salvation. Moreover, God will avert all evil, or turn the evil to our profit, so that all things must be conducive to our salvation. Is this promise, perhaps, conditional, so that it implies a prerequisite which we must fulfill in order to obtain it? Are prosperity and adversity, sickness and health, peace and war, life and death, and anything that may be our experience or may befall us in this life, conditioned by anything that man must do? Or can man do anything in order to turn all these things unto our profit and unto our salvation? Again I say: God forbid! In His eternal covenant of grace God promises all these things unconditionally.

Finally, notice that according to the Baptism Form in baptism, God witnesses and seals all these things unto us. That God the Father seals this unto us is the same as saying that He swears by an oath that He will surely fulfill the promises unto those to whom He promises these things. Will God ever fail to fulfill His promise? Can our sin or our unbelief ever prevent Him from realizing His promise? You answer with me: of course not. If that were the case, He would never fulfill it. For we on our part always violate the covenant of God and make ourselves unworthy of being called His children by our sin and iniquity. Hence, that He seals the promises unto us means the same as saying that all these things are promised to us unconditionally. This is all the more evident from the fact that according to the Baptism Form He seals all

these promises *unto us*, that is, unto the believing church and their spiritual seed. He seals these same promises to the little infants that are baptized, and that cannot even conceive of, still less fulfill, any conditions whatsoever. To this element we must refer later.

In the light of the foregoing, I would ask the Rev. Kok whether he would still maintain this statement:

“Bearing this in mind, there is no one who would dare to maintain that God ever promises salvation unconditionally to anyone, no more than He did to Abraham, the father of believers.”

I kindly and in a brotherly spirit ask him to answer this question. I offer him all the space necessary to reply to this.

The Baptism Form continues that God the Son promises, that is; that He sealeth unto us, that is, that He swears with an oath

“that he doth wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God.”

I ask again: Is this promise, perhaps, conditional?

What does it mean that Christ washes us in His blood from all our sins, and what does it mean that He incorporates us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection?

It certainly means, in the first place, that the Lord Jesus Christ died for us, and that through His death we were reconciled unto God. Objectively the atoning death of Christ is the washing away of the sins of all the elect. And certainly the atoning death of Christ is not, and cannot be conditioned by anything we can do. Unless we want to make the death of Christ according to God’s intention universal, and speak of general atonement, we may certainly say that God fulfilled His promise of the washing away of the sins of all the elect in the death of Christ and that He sealed that promise in His resurrection.

The same is true concerning the incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ. All the elect were legally and ideally incorporated into Christ when He died on the cross and rose again from the dead. For this is plainly taught in Eph. 2:4-6:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even

when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

The washing away of the sins of all the elect, and their incorporation into Jesus Christ, is an accomplished fact, realized in time long before we were born, and rooted in God’s election, according to all our Confessions. And therefore also that part of our salvation cannot be conditional.

It is true that in time this washing away of our sins and this incorporation into Christ must be applied unto us, and that, we obtain it only by a true and living faith. But, in the first place, to this I will call attention when I am discussing the last part of this particular paragraph of the Baptism Form. And besides, let me emphasize that when we say that we receive all these blessings and the realization of these promises by faith, that faith; according to all our Confessions; is not a condition, but is only a means, a God-given means, implanted into our hearts and evoked by the preaching of the gospel through the living and abiding Word of God, whereby we obtain part with Christ and all His benefits.

But again I ask: Will the Rev. Kok still maintain that God never promises salvation unconditionally to anyone?

And again I emphasize that the Baptism Form appropriates all these promises for “us and our children,” and that these children certainly cannot fulfill any conditions whatsoever.

We now come to the third part of that second paragraph in our Baptism Form. We read there the well-known words:

“In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us, that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.”

Now, unless we want to sail directly in Arminian waters, this part of our Baptism Form teaches in words that are unmistakable that the promise and the whole of our salvation is absolutely unconditional and for the elect alone. Notice, in the first place, that according to the Baptism Form here we are assured in baptism that the Holy Ghost will dwell in us.

Heyns, at least, feels a difficulty here. With the Liberated he interprets the former

two parts of this paragraph of the Baptism Form, those that refer to the work of the Father and to the work of the Son, as meaning an objective bequest. Objectively, according to him, by a testament it is bequeathed upon all baptized children that God the Father will establish His eternal covenant of grace with them and adopt them for his children and heirs, and will provide them, with every good thing and avert all evil, and that God the Son washes us in His blood and incorporates us into the fellowship, of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins and accounted righteous before God. But he feels that this cannot be applied to the work of the Holy Spirit. Here we have to do, not with an objective bequest that is applicable to all the baptized children, but with the subjective application of the blessings of salvation to the elect. And so, in this part he wants to emphasize the auxiliary verb WILL. When we read in this part that the Holy Spirit *will* dwell in us, this, according to Heyns, does not mean the same as saying that He dwells in us. The promise here is future and conditional. Whether this promise will also be realized unto us depends on the question whether or not we are willing to enter into God's covenant, accept our covenant obligations, let the Holy Spirit dwell in us, and appropriate the promise.

But once more, Heyns realizes too that this would not solve the difficulty, for after all we can enter into the covenant of God and appropriate the promise only by faith. Now faith is a gift of God, wrought in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Hence, faith is before the acceptance of the promise, and the Holy Spirit is before faith. Before we can believe the Holy Spirit must dwell in us. This difficulty Heyns tries to circumvent by inventing the theory of preparatory grace. There is a certain covenant common grace, which is common not to all men, but to all that are baptized, which places the baptized children in a state in which they can either reject or accept the covenant promise and thus let the Holy Spirit dwell in them. It is really a grace that makes of the covenant children little Pelagians, and that gives them a free will to choose either for or against the covenant of God.

The Liberated do not accept this theory of Heyns is far as we know. Schilder, at least, rejected it and criticized it in an article in the *Reformatie*. But neither do they solve the difficulty in which their own theory involves them. For according to them, also in this part of the Baptism Form the promise of the Holy Ghost is made conditional. It is meant for all the baptized children. God promises to all that the Holy Spirit will dwell in them. But this promise is realized only if they believe, and they can reject this promise by unbelief.

But this does not solve the difficulty. For the promise of the Holy Spirit and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit certainly implies the promise of faith. God therefore promises here that He will, so work in the hearts of those that are baptized that they come to faith. And if this promise is for all, then either all will receive the faith

and be saved, or man, either by his natural light or by the Heynsian preparatory grace, is able to frustrate the promise of God that He will dwell in the hearts of the baptized to work faith in them, or accept this promise. In last analysis, therefore, the promise of the Holy Spirit is conditioned upon the will of man. I am well aware that the Liberated do not accept this alternative. They want to be Reformed. But neither have they ever explained this difficulty and this flat contradiction in their theory. It is especially on this point that they are always accused of Arminianism. And unless they make themselves clear which they have never done, the accusation stands.

There is and can be only one Reformed position and only one Reformed interpretation of this part of the Baptism Form. And that is that the promise of the Holy Spirit is not for all, but for the elect seed only, and is absolutely unconditional. He promises, and He realizes the promise of the Holy Ghost, not to and in all the children that are born under the historical dispensation of the covenant, but to and in all the elect seed only. And there is, and can be, no condition to receive the realization of this promise. For the Holy Spirit is absolutely first, and no man can fulfill any conditions in order to receive the Holy Spirit. When we read in the Holy Scriptures, Phil. 2:12,13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," the working out of our salvation is not a condition which we must fulfill in order to have the Holy Spirit work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure; but the latter is the ground of the former. God through His Holy Spirit is always first, and there never can be any condition or prerequisite which man must fulfill in order to receive the sovereign and efficacious grace of God.

But perhaps you say: with this we agree. The Holy Spirit is first, at least in the beginning of the work of salvation. This part of the work of God is certainly sovereign and unconditional. But do not conditions enter afterwards? Is it not thus, perhaps, that we must fulfill the condition of sanctification, of a walk of obedience and in a new and holy life, in order to receive and enjoy the continued indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us?

My answer is: No, there are never any conditions in the relation of man toward God. No conditions enter in at any stage in the work of salvation from the first reception of the Holy Spirit until the final preservation and perseverance of the saints and until the resurrection of the dead.

This also is implied in this third part of the second paragraph of the Baptism Form. For we read there that the Holy Spirit "will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be

presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.”

This is the promise of God sealed unto us in holy baptism. And just as the beginning of the realization of the promise, namely, that the Holy Spirit will dwell in us, is sovereign and unconditional; just as in that realization of the promise in its beginning God is absolutely first, and man always follows; so also in all the rest of the application of our salvation by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the elect God is, and remains, first, and we follow. In applying all that we have in Christ, the Holy Spirit regenerates us sovereignly and unconditionally; He it is that implants the first seed of regeneration in our hearts; He it is that through the living and abiding Word of God quickens that seed; and He it is too that by the gospel calls that seed of regeneration, quickened by the living and ever abiding Word of God, into conscious activity sovereignly, efficaciously, and unconditionally. He it is that gives us the living faith whereby we are ingrafted into Christ; and also that faith, as the gift of the Holy Ghost, is not a condition, but a mere instrument whereby our soul is united with Jesus Christ our Lord. He it is that washes away our sins and renews our life; and there is no condition attached to this work of the Holy Spirit in us. And He it is that preserves us unto the end, until we shall arrive in the assembly of the elect in life eternal. Even this preservation of the Holy Spirit unto the end is not conditioned by perseverance, or even by the willingness to persevere. But on the contrary, the preservation by the Spirit is first, and the perseverance of the saints follows as the result and the fruit of the former.

To teach differently is simply Arminianism, pure and simple. The Arminians also taught a preservation of the saints until the end; but this preservation was conditioned by the willingness of the saints to continue in the grace of the Spirit to preserve them. For this is exactly the teaching of the Fifth Article which the Remonstrants composed in Gouda in 1610. This article reads as follows:

“Those who are grafted into Christ by a true faith, and therefore partake of His vivifying Spirit, have abundance of means by which they may fight against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and obtain the victory, always, however, by the aid of the grace of the Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ assists them by His Spirit in all temptations, and stretches out His hand; and provided they are ready for the contest, and seek His aid, and are not wanting in their duty, He strengthens them to such a degree that they cannot, be seduced or snatched from the hands of Christ by any fraud of Satan or violence, according to that saying, John 10:28, ‘No one shall pluck them out of my hand.’ But whether these very persons cannot, by their own negligence, desert the commencement of their being in Christ, and embrace again the present world, fall back from the holy doctrine once committed to them, make shipwreck of their conscience, and fall from grace; this must be fully examined

and weighed by the Holy Scripture before men can teach it with full tranquility of mind and confidence.”

And this last proposition was so modified by the followers of Arminius that the possibility of falling away from grace if man did not fulfill the conditions of persevering and fighting against sin, the devil, the world, and their own flesh, was positively maintained and asserted.

Over against this false doctrine our Reformed fathers placed the following propositions:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption, and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death; nor does he permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.” Canons V, 6.

And in Article 7 of the same chapter of the Canons: “For in the first place, in these falls he preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing, or being totally lost; and again, by his Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore his mercies, and henceforth more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.”

And they reject the errors of those “Who teach: That the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God, gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which (as they declare) man before his decisive election and justification must fulfill through his free will.” Canons V, B, 1.

The whole of salvation, therefore, from beginning to end, is absolutely unconditional and sovereign. God is always first, and man always follows.

Moreover, how otherwise could our fathers have maintained the validity of their doctrine of the baptism of infants? They surely fulfill no conditions. They have the promise of the Holy Spirit. In them God works His salvation. And when thus the salvation is wrought in the littlest children of the covenant that salvation can never be lost. Which means the same thing as saying that it all depends on God alone, and that it is unconditional. H.H.

Chapter 7

The Baptism Form, Our Part, And The Responsibility of Man

But if, as the Baptism Form so plainly teaches, salvation and the promise of God unto salvation are absolutely sovereign and unconditional, can we still preach the gospel, and maintain the responsibility of man?

So some of us seem to think.

Now it is striking that in virtually all the protests that were lodged against us in 1924 this same accusation was found. Van Baalen, Vander Mey, Schans, all accused us that we could not preach the gospel sufficiently and fully, and that we could not and did not maintain the responsibility of man, and even that we made God the author of sin. These accusations were based on the fact that we denied common grace. And, so the accusers argued, if common grace was denied, the responsibility of man could not be maintained, and the gospel could not be sufficiently and fully preached. The Synod of 1924 did not consider these charges, because they said they could not judge my preaching of the gospel. Yet it is evident from the First Point of 1924 that they sustained even these charges. For if you take the First Point in connection with its proof from Scripture and from the Confessions, it is very clear, as we have always maintained, that the heart of the First Point is after all that the gospel is a well-meaning offer of salvation on the part of God to all that hear. It is not striking, then, that now we hear the same accusations, and that too from some in our own midst? To me it means that they no longer repudiate the First Point of 1924 together with all its proof from the Confessions and from the 'Scriptures. And, I am sorry to say, but it is a fact nevertheless, that I am convinced that in 1924 they would have agreed on this point not with us, but with our accusers. And so would the Liberated.

Besides, the accusation itself is characteristically Arminian: *ex ungue lionem*, – you recognize the lion by its paw. Always the Arminians have accused Reformed theologians, whether they were infra or supralapsarian, of denying the responsibility of man, of making God the author of sin, and of being incapable of preaching a full gospel.

But there is no truth in this accusation whatsoever.

The same accusation can be lodged, provided that you nourish a wrong conception of the responsibility of man, against practically the whole line of Reformed theology. Thus, they say, if you maintain an unconditional and sovereign election, you deny the

responsibility of man and can proclaim the gospel only unto the elect. Thus, they say again, if you maintain that man is conceived and born in sin, that he is guilty because of Adam's sin, and that he is corrupt because of his organic connection with the human race, you cannot maintain the responsibility of man, neither is it of any use to preach the gospel to a sinner that is completely dead in sin. For how can you maintain individual responsibility if every man is dead in sin from his birth? The same accusation is lodged against Reformed theologians on the score of absolutely free justification by faith. If a man is justified without any work on his part, so they claim, it makes absolutely no difference whether he sins or not: let us continue in sin, that grace may abound. Hence, they make man sovereign in his own domain. Responsibility to them means that man is sovereignly free. And by maintaining the conception of the responsibility of man they destroy the sovereignty of God.

This position also lay at the root of the adoption of the First Point in 1924. If the gospel is not a well-meaning offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, if in that sense there is no common grace, it is impossible to preach the full gospel and to maintain the responsibility of man over against that gospel.

But once more, I say, there is no truth, in this accusation, provided you maintain the correct responsibility of man. And that correct conception is not that responsibility presupposes sovereign freedom and presupposes conditions which man must fulfill in order to have God grant His salvation to him, but that man is responsible in his position as a creature, that is, always in a dependent position.

This is the position also which the Baptism Form assumes. For surely, in that second paragraph of the Baptism Form which we just discussed, salvation is presented as being solely of God and as unconditional. A conditional promise, a promise which is dependent on something which man must fulfill as a prerequisite, is no promise to our fathers. Otherwise they could never have maintained the validity of infant baptism. For infants are in no position to fulfill any conditions whatsoever.

Nevertheless, in the third paragraph, which speaks of our part in the covenant of God, they maintain very clearly and very beautifully the responsibility of man. There they teach:

“Whereas in all covenants, there are contained two parts: therefore are we by God through baptism, admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life. And if we sometimes through

weakness fall into sin, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and undoubted testimony that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God."

The unconditional establishment of God's covenant with us by no means destroys the responsibility of man, but rather make him responsible in the highest sense of the word; renders him not sovereignly free, but free in the highest sense to which a creature can attain, that is, free to love God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. It renders him responsible, not for God's part, responsible, not in regard to the question whether or not God will bestow grace upon him, a question which then is dependent upon a condition as a prerequisite which he must fulfill, but responsible for his part of the covenant of God. And the relation between those two parts of the covenant is certainly not that of mutual stipulations and conditions. But it is such that the realization of our part of the covenant is the fruit of the part which God fulfills in us and through us. And that there is such a second part of the covenant possible is only because God realizes His covenant in us and through us not as dead stocks and blocks, but as rational, moral creatures.

Thus, in the church of Christ the gospel can be preached. Thus in that church that gospel can admonish believers, and, in fact, can admonish all that hear and all that are under the historical dispensation of the covenant to cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; to trust in Him and love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength. Thus in the covenant of God we are placed before the obligation not of the law as an external code and demand, but of the law of love, of the law of perfect freedom and of highest responsibility. Thus in our part of the covenant of God as the fruit of God's establishing His covenant with us, we are admonished to live from the principle of regeneration, antithetically in the midst of the world, and to forsake it. Thus in our part of the covenant as a fruit of God's part, we are admonished to crucify our old nature, to mortify the members of the body, and to live in sanctification of life. However, all this is not a condition for God's part of the covenant. For even if we fall into sin we may nevertheless cling to the unconditional gospel and the unconditional promise of God, as sealed and confirmed in holy baptism, that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God.

Such is the pure Reformed position.

And this position we must certainly maintain as a Protestant Reformed Church, if we would maintain our identity.

Chapter 8

According To The Baptism Form The Promise To The Children of Believers, Who they are and Where They Are found

There is still more regarding the promise in the beautiful Baptism Form.

In the part that introduces the doctrine of *infant* baptism, we read as follows:

“And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ; as God speaketh unto Abraham, the father of all the faithful, and therefore unto us and our children (Gen. 17:7), saying, ‘I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.’ This also the Apostle Peter testifieth, with these words (Acts 2:39), ‘For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.’ Therefore God formerly commanded them to be circumcised, which was a seal of the covenant, and of the righteousness of faith; and therefore Christ also embraced them, laid his hands upon them and blessed them (Mark 10).”

First of all, notice the clause, “for as they are without their knowledge, partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ.”

Let us first of all examine the clause, “so are they again received unto grace in Christ.”

To be received unto grace in Christ means, of course, the promise of salvation.

The Liberated want to include all this in the mere objective bequest. They say that all the children of the covenant are received unto grace in Christ, head for head and soul for soul, in the promise. And that promise is conditional. And so, just as Heyns would interpret this clause, infants are received unto grace in Christ if in the future they will accept the obligations of the covenant. But if they do not, accept these obligations, and if they reject this promise by their unbelief, they were nevertheless in their infancy received unto grace in Christ. God’s promise is sincere, and sincere for all. If this is not common grace, and common grace too in the Arminian sense, applied to the sphere. of the covenant, and if this is not the same as a” well-meaning offer of grace on the part of God to all that are born under the historical dispensation

of the covenant, in other words, if this is not the same as the doctrine of the First Point with its proofs from the Confessions and from the Scriptures, we cannot understand what they do mean.

But this certainly was not the meaning which the fathers meant to convey by this clause. For, first of all, the clause, “so are they again received unto grace in Christ,” can mean nothing else than that by God they are received into the state of grace in Christ, in others words, that they are actually partakers of that grace in Christ.

But secondly, notice the comparison implied in the entire clause: “as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ.”

What does it mean that they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam? Does it mean that when they grow up and accept this condemnation in Adam and walk in the way of that condemnation, they will be condemned in Adam? Of course not. It means nothing else than that our little infants are by nature actually partakers of the condemnation in Adam. It means; as the very first paragraph of the whole Baptism Form has it, “that we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, in so much that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God except we are. born again.” Without their knowledge our little children are actually partakers of the condemnation in Adam. They are actually partakers of the guilt of Adam. They are actually partakers of the corruption of our nature in Adam. But if this is the case, and it is, then the comparison demands that so, without their knowledge, our little children are received actually into a state of grace, so that they are actual partakers of the righteousness in Christ, and so that they are actual partakers of the application of all the blessings of salvation by the Holy Spirit in Christ. It is said in the Baptism Form that all this is without the knowledge of the little children. And, if it is without their knowledge, it stands to reason that it is unconditional: for without their knowledge they cannot fulfill, or even be aware of, any condition as prerequisite which they must fulfill on their part.

There is still more in the Baptism Form concerning the promise to children of believers.

We refer to the texts that are quoted in this part in proof of infant baptism, the one from the Old and the other from the New Testament, besides the concluding reference to the fact that Christ embraced the little children, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them. This part reads as follows:

“As God speaketh unto Abraham, the father of all the faithful, and therefore unto us and our children (Gen. 17:7), saying, ‘I will establish. my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after-thee.’ This also the Apostle Peter testifieth, with these words (Acts 2 :39), ‘For the promise is unto you and: to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.’ Therefore God formerly commanded them to be circumcised, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; and therefore Christ also embraced them, laid his hands upon them and blessed them (Mark 10).”

Let us notice the connection between this part and the immediately preceding part. For that is important. The connection is in the words “as God speaketh unto Abraham, the father of all the faithful, and therefore, unto us and our children.” This refers to what immediately precedes, that is, to the statement that our young children, who do, not understand these things as yet, “as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they s again received unto grace in Christ.” That this cannot possibly mean all the carnal seed of Abraham or all the carnal seed of believers, we have already shown. The promise is only for the elect. And the Baptism Form throughout speaks of the church and its elect seed. This is evident also from the quotation itself, especially if we view this quotation in the light of Romans 9. It is evident that in Gen. 17:7 we have mention of the promise. The promise is that God will establish His covenant with Abraham and his seed, and that in that covenant He will be a God unto them. The question is whether this promise is for all the children that are born from Abraham, head for head and soul for soul, as the Liberated have it, and therefore also for all the seed of believers in the new dispensation; or whether this promise is particular and is meant only for the spiritual seed, and therefore only for the elect. In the light of Romans 9 there can be but one answer to this question. And that is: the promise to Abraham was meant only for the elect, and not for all the carnal seed of Abraham. In Rom. 9 :6-8 we read: “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all, Israel which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”

To this important passage we must call close attention.

The passage is an answer to the question whether, seeing that so many of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh are lost, the Word of God has fallen out, the promise has become of none effect. To this question the text is an answer, And the answer is: no, the Word of God has not fallen out, has not failed to realize itself; but we must

remember that this Word of God pertains only to the children of the promise. These children of the promise are designated in a fourfold way. They are called *Israel, the seed, children of the promise, and children of God.*

They are called Israel. And it is evident from the text that only the spiritual Israel is meant, not the Jews, and not all the carnal children of Abraham. For the apostle writes: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Not all the descendants of Jacob are people of God. Not all are true Israelites, to whom pertained the promises, and who must be taken into account when the question is asked whether the Word of God has fallen out. The children of the promise, therefore, are the true children of God, Israel in the spiritual sense of the Word.

Secondly, they are called the seed. In verse 7 we read: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." And in vs. 8 the apostle writes: "The children of the promise are counted for the seed." This seed, according to Galatians 3:16 is principally and centrally Christ. From which it follows that Christ and those that are in Him are counted for the seed of Abraham. Believers in Christ are therefore the true seed of Abraham. And once more, if the question is asked whether the Word of God has taken none effect, we must not forget that only they are counted for the seed.

Thirdly, they are called the children of the promise. What is meant by this expression? Does the term simply mean the same as if the apostle had written "the promised children"? Or is the meaning, as others would interpret, "children to whom the promise pertains, that are heirs of the blessed promise of God"? To be sure, the children of the promise were also promised children, and the promised blessing was for them. But the expression "children of the promise" has a deeper significance. Frequently Scripture speaks of the promise. Sometimes it uses the singular, *promise*, and in other passages it uses the plural *promises*. Essentially the expression always refers to the same truth. The promise is God's revealed and pledged, yea, sworn purpose of salvation for His people through Jesus Christ our Lord. It implies redemption and deliverance from sin, and the inheritance of eternal glory in the kingdom of heaven. Now, children of the promise are children that are brought forth through the promise. The promise is, as it were, their mother. God brings them forth through the power of the promise by realizing His Word of promise in them. Hence; they are those in whom the promise of redemption has been realized in principle, spiritual children, born not of the flesh but of the Spirit, That this is the real meaning of the expression may be gathered not only from the expression itself, and from the fact that Isaac was the typical child of the promise, but also from a comparison with the expression as it occurs in Gal. 4:23, 28 : "But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was born by promise." The phrase "by promise" in vs. 23 literally reads in the original "through the promise"! Isaac was born through the means of, by the power of the promise. So we

are also children of the promise as Isaac was. And that this refers indeed to their spiritual birth is evident if we compare vs. 29 of the same chapter of Galatians; “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.” By nature, apart from the power of the promise of God, we are born after the flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. But by the promise of God we are born of the Spirit and after the Spirit: for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. And therefore, children of the promise are spiritual children in whom God wrought and realized the power of His promise of salvation.

Lastly, in connection with the term children of the promise stands the name *children of God*. The children of the promise are children of God. For the apostle writes in vs. 8 of Rom. 9: “That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” The implication is evidently that the children of the promise are indeed God’s children. They are those whom God adopted as His children in Christ before the foundation of the world, for whom Christ died and rose again, that they might have the right of sonship, and in whom God realizes this adoption by the Spirit of grace.

If now we consider these different terms designating the children of the promise in their relation with one another, we conclude the following. In the old dispensation the children of God, God’s people, were the natural descendants of Abraham and of Israel. That is the reason why they could be called the seed of Abraham and Israelites. This does not mean that all the descendants of Abraham were also children of God, or children of the promise. But in general it may be said that for many centuries all the children of God were natural descendants of Abraham. They were of Israel. They were Jews. But these descendants of Abraham and of Israel became children of God only through the power of the promise. The seed of Abraham according to the flesh is carnal, for Abraham could of himself never bring forth spiritual children of God. That which is born of Abraham is born of the flesh, and is flesh. And therefore the apostle can write: “Neither because they are of the seed of Abraham, are they all children.” In fact, if that had been all that could be said of these children; that they were born of Abraham as their father, none of them would ever have been a child of God. No more than Abraham of himself could bring forth the Christ, no more could he give being to a single child of God. But God made children after the Spirit, children of God out of Abraham’s descendants. He gave the true seed to Abraham by His grace, by realizing His promise to Abraham. And thus the children of the promise are children of God, the true seed of Abraham, the Israel of God.

This is still the case. Believers in the new dispensation are still the seed of Abraham. And God realizes His covenant with them in their generations, as He did with Abraham. But grace is never inherited. Believers of themselves can never bring

forth a single child of God. By nature they can only bring forth children of the flesh. But God gives unto them children of the promise. Out of their seed God takes His own children. Of their flesh it pleases Him to make spiritual seed. In that hope of God's marvelous grace the church brings forth children. God will transform their carnal children into spiritual children of God by the power of His promise. But it is very evident from this passage that the promise to Abraham and the promise of the covenant to believers: does not include all their seed, but only the seed according to election.

We must still answer the question : *who* are the children of the promise?

And also the question: where are they found?

These questions are very important, especially with a view to our controversy with the Heynsian conception and with the Liberated.

The question is: are all the descendants of the father of believers also children of God? Are all the seed of Abraham spiritual seed by the grace of God? This is the question with which Rom. 9:6-8 plainly deals; Is the conclusion warranted that because some one is a Jew, therefore he must be a child of the promise? In the old dispensation all the children of the promise were Jews. Were then all the Jews also children of God? In the new dispensation God establishes His covenant with believers and their children. Does this imply that all the children of believers are heirs according to the promise?

When the term *promise* is superficially considered that is, in the sense that it is a proclamation of a conditional assurance, it seems as if an affirmative answer would be justifiable.

And superficially considered, it would appear as if the promise to Abraham actually included all the Jews. Was not the Word of God to Abraham quite without limitation: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee"? Does not the Apostle Peter sound forth the same general promise when he proclaims in the text that is also quoted in our Baptism Form: "For unto you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call?"

But then the question arises: has the Word of God taken none effect? For the fact is that many, that the large majority, of the descendants of Abraham never received the promise, that thousands upon thousands of the seed of Abraham in the old dispensation perished, that at the very moment when the promise of God enters

upon its realization, the nation of Israel is definitely rejected, and that the hearts of many individual Jews are so hardened that they are closed to the influence of the gospel of Christ. The same may be said of the children of believers in the new dispensation. Many of them receive the seal of God's covenant in infancy, are instructed in the way of God's covenant from their very youth, but nevertheless despise the promises of God and choose the way of destruction even unto the very bitter end.

This therefore, is a very serious question: has the Word of God taken none effect?

There are many who, as they face this question, take refuge in the explanation that the promise of God is contingent upon the consent and acceptance of the promise by the seed of Abraham, by the children of believers. The promise, in other words, is conditional. It is indeed for all the children of Abraham and for all the children of believers. They are all, without exception, comprehended in the covenant of God. From God's side the covenant is established with all of them. On God's part the promise to them all, head for head, and soul for soul, is, "Yea and Amen." This, they claim, is the privilege of all that are born of believers in the church of Christ, that God sincerely holds out His promise to them, promises them the blessings of salvation. But then they come to years of discretion they must accept their covenant obligation. They must believe and walk in the way of obedience. The promise is conditional. And if the promise is not accepted, they simply cannot receive it. Thus it was in the old dispensation. The promise to Abraham and his seed includes indeed all the children of Abraham, all his natural seed. But thousands for whom the promise was intended failed to accept the offer of salvation which was well-meaning on the part of God to them all. And therefore, many of the children of the promise were lost. And the same failure to accept the promise explains why so many children of believers in the new dispensation for whom the promise is intended are cast out and rejected.

The question is, however, is this interpretation in harmony with the Word of God in Romans 9:6-8?

The answer to this question is undoubtedly negative.

The apostle exactly emphasizes that the Word of God in the promise has not become of none effect. Even the awful phenomenon that countless numbers of Jews are rejected does not warrant the conclusion that the Word of God has fallen out.

Yet, according to the explanation just mentioned this is exactly what happened. God's promise was for all. Yet, in the case of thousands upon thousands, this promise failed of its realization. Why? Do not answer that the promise failed in the

case of carnal Jews because of their unwillingness to accept the promise and honor God's covenant. For although I fully understand and admit that in the way of their unbelief and iniquity they were lost, I nevertheless deny that this can serve as an explanation of the fact that God did not fulfill His promise in them.

Such an interpretation is absolutely impossible. Consider that all the Children of Abraham by nature are alike. They are all dead in trespasses and sins. No one is by nature able to enter into the covenant of God, to believe and hope in the promise, unless God first realizes His promise unto them. How shall the seed of Abraham, and how shall children of believers ever become children of the promise unless God takes the initiative and realizes His promise. If, then, God's promise is for all the seed of Abraham, and if by nature all the children of Abraham according to the flesh are alike, unable to render themselves worthy or receptive for the promise of God, it follows that the Word, of God has fallen out, has become of none effect, has utterly failed in the case of those children of Abraham that never receive the promise.

But the text emphatically states the very opposite. The Word of God has not fallen out. The Word of God is the Word of GOD! Therefore it cannot possibly be conditional or contingent. It cannot depend on the creature for its realization. Its realization depends on God alone. And His Word of promise faileth never. Neither did it fail in the case of the unbelieving Jews. All, to whomsoever the promise was given, and to whom it pertained, were surely saved: not one of them ever perished. But from this it follows that the Word of God's promise, as far as its contents was concerned, was limited in scope, and that the promise did not pertain to all the seed of Abraham. This is the answer of the apostle, the explanation of Scripture of the fact that thousands of Israelites according to the flesh fail to become heirs of the kingdom of heaven. They are not all Israel that are out of Israel, that are the descendants of Jacob. Neither are they all children, that is, true children of God and children of the promise, because they are the carnal seed of Abraham. The children of the flesh are not the children of God, but the children of the promise, that is, those children of Abraham in whom God freely and sovereignly realizes His promise, that are therefore spiritually born through the power of the promise, these are accounted for the true seed of Abraham, and these are meant by the Word of God, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee."

And this is still of force. Also today the promise is unto us and to our children. God establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations of believers. Does this mean that all are children of the promise? Does it give parents with, say, four or five Children a ground, a God-given ground, to plead that all their children be saved? Can they say to God in their intercession for their children: "On the basis of Thine own promise to me I am bold to ask that Thou transform all my children into Thine?" And if the Lord does not hear this petition, and one or more of the children should

evidently be lost, will they have reason to complain that the Word of God has taken none effect? God forbid! They are not all Israel that are of Israel. And not all the seed of believers are children of God. But the children of the promise shall be counted for the seed. God sovereignly takes out of our children His own, and realizes all His Word without fail and unconditionally.

Thus also the question is answered: where are the children of the promise?

.And the answer is: they are in the line of the generations of believers.

But in the line of the generations of believers there are two kinds of seed: the carnal seed and the seed of the promise.

Outwardly and for a time they are one people. In the strictest sense this was the case in the old dispensation, when the line of the covenant was confined within the limits of the nation of Israel. They formed a nation. They were all called Israel. They all lived under God's dealings with His own. They were all delivered with a mighty arm from the house of bondage. They were all witnesses of God's terrible signs and wonders. They all passed through the Red Sea. They were all baptized into Moses. They all ate of the spiritual bread. They all drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. They were the nation that received the law, to whom the Word of God was entrusted, whose were the prophets, the priests, the kings, the service of the temple, altar and sacrifices. Yet; with the majority of them God was not well-pleased. There were always two seeds. There were within the nation of Israel the true children of the promise and the carnal children that despised God's covenant and trampled under foot the holy things of the covenant of God, His Word and precepts, In other words, there were always in the generation of Abraham the remnant according to the election of grace, and the carnal reprobate. And the latter were generally in the majority.

In the new dispensation it is no different.

The church in the world is the gathering of confessing believers and their children. And they form one people, even though the course of God's covenant is no longer confined to one nation. And to this people God reveals His covenant. They are called after His Name. Outwardly all that belong to them are subject to the same dealings. They are all baptized in the name of God Triune. To all the Word is proclaimed. All, young and old, are instructed in the knowledge of God and of our Savior Jesus Christ. Yet also in the church of God of the new dispensation the Word of God applies I "All is not Israel that is out of Israel" There are always the children of the promise, the true spiritual seed; but there also develops always again the carnal seed, that live in close proximity and outward fellowship with the spiritual seed, dwell in the same.

house with the latter, are subject to the same influences as these, but are not children of the promise, all receive not the grace of God in their hearts.

Such is the evident meaning of Romans 9:6-8.

The children of the promise are found in the line of the generations of believers. But all the children of believers are not children of the promise.

All is not Israel that is of Israel. H.H.

Chapter 9

The Baptism Form and “Sanctified in Christ”

There is still more in our Baptism Form that points to the fact that according to our fathers the promise in baptism was not for all the children, head for head, but only for the elect, even though all the children must receive the sign and seal of baptism according to the rule that God establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations.

We may omit the sentence that baptism is come in the place of circumcision, therefore infants are to be baptized as *heirs of the kingdom of God, and of his covenant.*”

But we wish to call attention to the first question of baptism:

“Whether you acknowledge, that although our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea; to condemnation itself; yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of his Church ought to be baptized?”

Especially to the clause, “they are sanctified in Christ,” we wish to call your attention.

This clause has been the subject of discussion and strife in the Reformed churches very frequently. Especially as the membership of the church increased and discipline was more and more neglected, it stands to reason that this clause could not be maintained in its proper meaning. Everybody was baptized. And it certainly was not possible to declare of all the children that were baptized that they were sanctified in Christ. There were many parents that did not walk in the way of the covenant themselves, yet they were never disciplined. The children were not instructed in the truth of the gospel and of the covenant. And thus it became more and more impossible to confess with the Baptism Form that the children of the covenant were sanctified in Christ. It wasn't very long before preachers began to change that clause, each in his own way. Some read that the children “may be sanctified in Christ.” Others, that “they can be sanctified in Christ.” Others, that “probably they were sanctified in Christ.” Others, that “they ought to be sanctified in Christ.” Still others, finally, “if they were sanctified in Christ.”

Yet, the meaning of this clause certainly cannot be dubious, either in the light of the rest of our confessions and Scripture, or in the light of the historical origin of our Baptism Form.

Heyns and the Liberated maintain that this clause has reference to a certain objective holiness or objective sanctification that has nothing to do with regeneration and spiritual sanctification. It simply means that children are included in the church and are separated from the world, and in that sense they are sanctified. But this is certainly not the meaning which the fathers themselves, at the time when the Baptism Form was composed, attached to the clause. Biesterveld writes in *“Het Gereformeerde Kerkboek”* (I quote and translate):

“The Reformed people have always taught that the sacraments, and therefore also baptism, are instituted for believers. Now the blessings of salvation, which are sealed by baptism, both by the baptism of children and of adults, are the same. And these are regeneration and remission of sins. These blessings of salvation are not bestowed upon them through baptism, but they are already by faith in the possession of him who receives baptism properly. Thus the expression ‘sanctified in Christ’ can mean nothing else than a real being implanted into Christ, and therefore being sanctified in that real sense of the word.”

That Scripture knows of no other sanctification in Christ than this real sanctification, which has its principle in regeneration, I hardly have to show. In I Cor. 1:2 the apostle writes: “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” In Phil. 1:1 the apostle writes: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: [Grace be unto you and peace, etc.] Saints in Christ Jesus means, of course, the same thing as sanctified in Christ. Other expressions have evidently the same meaning. Thus, we read in I Cor. 6:11: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God .”

Certainly this expression does not mean that our fathers taught that every baptized child was regenerated and sanctified, nor did they teach a presumptive regeneration in the sense that we may presuppose that all the baptized children are regenerated, until, perhaps, when they come to years of discretion, the opposite appears.

But it certainly means that the entire Baptism Form, in its doctrine, in its confession, in its prayer, and in its thanksgiving, views the church organically as the elect saints in Christ Jesus. The church confesses, prays, and gives thanks for the

believers and their spiritual seed. And of course, this implies that the promise is not for all, head for head and soul for soul, but only for the elect, for the believers, for them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus. H.H.

Chapter 10

The Baptism Form And The Prayer of Thanksgiving

We must still call attention to the thanksgiving at the close of the Form for the Administration of Baptism. There we read the well-known words:

“Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise thee, that Thou hast forgiven us, and our children, all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and, received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy Baptism.”

This is strong language indeed!

True, it does not literally mention the promise.

But the rich contents of the promise is expressed here in no uncertain terms: the forgiveness of sins, reception into the fellowship of Christ, so that we are His members, adoption unto children.

Moreover, all this is presented as an indubitable fact. It is all accomplished: ‘God *has* forgiven us all our sins, He *has* received us through His Holy Spirit as members of His only begotten Son, He *has* adopted us to be His children. It is all finished.

And of whom is this said here? Is it perhaps, for conscious believers, that fulfilled the condition of faith? Or is the promise here necessarily presented as unconditional?

The latter is, evidently the truth. For, in the first place, this thanksgiving does not only speak for those that utter this thanksgiving, but also for their little children. God has forgiven little infants, that certainly cannot consciously perform the act of faith, that are wholly incapable of fulfilling any conditions, all their sins; through His Holy Spirit He made them members of His Son, before they knew anything about it. And through the same Spirit He gave them the adoption unto children and heirs. Here we have again the same language we met in the doctrinal part of the Baptism Form: “for as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam; so are they again received unto grace in Christ.” Hence, in the thanksgiving the promise is surely presented as unconditional.

But a second reason why this thanksgiving, evidently, means to present the promise

as unconditional, is that it mentions the gift of the Holy Spirit as the Author of our having become members of Jesus Christ. And the ingrafting into Christ as His members by the Holy Spirit is surely prior to any possible act of faith on our part, and, therefore, unconditional.

Our fathers, therefore, surely maintained that the unconditional promise was signified and sealed unto us and to our children in baptism.

But how could our fathers speak so positively? How could they give thanks that God *has* forgiven us and *our children* all our sins, that He *has* made us and our *children* members of Christ through the Holy Spirit, and that He *has* adopted *us and our children* unto His children ?

Is this true, then, after all, of all the children that are baptized?

Or, is this, perhaps, all presumed, and based upon a presupposition?

I well remember the case of a certain minister in Classis Pella, who had conscientious scruples to pray this thanksgiving of the Baptism Form in his congregation. He appealed to classis and revealed his objections. This classis, however, did not explain the problem to him, but, nevertheless, insisted that, in baptizing children in his congregation, he would have to use the Form including the thanksgiving.

He tried to get light on the subject from others, even in Grand Rapids.

I know that he came to Prof. Heyns. And the professor explained that he must understand the language of this thanksgiving as merely an objective bequest, which God, on His part, granted to all the children that are born under the dispensation of the covenant, but that would be subjectively granted to them and realized in and for them on condition of faith and obedience. But the brother that had the conscientious objections was not satisfied with this. He pointed to the very positive language of that thanksgiving, and insisted that, according to it, the children as well as the adults were really partakers of all the blessings of salvation in Christ.

I know, too, that he approached Dr. Van Lonkhuyzen with his problem. He believed in presumptive regeneration; and explained to the brother that the thanksgiving does, indeed, refer to all the children that are born under the dispensation of the covenant, but that we must simply presume or presuppose that they all have the blessings of the covenant. Whether this is really the case will not become apparent until the children grow up and reveal themselves as real and spiritual children of the covenant. But again, the objecting brother pointed to the, very positive language of

the Baptism Form, and remarked that this language could never be interpreted as presumptions or presuppositions.

Evidently, the brother was right as far as the language of the thanksgiving is concerned.

But what then?

What did our fathers mean?

There is only one possible explanation. The Baptism Form has in view the believing Church and her spiritual seed. It is that believing Church that confesses, prays, pledges, and gives thanks. And that believing Church includes her spiritual seed, the children of the promise. To that Church and her spiritual seed are all the promises of God. And only in that light can we understand that, in the thanksgiving it can say: "Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank Thee that Thou hast forgiven us, and our children all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ."

In other words, our fathers believed and maintained that the promise is unconditional and for the elect only. H.H.

Chapter 11

The Term “Conditions” And The Conclusion from the Confessions

Some time ago we wrote about the subject of conditions in the light of our Confessions. (see “As To Conditions”)

Then we discovered that, although our confessions are very elaborate and cover every phase of the truth, there is no trace of “conditions” in them. Our Reformed fathers, evidently, had no need of the term conditions. In spite of that fact that the term was well known, and that several Reformed writers were rather free in using it, they did not give it a place in the symbols of the Reformed Churches, the Three Forms of Unity.

It does, indeed, occur in the Canons of Dordrecht, but only in the negative part, in which the doctrine of the Arminians are condemned. The Arminians needed the term, and made frequent use of it. It certainly may be said, therefore, that it is not a confessionally Reformed term.

Now, however, we wish to devote some attention to the subject of the promise and conditions in the light of Holy Writ.

Before we do this, however, it may not seem superfluous to define the term condition.

This is all the more imperative because; even as the term is not confessionally Reformed, so it is neither a Scriptural term. In the whole of Holy Writ, one looks in vain. for the use of the word “condition.” This does not mean that we may not use the term. Fact is that we use many terms in our system of doctrine as well as in our confessions that are not at all employed in Holy Writ, such as holy trinity, providence, attributes, sacraments, means of grace, etc. Nevertheless, the fact that the term is not found in Scripture at the same time makes Scriptural exegesis of it also impossible. Hence, we have to go elsewhere to define the meaning of the word in order to discover whether or not it may be, ought to be, or is at all advisable to be given a place in the expression of our Reformed system of doctrine.

First of all, we may remark that the etymology of the word “condition” cannot help us. Etymology is the science that treats of the history, origin, and primitive significance of words. It is often helpful to determine the present meaning of words. But this can hardly be said about the term condition. The word is composed of two parts, *con*, with, together with, and *ditio* or *dicio*, which probably means to point out,

to declare. Thus the term “condition” would mean a pointing out together with. And this hardly seems to throw any light upon our modern use of the term. If we consult the dictionary we find that the very first meaning of the word is *mode or state of being*. Further, it signifies: *mental or physical strength, disposition, character, essential property, attribute*. We see at once, however, that all these different connotations have no bearing upon the term under discussion at present. In this sense we all use the term, also in theological terminology. Who is not acquainted with the distinction we already learned in catechism between “state” and “condition”? Christ entered into the state, not in the condition of sin. State, in this case refers to one’s legal position, condition to one’s actual mode of existence or nature. But this has nothing to do with the term as it is discussed so frequently among us today. In this sense, it is properly translated by the Dutch term “toestand”, while the term in discussion among us may be translated by the Dutch “voorwaarde.”

Another definition we find in the dictionary is that condition is something which must exist as a concomitant of something else. By concomitant is meant something which exists alongside of something else, with or without any causal connection. Wind is a concomitant of an electric storm. Reproach is a concomitant of confessing Christ in the world.

However, also this is not the meaning of the term “condition” as we are discussing it at present and as it is used in theological parlance. Wind may or may not be a concomitant of a thunderstorm, but it can hardly be said that, if we understand the term as it is used in theology, the thunderstorm is a condition for the wind: there may be wind without a thunderstorm.

The definition of Schilder we already discussed sometime ago.

He wants to discard the dictionary and its definitions, and invent one of his own, or, at least, rather consult theological works to arrive at a definition of the term.

This is rather dangerous and arbitrary. Words certainly have meaning. Not only so, but they also are currently used in every day language. The latter is known by the Latin term *usus loquendi*. Now, the definitions of a word offered in the dictionary give the meaning of a word according to its original significance, its denotation and its current use. The danger is that, if we invent a definition of our own, the people will forget all about our definition, and use the term in its current meaning. And as far as the use of the term in theological works is concerned, the danger is that we will arrive at an Arminian definition, and by using the term, fall into the Arminian error.

Besides, the definition which Schilder offers is altogether too indefinite and

ambiguous, as I have pointed out before. Cf; Chapter 1 of this Response

However, for the sake of completeness, we quote it here once again: “A condition is, something which God has connected with something else, to make clear to us, that the one thing cannot come without the other, and that we cannot be sure of one thing, unless we are at the same time assured of the other.”

As we said; this definition is indefinite and ambiguous. The question is: what is this something which God has connected with something else? And what is the connection: means to an end, cause and effect? Besides, it ignores the personal element that is always present in the term “condition” as used in theological parlance. The term condition always implies that man must do something in order to receive something from God.

Hence, the term condition, also as it is used in theology, always means “that which is requisite in order that something else should take effect.” This implies that a condition is *prerequisite*, i.e. “something previously required, or necessary to an end or effect proposed.”

This is the meaning the term has as it occurs in the Canons, in the rejection of the Arminian errors.

We are not concerned now with the. question whether or not the term is necessarily and *per se* Arminian. For the present we merely wish to arrive at a proper definition of the term.

When the Arminians speak of “conditional election” no Reformed man will adopt. this terminology. Nevertheless, it is evident that the fathers of Dordt who condemned the term condition with application to election, understood the term as meaning a prerequisite, something that is required of a man before he can attain unto salvation. Canons I, B, 2.

When they teach that God chose out of all possible conditions the act of faith as a condition unto salvation, the fathers of Dordt certainly do not agree with them but condemn their doctrine. The fact remains, however, that also according to them the term condition signifies a prerequisite which man must fulfill. Canons I., B, 3.

The Arminians also understood that faith is a gift of God, and they even speak of an election unto faith. But according to them, “in the election. unto faith this condition is beforehand demanded, viz., that man should use the light of nature aright, be pious, humble, meek and fit for eternal life.” On these things, as requirements beforehand, election unto faith depends, according to them. Again, I wish to

emphasize that it is not the question whether any Reformed man believes in these Arminian conditions., The question is merely how our fathers understood the term. And then it is plain that they, as well as the Arminians, understood the term in the sense of a prerequisite, something that is required of man beforehand. Canons I, B, 3.

According to Canons I, B, 5 the Arminians teach.

“that faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness and perseverance are not fruits of the unchangeable election to glory, but are conditions, which being required beforehand, were foreseen as met by those who will be fully elected, and are causes without which the unchangeable election to glory does not occur.”

Our fathers condemned the term election in this connection. But the very fact that they condemned its use here shows plainly that also to them the term as such only could mean a prerequisite which man must fulfill. This, therefore, is the proper definition of the term in theological usage.

The Arminians also boldly teach that Christ neither merited, salvation for anyone, nor faith,

“but that he merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.” Canons II, B, 3.

Of this doctrine our fathers must, of course, have nothing. But they understood very well the proper meaning of the term conditions. By the term as such they understood the same concept as the Arminians. Otherwise they would have fought straw men when they condemned the doctrine of the opponents of the Reformed truth. “Prescribed conditions” also to them meant stipulations required of man beforehand, i.e., prerequisites. Canons I, B, 5.

Finally, according to Canons V, B, 1, the Arminians deny that the perseverance of believers is the fruit of election, and they maintain that it is “a condition of the new covenant, which man before his decisive election must fulfill through his free will.” Here, too, our fathers have no dispute with the Arminians about the term *condition* as such though they oppose and condemn its use in this connection. Also to, them the term refers to something which man must fulfill beforehand.

This is also the meaning Dr. Greenway attaches to the term in *"Torch and Trumpet"*, March 1953, when he writes: "What I am trying to say is that when our Form for Baptism says: Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts . . .," it certainly describes the hearer of the promise as being in a position where he can claim the first part of the covenant for himself only if he assumes the obligations of the second part." Man can claim something for himself (salvation!) on condition, prerequisite, that he fulfills certain obligations.

This definition, then; we, must constantly bear in mind when we discuss conditions in the light of Scripture.

We must agree, therefore, that the term condition also in theological and dogmatical parlance certainly means a requisite, or prerequisite, in order that something else may take effect.

When, for instance, we say that God promises us salvation on condition that we believe, the meaning can only be that unless we fulfill the condition or the prerequisite of believing, the promise of God can take no effect. Our act of believing is first, and the effect of the promise follows.

When we say that God promises us forgiveness of sins on condition that we repent, the only meaning can possibly be that our act of repenting is a requisite that must precede God's act of forgiveness. Or again, if we say that God gives us the assurance of forgiveness on condition that we repent, it certainly means that God's act of giving us assurance follows upon our act of repentance. Man must do something before God will do something.

Again, when we say that God will give us His Holy Spirit on condition that we pray, it certainly means that we must fulfill the requirement of prayer before God will give us His Holy Spirit.

When we say that God will preserve us unto salvation on condition that we persevere in the way of obedience, it means that our act of perseverance precedes God's work of preservation.

Once more, if we say that God will regenerate us on condition that we believe and accept Christ, it means that our act of believing precedes God's work of regeneration.

From all these illustrations, it is evident that term *condition* always refers to an act of man which he must fulfill before any work of God can take effect.

That, to say the least, we may well be very much afraid of using the term condition is

evident from the fact that some Arminians present the difference between the Reformed and themselves as hinging upon the use of this term.

This is evident from the following quotations, for which I am indebted to the Rev. Ophoff, and which are quotations from a dogmatical work by Thomas N. Ralston. Writes he:

“That salvation is of grace, in the sense in which the term may be explained, is perhaps more than Arminians can admit, either in words or in effect. For if by salvation by grace Calvinists understand that faith and obedience have no connection whatever with salvation, either as conditions or otherwise, this view of salvation by grace must be rejected by Arminians, as directly contrary to the Scriptures. And this, we are persuaded, is the sense in which salvation by grace is understood, when it is said that the Arminian system does in effect destroy it.”

Here is another quotation:

“The plain difference between, Calvinism and Arminianism, on this subject, is this Calvinists cannot see how salvation can be of grace, if it have any respect to faith, or anything else as a condition; whereas Arminians, while they understand that repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, are indispensable conditions of salvation with all to whom the gospel is addressed, understand at the same time, that salvation is entirely from beginning to end, a work of God through grace.”

How closely the Arminians seem to approach the Reformed conception of sovereign grace, while yet the two views are as wide apart as east is distant from the west, may be gathered from the following quotation:

“If it still be insisted that salvation cannot be ascribed to grace, if it be suspended on a condition, then the charge of inconsistency or heterodoxy must be made upon the Bible itself; for nothing can be plainer than that God has promised to save the believer on the condition of faith, and threatened to punish the unbeliever in consequence of his unbelief and voluntary rejection of the gospel. Notwithstanding, salvation is thus suspended upon conditions, and, in a certain sense, man by his own agency must determine his eternal destiny, yet it may easily be shown that salvation is all the work of God through grace.

“1. Man is by nature utterly helpless, incapable of any good whatever, only as he is visited and strengthened by divine grace.

“2. It is attributable to grace alone that a plan of mercy has been devised and proposed to man.

“3. Nothing that man can do can avail anything toward purchasing salvation by merit; for when we have done all that we can do, we are unprofitable servants.

“4. The work of salvation, in all its stages, can be performed, either in whole or in part, by none but God; and this is certainly the work of grace, for none can claim it at the hand of God as a matter of right, and it is of mere grace that God has promised to save the sinner, according to the plan of his own devising.”

That all this sounds very orthodox and may even appear to many to be thoroughly Reformed, while yet it has nothing to do with the Reformed faith of unconditional election and unconditional salvation and unconditional promise, is evident to all that have the Reformed power of discernment.

For it is not so much the question whether salvation is of mere grace in the sense that it is entirely unmerited, as whether God irresistibly and unconditionally works salvation in the heart of the sinner, according to Eph. 2:8: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” ,

I will close these quotations from Ralston by an interesting dialogue between him and a Calvinist.

“Calvinist: Nay: but are not all the promises Yea and Amen?

“Ralston: They are firm as the pillars of heaven. Perform the conditions and the promise is sure. Believe and thou shalt be saved.

“Calvinist: But many promises are absolute and unconditional.

“Ralston: In many the condition is not expressed. But this does not mean that none is implied, No promise can be expressed in a more absolute form than those from the 89th Psalm. And yet, as we have seen, a condition is implied even there, though none be expressed.”

It therefore is not only an interesting, but also a very important study, to find out whether Scripture really teaches conditions and conditional theology.

In order to make this investigation, we shall necessarily have to follow a certain

order. And the order will be as follows:

1. First of all, we will follow the order of what is called the *regula Scripturae*, that is, the answer to the question, Is conditional theology in harmony with the current teaching of Scripture concerning our salvation?
2. Secondly, we hope to make study of what are grammatical conditional sentences in Holy Writ.
3. And thirdly, we shall study some other texts that may be construed as teaching conditions. -H.H.

--- Here the split in 1953 occurred

The propose study was never completed, though :

- 1) The first part was effectively done by Rev. Herman Veldman, in “An Exposition of The Doctrine of the Covenant From Scripture” which appeared in the *Standard Bearer* in the winter of 1947 and throughout 1948
- 2) The second part was done by Ophoff : Once MoreThe promise, “if” clauses and the promise Cf. Part 4, Appendix A. 1.

Once More ... The Promise

By George Ophoff

*1. The Promise is not an if-clause,
but an unconditional word of assurance*

According to the Confessions and the Scriptures the promise of God as to the Form of its words is not an if-clause sentence. Hence, such a sentence as, "If you believe, you will be saved," is not the promise. But the promise is simply, "I the Lord will save you, my people."

According to the Confessions. Canons chap. II, art. 5, "Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish but have everlasting life," meaning, all, everyone that believeth will be saved without a single exception. In a word, God will save the elect, historically the believers. Such is the promise. It is not, according to the Confessions, an if-clause sentence.

According to the Scriptures. First, let us take notice of the promise as first proclaimed by the Lord Himself by His own voice immediately after the fall. Said the Lord to our fallen and disobedient first parents: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; and it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise its heel."

This is a simple sentence. It is all promise.

The protevangel is the seed of all the promises spoken thereafter. Hence, nowhere in all the Scriptures is the promise of God as to the form of its words such an if-clause sentence.

In proclaiming to Noah the promise, God said not to him, "I will establish my covenant with you, *if you believe*." But he said, "I will establish my covenant with you." period. And then the Lord went on to say among other things, "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." This is the promise as it came to Noah.

What was the promise to Abraham? Said the Lord to him, "I will make of thee a

great nation, and will bless thee, if thou believest, *if* thou walkest before my face and art upright?” Nay, but this was the word of God to Abraham, “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” and here the Lord again put the period. This is the promise as it came to Abraham. The writer of the Hebrews tells us that it is the promise. Says this writer, “For when God made promise to Abraham,” mark you, *promise*, “because he could swear by no greater, he swore by Himself, saying, “Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.” Such is the promise as it came to Abraham.

And what said the Lord to Jacob in the vision, to the ill-deserving Jacob on his way to Padan-aram fleeing from the results of his sin? It is this, “I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee? will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all the places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken unto thee.” No such if-clause as, “if thou believest,” once appears in this entire communication. For it is the promise that Jacob hears.

And so again to Jacob by the voice of the prophet (Isa. 44) “Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel whom I have chosen; thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; fear not, O Jacob, my servant, and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses,” and in a like vein. in the chapter immediately preceding (43) “But now thus saith the Lord who created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when, thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame be kindled upon thee,” and so on through verse 7. And so again to Jacob – the church of God – by the pen of the apostle Peter, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Pet. 1:3,4). And finally this word of promise (Col. 3:3,4), “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

The promise of the gospel is not an if-clause sentence. It is not a sentence the apodasis of which is the promise pivoted on some such if-clause as, “if you believe”. As was stated, “if you believe, you will be saved,” is not the promise.

This, of course, is not denying that such statements as, “If you believe you will be saved,” do not occur, in the Scriptures. Fact is that the Bible is replete with them. We have Isaiah declaring in the name of the Lord to the Israelites indiscriminately, “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land, but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured by the sword.” And so Paul to the brethren of the church at Rome, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For *if* ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but *if* ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh; ye shall live” (Rom. 8:12, 13). Certainly, this must be declared unto every man, reprobate and elect alike, to whom God sends the gospel. That certainly is the duty and calling of every human preacher of the gospel, namely, to declare unto all persons promiscuously the command to believe, and further also to declare unto all persons promiscuously that the believers have eternal life, so that, if a man believes he will be saved, but that, if he believes not, he, will be damned.

Let us take notice: if a man believes, that is, *in* case he believes, but not certainly “op voorwaarde,” *on condition*, that he believes. The above message places every man who hears the gospel under the obligation to believe. What is more, it throws all the blame on the disobedient for the fact of their perishing to their unbelief, and it thus completely exculpates God

But to call this “if” statement – if you believe, you will be saved – the promise is a serious error. And the reasons are the following:

First, consider to whom the promise is given. “The promise is given to Jacob. (See the Scriptures quoted above from Isaiah). And who is Jacob? Jacob is Christ, and secondarily the church of the elect, historically the believers. Think then what it would mean, were this “if” statement – if you believe, you will be saved – the promise, actually the promise. It would mean that God through the ages addressed and is still addressing and will continue to address through the ages to come, to Jacob, that is, to Christ and the church of the elect, historically the believers the following speech: “But now thus saith the Lord who created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by name, that is, if thou believest, but if thou believest not, thou, Jacob, Christ, the church of the elect are damned.” And further, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame be kindled upon thee, that is, if thou believest, Jacob, but if thou dost not believe, thou shalt be damned.”

And further, (Isaiah 43:3) “For I am the Lord thy God, the holy one of Israel, thy Savior, that is, if thou believest, Jacob, but if thou believest, not, thou shalt be damned.” And further, (verse 4) “Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee, that if, if thou believest, Jacob, but if thou dost not believe, thou shalt be damned.” And finally, “Therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life, that is, Jacob, if thou believest, but if thou believest not, thou shalt be damned.”

It ought to be clear that the promise to Jacob cannot be pivoted on some such “if” clause as “*If* thou believest.” That ought to be clear. It ought to be clear that as pivoted on such an “if” clause, the promise to Jacob is not any longer a promise. True it is that in addition to declaring to Abraham, “I am thy God and the God of thy (spiritual) seed, the Lord also commanded him: “Walk before my face and be upright.” But this command coming, as it always does, to God’s redeemed and, spiritually living people, must not be converted into an “if” clause, and as so converted added as a pivot to the promise thereby making it to read, “Abraham, I am thy God the God of thy salvation, if thou believest; but *if* thou dost not believe, I am thy adversary to destroy thee.” This is not the promise, no matter how that “if” be interpreted.

In the first place, such a declaration could not possibly serve the purpose of a promise. Let us consider that the believer has need of knowing that he is a saved child of God. And there is but one Who can tell him so that he believes and is assured and that one is God. And God does tell him in connection, of course, with his fruit bearing as a regenerated person, thus in connection with his penitence and, contrition of heart, in connection with his steadily fixing his eye upon the crucified, risen and glorified Christ, the only hope for a condemnable, lost and undone sinner, in connection with his crucifying his members which are upon the earth and his putting on Christ, and in connection with his fighting the good fight of faith as; bearing the reproach of Christ. In connection with this his fruit bearing – the work of Christ’s Spirit in him, – the believer receives from his God the testimony in his heart that he pleases God and is saved for Christ’s sake, which is but another way of saying that in the language of Paul, the Holy Spirit beareth witness with his spirit that he is God’s son.

But there is now this question: From where does the Holy Spirit derive the content of His witnessing with the spirit of the believer that he is God’s son? There is but one answer. From the Holy Scriptures and from the Scriptures alone, and thus also from the sermons of the human proclinator of the Gospel, if he truly proclaims the gospel and proclaims it purely.

And this brings us to the question: what is the proper content of this witnessing of the Spirit? The proper content of this witnessing is not the command to believe in Christ. True, the Holy Spirit is in the need of this command to save His people. By speaking this command in their hearts, he fixes their gaze steadily upon Christ. And as looking to Christ and to Christ only, they receive in their hearts the testimony of God that they are justified and saved. Yet, certainly, this command to, believe is not the promise. It is not therefore the proper content of this witnessing of the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit speaks this command also in the hearts of the reprobated, but unto their damnation, By this command He hardens them in preparation of their everlasting destiny. Neither does this “if” declaration, “If you believe in Christ, you will be saved,” form the proper content of this witnessing of the Holy Spirit. True, as proclaimed, it is a joyful sound in the ears of God’s believing people. But it is to them such a joyful sound only because they have received of God testimony that they are His children. And let us consider that the Holy Spirit speaks also this “if” declaration, “if you believe, you will be saved, but if you do not believe, you will be damned,” in the hearts of the reprobated, His purpose being, as already has been explained, to render them responsible and without excuse in the final day of judgment.

What then is the proper content of this witnessing of the Holy Spirit? Precisely this “if-less,” this unconditional promise of God, “I am the God of thy salvation.”

You have a son of let us say eight years who on a day comes home from school. looking very sad because the boys at school have been telling him that he is an adopted son of yours, and thus not your very own flesh and blood. Would you think to reassure your child by some such statement as “You are our son, flesh of our flesh, if you behave, otherwise not.” That would be a cruel answer. What assurance would there be for the child in such a statement? None whatever. Well do you realize. So as a good parent you look down into the eyes of your child, and say to him, “Believe me, my child, you are our son, our very own flesh and blood,” and right here you put the point, and your child believes you.

It would be a sad thing indeed, wouldn’t it, if all that the Heavenly Father had to say to His children is, “If you believe, you are my sons. If you do not believe, you are damned.”

But God does have more to say to His own children, to His redeemed ones. In the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, the Holy Spirit sets before Him these children. He sets before Him the elect, historically the believers, and directs to them the promise, the “if-less” and on this account the unconditional promise for there is none other. “I am your God,” He says to them, “your Father in Christ, the God of your salvation.” And here He puts the period.

But He does more than this. He commands His servants, the human preachers of the gospel, to follow the example that He sets them in the Scriptures. Thus He commands them that they, too, set before them in their sermons the elect of God, historically the believers, and address to them the promise of God, the “if-less”, the unconditional promise of God – there is none other. These servants, of course, do not know who the elect are. But it does not matter. The Spirit does. For He knows the heart. And the Spirit, who is the only preacher of the Word, speaks this promise, this “if-less,” unconditional promise – there is none other – in the hearts of His children. So, by speaking this “if-less,” unconditional promise – other promise there is not – in the hearts of His people, does the Spirit bear witness with their spirit that they are the sons of God.

And as it is the duty and calling of the human preachers of the Word to set before him the elect, so is it likewise his calling to set before him in his sermon the wicked and the reprobated and speak to them the very word that the Spirit directs to them in the Scriptures. It raises the question whether the human preacher of the word must come with two messages, one for the elect, historically the believers, and another for the wicked and impenitent. Indeed he must. So our Confessions teach.

Qu. 83, of the Catechism. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

Ans. The preaching of the Holy Gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut to unbelievers.

Qu. 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the Holy Gospel?

Ans, Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all believers, that, whenever they receive the promise of, the Gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ’s merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: according to which testimony of the Gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.

The human proclinator of the Word must proclaim the Gospel as the Holy Spirit proclaims it in the Scriptures. Setting before him in His sermons both the elect and the reprobated, the believers and the unbelievers, he must direct to each the message that the Spirit in the Scriptures directs to each. Then only does he preach

the Gospel, the full-orbed Gospel, but not otherwise. Then only is his preaching what it must be a two-edged sword. Then only is the kingdom of heaven opened to the believers and closed to the unbelievers. Then only are God's believing people being assured, comforted, instructed and built up in the faith. The task of the human preacher of the Word is plain. His task is to preach sermons from which the Holy Spirit can derive plentiful content for His bearing witness with the spirit of the believers that they are the children of God and also sufficient content for His testifying in the consciousness of the unbelievers that "they are exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted."

From all that is presented above it ought to be plain that the promise of God is and must necessarily be "if-less", and therefore of necessity unconditional, and a gospel, a good news, for the elect only. To them only is the promise.

And how about such "if" statements as "if you believe, you will be saved?" As was stated, the Scriptures is replete with them. And they must be preached for a reason already stated. But certainly there is no need at all of making the "ifs" in such statements to mean "condition," "voorwaarde." These "ifs" are not conditions. And nothing is gained by making them so. Certainly it need not be done for pedagogical reasons. Making these "ifs" to mean conditions is only loss. What is lost is the truly reformed position.

Nor must these "if" declarations be called promises of God. For according to the Scriptures and the Confessions, the promise of God bequeaths upon those to whom it is given a legal claim upon salvation and accordingly the right to hope for it. Hence, whereas these "if" declarations are personal addresses directed to all, reprobate as well as the elect, it follows that to call these declarations promises of God is to say that they bequeath also upon the reprobated a claim upon salvation and accordingly the right to be saved.

But this raises questions. First, how can God bequeath also upon the reprobated a claim upon salvation, if Christ died only for the elect?

Second, if God bequeaths upon the reprobated the right to be saved, why then do they perish? There can be but one answer: either God is unfaithful to His promises regarding the reprobated, or he is powerless to save them, which would mean that God is not the sovereign Lord of the perverse will of the creature, but this will the lord of God.

What then are these "if" statements, if they are not promises? They are simply statements of the fact that if a man believes he will be saved, but that if he believes not, he will be damned. I place this article in this issue of the *Standard Bearer* with a

view to our coming Synod. As a delegate to Synod I shall go to Synod as armed with the argument of this article. Let the brethren-delegates to Synod make a study of it, and, if they can, overturn it. If they can't overturn it, the Declaration certainly should be adopted. For if this argument is true, then nevertheless to reject the "Declaration" is to open wide the doors of our churches to most serious doctrinal errors, talk as we may.

And let us not imagine, that in arguing the points involved is to be wasting time in what is called hairsplitting argument. The issue on which our present controversy turns is truly fundamental. It is very actually none other than this, namely, whether there really is such a thing as a Gospel of God, and if so, whether this Gospel is to be or not to be in our circles. As I see it, the view according to which the promise of God is pivoted on an "if" cuts the very gospel out of the Scriptures conceptionally and thereby renders them absolutely "gospel-less." If I am mistaken, let the brethren then make this plain to me on the coming Synod by overturning with the Scriptures the argument of this article.

It will not do of course to distinguish between *the* promise of God and 'a promise of God,' and then to maintain that *the* promise of God is this "if-less," unconditional declaration, "I am the God of thy salvation in Christ Jesus," and that this so-called 'a promise of God' is this "if" statement, "*If* you believe you will be saved." To so reason is simply to smuggle into our churches through their backdoor the very view of things that was first cast out through their front door; it is to retrieve what was first repudiated. It is a doing like that of a dog returning to its vomit. G. M. Ophoff.

*2. Promises are If-less
If-clauses are to be distinguished
as to kind, not all are "conditions"*

As I stated in my previous article, according to our Confessions And the Scriptures, the promise of God as to the form of its words is not an "if" clause sentence. Hence, such a sentence as, "if you believe, you will be saved," is not the promise. But the promise is simply, "I, the Lord, will save you my people." According to our Confessions, the promise of God is not such an "if" clause sentence. This was proved by quotations from the Confession (Canons, chap. II, art. 5).

According to the Scriptures, the promise of God is not such an "if" clause sentence. This was proved by several quotations from the Scriptures. We first took notice of the promise as first proclaimed by the Lord Himself by His own voice immediately after the fall, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; and it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise its heel."

This, so it was regarded, is a simple sentence. It is all promise. It is not pivoted on some such "if" clause as, "If thou believest."

It bears repeating that this promise, known as the protevangel, is the seed of all the promises spoken thereafter. As was stated, what must follow from this is, that nowhere in the Scriptures is the promise of God an "if" clause sentence. I quoted several Scripture passages to prove this point. Quoted was the promise as it was proclaimed first to Noah, then to Abraham, next to Jacob, again to the church of the days of Isaiah, and finally to the church of the New Dispensation.

I want to quote one more Scripture passage to drive home this point. Let us yet attend to the promise as it came to the church by the voice of Ezekiel and as recorded in the 36th chapter of his discourse. Reminding the prophet of how He, the Lord, had poured His fury upon the house of Israel for the blood, "that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it; and of how He had scattered them among the heathen, and dispersed them through the countries (verses 16-20) the Lord continues as follows:

"But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God: I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned, in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know, that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you

before their eyes, For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. And a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

“And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.

“Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.” Ezekiel 36:21-31

Such is the promise as it comes to the church by the voice of Ezekiel. No such “if” clause as, “If thou believest” once appears in this entire communication. And the reason is that it is again the promise that is here being proclaimed. To insert into this communication some such “if” clause as, “if you believe,” is to convert it into a declaration absolutely meaningless and devoid of all comfort; for then we get this, “For I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned, *because this house believed*. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, *if the house of Israel will believe*. And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes, *if you believe*. Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; *if you believe*. From all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you, *if you believe*. And a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, *if you believe*. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and will give you an heart of flesh, *if you believe*. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, *if you believe*.”

What comfort could a man, brought under the conviction of sin and thus having come to know himself as a sinner by nature totally depraved, guilty and damnable in the sight of God and thus lost and undone, – I ask, what comfort could such a man derive from the above communication, had it come to the church as pivoted on an “if” clause? Absolutely no comfort whatever.

For let us consider that such a man stands out in his own mind as in need of all things – thus in need of a new heart and a new spirit in need of faith and always more grace to forsake my sin and put on Christ and to fight the good fight as seeking the things of Christ’s heavenly kingdom. “My soul cleaveth to the dust,” so prayed the psalmist,

“Quicken thou me according to thy word. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts, so shall I talk of thy wondrous works. Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it to the end. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments for therein do I delight.

“Turn away mine eyes from vanity; and quicken thou me in the way. Let thy mercies come unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation according to thy word. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.” Ps. 119.

But what would such a petitioner have to plead on and to live by on and by what real promise were it true in the Scriptures the promises of God, including the promise of faith, came to the church as pivoted on an “if” clause such as, “if thou believest,” so that all that God were saying to that petitioner is, “I will give thee a new heart, quicken thee in the way, help thee in thy unbelief, cause my mercies to come unto thee, give thee understanding; remove thee from lying, *if thou believest.*”

That petitioner would have no promise to plead on and to live by. For promises pivoted on “if” clauses are not promises. Such a declaration as “if you believe you will be saved,” is not a promise.

But if a new heart and a new spirit are not promised; if contrition of heart and repentance are not promised, if faith is not promised, if Christ’s return and the renewal of all things are not promised; if, on a word, nothing at all is really promised, how could a man thirsting for these things, pray for them? He could not and he might not. For there would be to him no promise bequeathing upon him the right to these things and thereby encouraging him to seek these things in prayer.

Let us see how the psalmist David prayed. Psalm 31 is one of those prayers in which he craved God’s help in the following language, “Let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for a house of defense to save me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid for me. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: my eye is consumed with grief, yea, my souls and my belly,” and so on through the end of the psalm.

On what was this saint basing his petitions for God’s help? Certainly on a word, a

testimony of God spoken by the Spirit in his heart. What was that word? What was its content? Was it this: I, the Lord, will save thee out of all thy troubles, if *thou believest*? Not that: We must consult the Psalm for the answer, taking notice of the following expressions of faith occurring in it. “In thee, O Lord, do I put, my trust (verse 1) For thou art my rock and my fortress (verse. 3), For thou art my, strength (verse 4). Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth (verse 6). I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the Lord (verse 6). But I have trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God.”

What are these expressions of faith of this petitioner but the echo of God’s very own unconditional testimony in his heart that the Lord is His God, the Savior of his life, the God of his salvation. How could the heart of the petitioner have said, “Thou art God,” except by the Spirit, first having spoken this profession in his heart?

This is revelation to be sure. But revelation in this sense did not cease certainly with the closing of canon of the Scriptures by the death of the last apostle. If believers are to know that they are God’s sons and that He is their God, God must tell them. And God does tell them as certainly as He told Abraham, the father of the faithful, when He spake in his heart the Word “I am thy God. Walk before my face and be upright.” And this witness of God in the hearts of His people is not pivoted on an “if” clause. It thus completely closes for them the question whether they are saved. With this testimony in their hearts – a testimony the contents of which the Spirit derives from the Scriptures – they know.

Once more then, the promises of God in the Scriptures do not come to the elect as pivoted on an “if” clause. The promises of God are “if-less” indeed and therefore unconditional. They are truly promises – declarations of God that He by His Spirit speaks in the hearts of His elect – promises, therefore by which His people live and die and on which they build for time and eternity.

In the light of these observation it ought to be clear that the view according to which the promises of God come to the elect as pivoted on an “if” clause is a serious error – an error that really loses the believers, God’s very gospel. And nothing is here retrieved by saying that the promise is conditional in the sense that God fulfills the condition. For were the promise conditional even in this sense, it still would needs be pivoted on some such “if” clause as “if you believe” But once more, to pivot the promise on an “if” clause is to destroy it as a *promise*. Such a statement as, “if you believe, you will be saved,” is not what the Scriptures mean by promise. And the reason is obvious. Being what it is, an “if-clause” sentence, in the soul of every one to whom it is addressed, it leaves unanswered the question whether he is saved. It is obvious; certainly, that to say to a man that, if he believes, he is saved, is not to say to him, that he is actually saved. If this is true, how could God assure his people that

they are actually saved by some such an “if-clause” declaration? Impossible, this requires an “if-less,” unconditional promise. Let us by all means insist then, that the promises of God are indeed “if-less” and therefore unconditional. Let us realize what is at stake here. Nothing less than this, namely, whether there is such a thing as a Gospel of God, and if so, whether that Gospel is to be or not to be in our circles.

However, as I remarked in my previous article on this subject, this is not denying that such statements as, “If you believe, you will be saved,” occur in the Scriptures. Fact is that both the Old and New Testament Bible are replete with such statements. They occur rather frequently in the epistles. And it raises the question whether sentences of this type, though “if-clause” statements as to the form of their words, must not in certain connections at least be taken, as real promises as to the thought conveyed. This seems to be the case, for example, with the “if-clause” sentence in Romans 4:24; Abraham, so the apostle relates in the verses preceding; believed against hope in hope, “that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able to perform. And therefore, it was imputed to him for righteousness.” And then the apostle continues “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also; *to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*”

Must not this “if-clause” statement, by reason of the setting in which it occurs, be taken to mean, “to whom – that is, to us – it shall be imputed indeed, seeing that we do believe in him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead?” Seemingly so and this on the ground of the following consideration. The apostle addresses his discourse to the church of God at Rome, thus to a redeemed communion of persons. Though this argument is invalidated by the likely presence of a carnal, reprobated seed in the church, yet the immediate connection in which the statement in question occurs apparently compels the conclusion that, though an “if” clause statement as to the form of its words and grammatical construction, it, as to the thought conveyed, is nevertheless a promise, “if-less” and unconditional. For let us take notice. Writes the apostle, “But for us – mark you, *us* – also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus, Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” As Christ died only for his people, this last clause – who was delivered for our offenses – can, strictly speaking, be made to apply only to the elect. And as throughout the two verses last quoted the apostle addresses the same group, the conclusion would seem to be inescapable that in this connection this “if-clause” sentence is, indeed a promise as to its proper meaning and therefore a statement directed solely to the elect.

But this argument is invalid for the following reasons. First, it was always the same Christian brotherhood that was being addressed; and this without regard to the fact that all is not Israel that is of Israel. That is to say, the apostle was not classifying the members of the church at Rome into elect and reprobated and addressing in his epistle now the one group and then the other; but from the beginning to the end of his epistle in all that he wrote, he was speaking to the entire congregation as to the whole of its constituency. To every member in the church Paul was saying, "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." But I must hasten to add that he was not in his mind singling out the individual member in the church and saying to him, "Christ was delivered for your offenses," and putting the period here. The apostle was not addressing individuals in this sense; he was addressing individuals in their totality. It can also be stated this way. Though to the total of members Paul was saying, "Was delivered for our offenses," he was not in his mind singling out the individual member in the church and including him in this "our" without the mental reservation, "If he be an elect."

Second. This "if-clause" statement reappears, be it in a somewhat different form, at chap. 8:13. And it reappears at this place in conjunction with a sentence that sets forth what is necessarily implied in such an "if-clause" statement. Here the text reads, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live."

We see now what we do to the Scriptures, when we convert this "if-clause" statement into a promise. We involve the Scriptures, definitely this epistle, in the strangest contradiction. For in the places where this "if-clause" statement appears, we make the epistle first to say, "For ye, brethren, do *live* after the flesh; Hence ye shall die; but ye, *brethren*, do mortify through the Spirit the deeds of the flesh; hence ye shall live." And so at 4:24, "To us, brethren, it shall be imputed for we do believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; but to us, brethren, it shall not be imputed, for we do not believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead?"

It is plain that the "if-clause" statement at this place cannot be taken as a promise directed solely to the elect. And what is true of this "if-clause" statement at this place is true of all "if-clause" statements in every place of the Bible. They are not promises.

"This again brings us to the question: what are these "if-clause" declarations of the type, "if you believe you shall be saved." To call Scripture utterances of this type *conditional* declarations is wrong. Allow me to remark in passing that the term "condition" because of its large, variety of meanings, is one of the most confusing words in the English language. In all my writings, thus also in this present one, I use

the term *condition* in the sense of prerequisite; Holland, *voowaarde*. I think that in our present discussions we had better stick to this meaning of the term, for otherwise we won't know anymore whether we are coming or going in our present dispute. The Liberated use the term in the sense of "voorwaarde." Van Dalen in his "*Groote Woordenboek*," defines the term "*voorwaarde*" as follows: 1. Beding. 2. Voorwaarden stellen, die eerst ingewilligd, werkelijkheden oeten worden, voor men zich aan het overeengekomene houdt; ik sta *hef U toe*, onder voorwaarde, met de bedinging. 3. De rechtsterm: toekomstige en onzekere gebeurtenis waarvan eene verbintenis afhankelijk is gesteld: de voorwaarde is vervuld.

All who can read and understand the Holland will see that according to this definition, a condition, *voorwaarde*, is a prerequisite laid down by the party of the first part of a contract that the party of the second part must of his own will accept and realize before the party of the first part will do as he agreed. Further, according to Van Dallen's definition, whether the condition will be realized is uncertain. It may and it may not be fulfilled, all depending on, the will of the party of the second part of the contract. This definition of *condition* in the sense of "*voorwaarde*" fully agrees with the definition contained in "The Century Dictionary." As was just stated, to call a scripture declaration of the type, "if you believe, you will be saved," a conditional declaration is wrong. It is wrong because such a Scripture utterance is not a conditional sentence but simply an if-clause sentence. It is certainly necessary to distinguish between the two. For though all conditional sentences are "if-clause" sentences, all "if-clause" sentences are not conditional sentences. Just because they are identical as to form and grammatical structure is no reason for putting them in one class and calling them one and all conditional. For there is a real difference as to meaning.

Let us illustrate. The thought conveyed by such a statement as, "if a child breaks out with a scarlet rash over its body, it has scarlet fever," is not certainly that a child is taken down with scarlet fever on the condition that it breaks out with scarlet rash. To read such a meaning into the sentence is to reduce it to sheer nonsense, And the reason is obvious. The scarlet rash is not the cause of scarlet fever, but the sign, symptom and indication of it. But now take a sentence like the following. A man says to his neighbor, "*If you are on this or that street corner at nine o'clock to morrow morning, I will pick you up in my car.*" The clause in italics is expressive of a real condition. It has all the characteristics of a condition, "*voorwaarde*." Being on the specified corner at the specified time is a pure prerequisite that the rider of his own free will agrees to realize and also must realize in order to be picked up by his obliging neighbor. It's the heart of the contract that he must first fulfill, if he is going to be picked up. And whether he will ride or not is wholly dependent on his ability and willingness to realize the condition laid down for him. Also, whether he will do as told is uncertain. He may or may not, depending on many things.

Here then we have to do with a real condition and conditional sentence. There are then such things as “if-clause sentences” expressive of no condition at all and therefore deserving to be known exactly by that name and by none other, namely “if-clause sentences.” Besides, there are also such things as “conditional sentences.” And they deserve to be known by this name, because that is what they are as to their real meaning. There is no objection to putting these two kinds of sentences into one class and calling them all by one name. But let that name be not “conditional sentences,” but “if-clause sentences,” and let the names for each kind of sentences within the class be: “nonconditional if-clause sentences” and “conditional if-clause sentences.”

The Lexicons, of course, do not have this terminology. But that doesn't matter. The reason I present it, is to compel ourselves to make some very necessary distinctions in our present dispute in order that we may know what we are at.

Now, then, what is such a declaration as, “If you believe, you will be saved.” Is it a “non-conditional if-clause sentence,” or a “conditional if-clause sentence”?

It is not, certainly, a “conditional if-clause sentence.” This ought to be as plain as the sun in the heavens, plain that the covenant is not a contract in which faith in Christ is an uncertain condition, prerequisite, “*voorwaarde*” laid down by God as the party of the first part and that man, as the party of the second part, of his own free will agrees to realize and must realize before God will save him and thereby do what He agreed. In a word, faith is not a condition! Such an “if-clause” sentence as “if you believe you will be saved,” is not a *conditional* “if-clause” declaration. For the covenant is God's; faith is His gift, and the believers as saints are His creations, the sheep of His pasture. And therefore we call such a statement as “if you believe, you will be saved,” a non-conditional if-clause declaration, Mark you “declaration,” and not “promise,” and this with reason. There is not an atom of promise in such a sentence. But more of this in a following article in which will also be taken up the matter of the real function of such non-conditional if-clause sentences as, “if you believe, you will be saved.” But what then is faith? According to the Scriptures and the Confessions, faith certainly is not a condition “*voorwaarde*” but the Spirit's instrument for realizing in the elect the virtues of Christ's cross, and in the elect faith is a sign, indicating that he has life in himself. Says Christ, “He who believes in the Son hath life in himself abiding, and I will raise him up in the last day.”

G. M. Ophoff

*3. If-clauses are declarations
and commands, not conditional promises*

In my previous article on this subject! I made plain that though all conditional sentences are “If-clause” sentences, all “if-clause” sentences are not conditional sentences.

I illustrated this point. I pointed out that the thought conveyed by such a statement as, “If a child breaks out with a scarlet rash, it has scarlet fever;” is not certainly that a child is taken down with scarlet fever on the condition that it breaks out with, scarlet rash. For certainly, so I remarked, the rash is not the cause of the scarlet fever, but the symptom of it. But the man who says to his neighbor, “*If you are on this or that street corner at nine o’clock tomorrow morning, I will pick you up in my car,*” gives utterance to a real conditional sentence. For, so I remarked, the clause in italics is expressive of a real condition – condition always in the sense of prerequisite, “*voorwaarde*” – that the prospective rider of his own free will agrees to realize and also, must realize in order to be picked up by his obliging neighbor,

There are then, so I concluded, and rightfully so, two kinds of “if-clause” sentences: conditional and non-conditional “if-clause” sentences. They can be put into one class and be called by one name. But, as was remarked, to avoid confusion in our present dispute, that name should not be “conditional sentences” but “If-clause” sentences; and the name for each kind of sentence within the class should be: “non-conditional if-clause sentences,” and “conditional if-clause sentences.

We next faced the question: what is such a declaration as, “If you believe, you will be saved?” Is it a “non-conditional if-clause sentence;” or a “conditional if-clause sentence?” The question was answered thus: “It ought to be as plain as the sun in the heavens; that such a declaration as “if you believe, you will be saved,” is a non-conditional if-clause declaration.

Let us now face this question: What is such a declaration as, “If you believe you will be saved to be called? Is it right to call such a declaration a “conditional promise”? There can be but one answer. It is not right to call such a declaration a “conditional promise.” And this for two reasons. 1) As was stated, there is not an atom of promise in such a statement. 2) Such an expression as “conditional promise,” when used with reference to Christ’s salvation is a contradiction in terms. For the word *condition* in the sense of “*voorwaarde*,” spells uncertainty, while the characteristic of the “promise,” is its certainty. The “promise,” therefore can no more be conditional than things truly certain can be uncertain. We can, of course, make a way for ourselves out of this difficulty by saying that God fulfills the condition, and that therefore the term condition, “*voorwaarde*” in this connection also spells certainty.

But then we play hocus pocus with words, definitely with the word condition “*voorwaarde*.” And what I mean by playing hocus pocus with words is to use words in a sense that they do not have in every man’s dictionary.

As I explained in a previous, article, the Holy Spirit in preparing for us the Scriptures never did that. He did not use Hebrew and Greek words in a sense that was contrary to the sense that these words had in the Hebrew and Greek languages as spoken by men. The Lord God did not deal with words in that way in communicating to man the thoughts of His heart. How could we understand the Scriptures, had God so dealt with words? In the scriptures the words of our earthy, human language serve as symbols of the things heavenly, but certainly without loss of their primary meanings. Christ said, “I am the bread of life.” But as in every man’s vocabulary, the word bread here still signifies bread and not a stone.

But if it is not right to call such a Scripture statement as, “If you believe you will be saved,” a conditional declaration, what then shall we call it? We should call such a statement simply a “non-conditional if-clause sentence.” To say of such statements that they are conditional as to the form of their words and grammatical structure, but nevertheless non-conditional as to their real meaning can only lead to confusion and a lot of unprofitable debate in our present dispute.

As was stated, both the Old and the New Testament are replete with such non-conditional if-clause statements as, “If you believe, you will be saved,” and, “If you believe not, you will be damned.”

We must now take up the matter of the function of such Scripture statements. What is their real function? The question is definitely answered by Moses in his third farewell address to the people of Israel (Deut. 27:1-30:20). Here are found the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience, all of which Moses communicated to the people as pivoted on if-clauses the blessings on the if-clause, “if thou obey,” and the curses on the-if-clause, “if thou dost not obey.”

Spake Moses to the people, chap. 28:1, “And it shall come to pass, *if* (Hebrew, *im*) *thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God*, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come upon thee, and overtake thee, *if thou, shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God*.”

“Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep,” and so on through verse 14.

The section that follows (28:15-28) records the curses for disobedience.

“But it shall come to pass, *if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day*; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field,” and so on to the end of the section, – a section the closing words of which read, “These are the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.”

In chapter 29 Moses now appears as presenting all Israel before the Lord to enter into His covenant. He exhorts the people to obedience, and sets forth the great wrath of God on all such that flatter themselves in their wickedness. To add weight to his exhortations he sets forth the truth that “the secret things belong to the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the works of the law.”

As we shall see, the discourse of the chapter that follows (30:1-10) is a prophecy in which great mercies are promised to the penitent. The next four verses (11-14) set forth the truth that the word of God – the commandments of the Lord – that Moses had communicated to the people, was “very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do them.”

The words that Moses spake next (verses 15-30) closes the entire series of sermons. Of these words of Moses we must take careful notice. For they contain the answer to the question of the true function of such Scripture-statements as, “If you believe, you will be saved; if you believe not, you will be damned. The passage reads, “*See, I have set, before thee this day life and good, and death and evil* in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply; and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

“But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, wither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it.

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

We must concentrate on the sentences, in italics. They tell us what the Lord by the

voice of Moses was doing in giving utterance to such speech as, “If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God all these, blessings shall come upon thee; but if thou wilt not hearken, unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe all His commandments ... that all these curses shall come upon thee...” By this speech, the Lord was doing this: He was *setting* before His, people reprobate and elect alike life and good, death and evil; and in addition telling them one and all that the way of life and good is the way of obedience to his commands; and being holy God, He was at once commanding them to choose life and good.

Such, then, is the function of the “if” clause sentences in the Bible of the type, “If you believe, hearken unto the voice of the Lord, you will live, or in the Gospel language of the Scriptures, “If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved.” The view according to which the Lord by such speech promises men life and bequeaths upon them the right to life we must not have. It is not the view of the Scriptures. Not the promise of life and salvation but the *presentation* of life and salvation comes to men as pivoted on “if” clauses, and likewise the presentation of death and evil. And as was just stated, the sole function of the “if” clause, “if thou obeyest and believest,” is to present to men the way that leads to life and the sphere in which life and salvation is possessed and enjoyed. But for all the reasons presented in the foregoing articles on this subject, the promises of God are not “if-clause sentences”.

However, the discourse of Moses in one of its sections (Deut. 30:1-10) seems to contradict the view of things here presented, that is, the view that nowhere in all the Scriptures are the promises of God set forth as pivoted on “if” clauses of the type, “if thou believest.” The section in question reads:

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee; the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.

“If any of thine be driven out unto the utmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee; And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.

“And, the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that

thou mayest live.

“And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecute thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the Lord and do all his commandments which I command thee this day:

“And the Lord thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good; for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: *if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.*”

What we have here is plainly prophecy and promise. Moses, being a prophet and of all the prophets the greatest, here foretells the exile of the people of Israel and the ultimate turning of their captivity. The Lord will again bring them into the land “which their fathers possessed; He will do them good above their fathers. He will circumcise their heart and will make them plenteous in every work of their hand, *if they hearken unto the voice of the Lord,*” and “*if they turn unto the Lord their God.*”

Here the promise is indeed, pivoted on “if” clauses, but not so however in the Hebrew text, which reads not “*if thou shalt hearken,*” and “*if thou turn.*” but, “*when thou shalt hearken ...*” and “*when thou shalt turn. ...*” The Hebrew participle here is not *im* but *ki* and must be translated *when*. The message then is this: The Lord will bring his people into the land of their fathers, He will circumcise their heart. As a result “thou shalt return and obey the voice of the Lord. (verse 8)” And the Lord will abundantly bless them (verse 9) *when they shall hearken unto His voice and when they turn unto Him*. Not an “if” clause appears in this communication. What we have here is promise.

The promises of God are “if-less” indeed, and therefore of necessity unconditional. And they come only to the elect, that is, historically the believers.

This view of the matter is also that of our Confessions.

So in, Art. 5 of the Canons, 2nd. head, “... the command to repent and believe ought to be declared and published, to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the Gospel.”

We deal here with God’s moral will or the will of His command by which God makes

known what men must do. As many of them to whom God sends the Gospel must repent and believe. So God commands and, seriously commands also the reprobated, whom He is sovereignly determined not to save but to harden by this word and Gospel in preparation of the destiny to which, He, in His sovereign good pleasure appointed them. Also these certainly are unfeignedly called, that is; commanded of God to repent and believe. For in the language of the Canons Art. 8 of the 3rd and 4th head; “God hath most earnestly and truly declared in his word, what will be acceptable to him; namely that all who are called,” that is, commanded, “should come to Him” that is, the command.

So it indeed is. Being holy God; He delights in well-doing and hates all unbelief and disobedience. Accordingly, it is acceptable to Him as holy God that all those who are commanded to believe should obey – all those who are commanded, including to be sure the reprobated, and this despite the fact that He has sovereignly reprobated them. He seriously commands also such to believe. But he does not in His word promise the reprobated eternal life and rest. The, promise of life comes only to the elect. This, too, is according to the teaching of the Confession, The concluding sentence of Art. 8 of the 3rd and 4th head of the canons reads, “He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.”

As those who come to him are the elect, the doctrine of, this article is to the effect that, though God commands, also, the reprobate to repent, He promises to save only the elect; historically the believers, as many as shall come to him. In a word, according to the teaching of this article, the promise of God comes unconditionally only to the elect.

In conclusion a word about the promises and the promise.

The following Scripture passages speak of the promise Gal; 3:14, “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive *the promise* of the Spirit through faith.” Throughout his epistle to the Galatians. Paul usually speaks of the promise.

Eph. 1:13, “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

I Ti. 4:8, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having *promise* of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

2 Ti. 1:1, “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the

promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.”

Heb. 6:13-15, “For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”

2 Pet. 3:4, “And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?”

2 Pet 3:13, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

The following Scripture passages speak of promises:

Rom. 9:4, “Who are Israelites ... to whom pertaineth *the promises*.”

Rom. 15:8, “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.”

2 Cor. 6:18, 7:1, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord And I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty. Having therefore these promises dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves.”

It is clear from these passages that in speaking of *the promise* and in addition of promises, the Scriptures do not have reference to one great outstanding promise of some one thing and of a number of promises smaller in comparison.

For let us take notice. According to Gal. 3:4 and Eph. 1:13 *the promise* is that of the Spirit. According to 1 Ti. 4:8 and 2 Ti. 1:1, *the promise* is that of life. According to 2 Pet. 3:4, the promise is that of Christ’s coming. According to 2 Pet. 3:13, *the promise* is that of new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

But let us now take notice also of this. At 2 Cor., 6:18, 7:1, Paul includes in the *promise’s* the following: 1) Our being received of God. 2) His calling us His sons and daughters, and further, at Rom. 15:8 all that was promised the Fathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now certainly any of these promises are just as great as any of the promises to which the Scriptures refer as *the promise*. Every one of the total of promises is great, the one is not less great than the other. And *the promise* is any one of the total.

In fine, Scripture knows not of the one great promise and besides of promises little or small in comparison with the one. There is a reason that the Scriptures speak of

promises, and of promise. The salvation of God is many sided and includes a wonderful variety of riches – riches of His grace. G. M. Ophoff.

Reasons For The Adoption Of The Proposed The Proposed Declaration

By Herman Hoeksema

There are several reasons why the Declaration that was proposed by our last Synod to the churches should be adopted at our next Synod.

Its adoption should not be postponed.

The Mission Committee evidently felt that they had need of such a declaration as a basis for their work and deliberations. And this basis must not be left uncertain for another year. The missionaries themselves evidently felt the need of it as a basis for their labors and for the organization of churches. At least, the Rev. A. Cammenga, who was present at our last Synod, strongly expressed himself in favor of adopting this declaration. And, at our last Synod it was virtually adopted without a dissenting vote. Surely a year should be long enough for the churches to consider such a document as the Declaration of Principles; which virtually offers nothing else than the Confessions themselves. Nor should we postpone the adoption of this declaration because of a possible visit of the Committee of Correspondence to the Netherlands. For, in the first place, it is not even certain, in view of the world situation, that the committee is able to go this year. And secondly, if they do go, it is advisable that the Deputies for Correspondence in the Netherlands, stand on a definite basis such as the Declaration of Principles offers.

Hence, I would not be in favor of postponing a final decision by the Synod on this important matter.

But should this declaration be adopted at all? Is there any reason for its adoption by our churches? To this question I answer affirmatively. And I have the following reasons:

1. It is indeed often necessary that within the Confessions the Churches clearly express what according to their conviction is the plain teaching of those Confessions. This becomes necessary when one or a group of persons within the churches claim to stand on the basis of the confessions but nevertheless deviate from them. Such was the case in the Christian Reformed Churches in 1918, when the Rev. H. Bultema attempted to propagate his premillennial and dispensational doctrine in the Reformed churches. The Synod then appealed to the Confessions to prove the unity of the church of all ages both in the old and new dispensations, and the Kingship of Christ over His church. Again; this was necessary when Dr. Jansen tried to inculcate into the students of the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Churches his

modernistic teachings concerning Holy Writ. Also then the Synod appealed to the Confessions to prove that he was in error. Once more it became necessary for those who loved the Reformed faith in 1924 to express their conviction as to what is the plain teaching of the Three Forms of Unity over against the error of the Three Points adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924. As churches we are in the same situation today. We must clearly express what according to the conviction of the Protestant Reformed Churches is the plain teaching of the Confessions, not only over against the Three Points adopted by the Christian Reformed Churches in 1924 but also in distinction from the Liberated view of the covenant and of the promise of God, which is principally the same as the Heynsian conception.

Now let us note, – and this is my main and principle ground on which I base the contention that the Declaration of Principles should be adopted, – that *the declaration is based from beginning to end on our Three Forms of Unity, as well as on our Baptism Form.*

Some have alleged, without any proof for their contention, that the Declaration of Principles is nothing but a private theological opinion, or that it is at least extra-confessional. But this certainly is not true. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. Let us not overlook the fact that the entire Declaration consists almost entirely of literal quotations from the Confessions. Only occasionally Synod expresses very briefly in its own words what the Confessions teach. Hence, the Declaration is essentially nothing else than the Three Forms of Unity and the Baptism Form as they have always been understood by the Protestant Reformed Churches. Even the terms *fountain* and *cause of our salvation*, which are used in II, A, to which Dr. Schilder objects, are nevertheless quite confessional. For in Canons I, A, 6 we read that the gift of faith proceeds from God's eternal decree, which certainly presents the decree as the fountainhead of faith. And in Canons I, A, 10 we read: "The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election." But whatever minor criticisms may be offered, it is safe to say that the Declaration of Principles is the language of the Confessions; it offers nothing new.

2. The Declaration of Principles was adopted as a proposal to all our churches in the regular, ecclesiastical way. No one can refute this on any sound church political basis. As I have repeatedly stated, it was adopted at the request of the Mission Committee. That committee is a synodical committee and cannot send its proposals or requests in the way of consistory and classis to synod, but must report to Synod directly. It is concerned with the mission work of our churches. And that work certainly pertains to all the churches in common. It was therefore no violation of Art. 30 of the Church Order when Synod received and acted on the request of the Mission Committee. Besides, let us never forget that the Synod of 1950 did not definitely adopt the Declaration, of Principles, but to avoid all semblance of hierarchy decided

simply, to propose it to all our churches, in order that in the way of consistories and classes it might be adopted at our next Synod. How anyone can contend on good grounds that the Synod violated any rule of the Church Order is certainly a mystery to me.

3. The Declaration of Principles will certainly serve as a sound and clear basis, for the organization of prospective Protestant Reformed Churches. And that there is dire need for such a definite basis for organization is already clearly proved by the history of our congregation in Hamilton, Ontario. There the consistory refused to stand by its own decision, which was corroborated by Classis East, namely, to ask of all prospective members that they submit to the instruction of our Protestant Reformed Churches and that they refrain from agitating against our doctrine. In my presence the members of the consistory definitely stated that at the time they were organized they did not promise anything and did not bind themselves to adhere to Protestant Reformed doctrine whatsoever. There was nothing binding in our churches according to them, except, of course, the Three Forms of Unity, which they interpret in their own fashion. Certainly a definite basis for organization of prospective Protestant Reformed Churches is a dire need. It was such a basis which the Mission Committee needed and requested and which was supplied by the proposed Declaration of Principles. And this Declaration will certainly admirably serve the purpose. Also for this reason I propose that the Declaration be adopted at our next Synod.

4. The Declaration of Principles will serve as a clear proclamation to all that are without of the faithful adherence of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Reformed faith as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, over against all that deviate from these Confessions. This is true particularly in the first place over against the errors of the Three Points, which teach that there is a grace of God to all men, including the reprobate, in the common gifts to men; which teach, besides, that the promise of the gospel is a well-meant offer of salvation on the part of God to all that hear the gospel; and which teach, finally, that through an influence of common grace the natural man can do good in this world. And secondly, this is true over against the Heynsian view of the promise and the covenant, which, according to the conviction of the Protestant Reformed Churches is certainly Arminian. It is especially over against these errors that the Declaration of Principles clearly sets forth what is according to the Protestant Reformed Churches the clear teaching of the Confessions.

5. It will safeguard our Protestant Reformed Churches by the grace of God against the influence of those who claim that they adhere to the Reformed Confessions, but who nevertheless deviate from them. There is more than one reason for this attitude. Some indeed do not like the clear language of the Confessions with their emphasis

on particularism, unconditional election, the total depravity of man, and sovereign grace. But there are others too, not only among the common laity but also among the leaders, that have never made a thorough and careful study of the Confessions. The former tendency to deviate from the strict language of the Confessions regarding the sovereignty of God, unconditional election, and the total depravity of man was evident when the Synod of 1924 of the Christian Reformed Churches adopted the well-known Three points. But this is no less true of many of the Liberated, who claim that they are bound only by the Three Forms of Unity but in the meantime teach that the promise is on the part of God for all the children that are baptized. But among them there are certainly very many that have never studied the Confessions. Their claim that they will be bound by nothing but the Three Forms of Unity is a mere empty slogan, by which they nevertheless want to throw open the doors of the church wide to whoever may want to join. This is evident from the attitude of the Consistory of Hamilton. Fact is that such people do not want to stand on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity but want to be bound by nothing at all, although they claim that they are bound by the Confessions. This is a great danger. If we follow their lead, our Protestant Reformed Churches will soon lose their distinctiveness. And therefore I claim that the Declaration of Principles; which clearly enunciates the teachings of the Confessions, will, by the grace of God, serve as a safeguard against all who claim that they are bound by the Confessions but who principally must have nothing of them.

6. Finally, the Declaration of Principles will serve as a sound and safe basis and starting point for correspondence with other Reformed Churches, especially also with the Reformed Churches (Art. 31) of the Netherlands. I can, very well understand and agree with men like the Rev. van Dijk of Groningen, Prof. Holwerda, and Rev. van Raalte and others, who protested at the Synod of Amersfoort when it decided to establish full correspondence with our churches and to, open their pulpits to our ministers without any preliminary discussion. Honest correspondence demands first of all that we clearly, enunciate the principles on which we stand and that in that way we may learn to know one another as churches. Correspondence with the Liberated Churches of the Netherlands certainly cannot be established by our opening our pulpits to them and they to us and by accepting one another's membership papers without first discussing the doctrinal differences that cause us to differ from one another. It is a well-known fact that the Liberated, though they deny that they have any officially adopted covenant view, all embrace the Heynsian conception. For proof I refer to the articles by Dr. Bremmer in the issues of the *Reformatie* that appeared soon after the war, to Prof. Veenhof's *Appel* and to his *Unica Catholica* as well as to many other articles in several church papers. We do not blame them for this. Nor do I think that correspondence with them is impossible. We can have correspondence, for instance, by sending delegates to one another's synods; we can have correspondence, too, by getting into closer and constant contact

with each other and by honestly and openly discussing the doctrinal differences that separate us. But it stands to reason that to establish the beginning of such correspondence we must clearly and definitely enunciate our conception of the covenant and of the promise of God, in order that we may stand in an honest relation to one another from the beginning. And the Declaration of Principles will certainly serve to enunciate clearly what our Confession teaches concerning these matters, and therefore will serve also as a safe and proper basis and starting-point for correspondence.

These are some of the reasons why, in my opinion, the Synod of 1951 should adopt the Declaration of Principles. H H

The Liberated Churches In The Netherlands, Their Covenant Conception

By Herman Hoeksema

[The following Article from 1946 is from a longer treatment after the war of the Synodical churches and their Kyperian view of presumptive regeneration, the Liberated and their view of the covenant, of which the following is the substance, and the church political issues pertaining to Article 31 of the Church order and the split in the Netherlands. The issue concerning of the autonomy of the local church, article 31, is one that the Protestant Reformed Churches share with the Liberated. - TCM]

When we speak of the covenant view of the liberated churches, we must constantly bear in mind, that there is no officially adopted dogma with them on this point.

By their covenant conception we mean the view that is consistently presented by their leaders, such as Prof. Greydanus, C. Vonk, R. Bremmer, Jon. Francke, P. Jasperse, H. J. Schilder, and others. However, they so unanimously present the same view, and that, too, in opposition to the view adopted by the synodical churches, that it is safe to speak of the covenant conception of the liberated churches, just as if it were an officially accepted dogma with them, provided we remember that no particular covenant conception is binding, in their fellowship, for the office bearers and members.

Their view, then, may be briefly characterized as follows:

1. They seek certainty, assurance. The “presupposition” or “presumption” of the synodical view they reject. On the basis of the view adopted by the Synod of 1942, they say, there is no assurance possible. For the covenant, according to 1942, is established only with the elect. I must, therefore; first know that I am elect, before I can have the assurance that I belong to God’s covenant, The best one can do on this basis with respect to the covenant children, is to presume or suppose that they are really in the covenant. There is no assurance. Hence, the liberated churches, emphatically reject this whole conception. They want no distinction between an “external” and “internal” covenant, or between being *really* and *not really* in the covenant. They refuse to speak of supposition and presumptions. They seek objective certainty. And this certainty with respect to the covenant of God they find in *the promise*: I will be your God and the God of your seed. This promise I may accept. It is sure. It can never fail. On it I may rely. It is a sure basis of certainty and personal assurance of faith.

2. They also want to assert something positive about all the children of the covenant, i.e. all the children of believing parents, all that are baptized. And again, they

appeal to the promise of God. The promise is for all the children of believers. In the promise God bequeaths all the blessings of the covenant upon all that are baptized. He gives to all the right to be saved. I may, therefore, say to them all: you are very really in the covenant. You have the right to accept the promise.

3. Hence, the promise is *conditional*. It is contingent for its fulfillment upon the faith of those that are baptized. They must believe the promise, fulfill their covenant obligations, their “part” of the ‘covenant of God. If they fail in this, the blessings of the covenant do not actually come in their possession. Instead they fall under the terrible covenant wrath and vengeance of God.

To this view I offer the following objections.

1. It does not establish the certainty of which it boasts, i.e. the objective certainty that, according to the promise of God, all that are baptized are really in the covenant and have a God-given right to its blessings. For:

a. Either the *conditional promise to all* is a promise the condition of which must be and is *fulfilled by God*. In that case all baptized children are actually saved. It is, of course, the Reformed view that all “conditions” of the covenant, all “conditions” unto salvation are fulfilled by God Himself. If, therefore, we say that our actually receiving the blessings of the covenant is conditioned by faith on our part, we must hasten to add that God Himself gives us the faith. You may also express it this way: the fulfillment of the condition *is included in the promise*. If the brethren of the liberated churches understand the “conditional promise” in this Reformed sense, and insist on it, they must be consistent enough to teach that all baptized children are actually saved. God promises to all the blessings of the covenant. He promises to all His grace and Spirit. He promises to all the lively faith whereby obey become partakers of the blessings of the covenant. The promise of God is sure. Hence, all baptized children are surely saved. The sign and seal of this they receive in baptism. If the brethren would be thus consistent, they would, indeed, arrive at certainty for all, but it would be a mere theoretical assurance, always contradicted by the fact that many baptized children are not saved.

b. Or, if they dare not thus consistently carry out their conception (and they do not), and still insist that the conditional (in the Reformed sense) promise is for all that are baptized, they make God a liar. God promises to establish His covenant with all the baptized children. He gives them a right to all the covenant blessings. He promises that He will give them all His Spirit and grace, and the faith whereby they become partakers of the covenant. Yet, He does not fulfill His promise to all, but only to the elect. In that case, they make God a liar, and all their talk of certainty is put to shame.

c. Or, if they will not subscribe to either of the above alternatives (and they will not); the *conditional* promise to all is a promise the condition of which the *baptized children themselves* must and are able to fulfill. That is the position of Heyns, as we have shown. The distinction between baptized children and others is that the former receive sufficient grace to accept the covenant to bring forth fruits of faith and repentance, although they can still refuse to do this. That is the position of the *Remonstrants*. It is Pelagianism applied to the covenant. But, of course, even so, least of all so, there is no certainty. For in that case, the covenant is made contingent upon the will of the sinner. And that means that it has become impossible of realization.

Now, I am well aware that the brethren of the liberated churches reject also this last position. They repudiate the indictment of remonstrantism, They emphatically state that God must fulfill all the conditions.

Yet, I wish to remark, first of all, that I cannot conceive of a fourth alternative. Nor did I meet, in any of the writings of the brethren of the liberated churches, even an attempt to offer an explanation of this problem. To me it appears that the above alternatives are exhaustive. If they can conceive of a fourth possible explanation of the dilemma, that the promise of God is for all, while it is not fulfilled to all, it is up to them to state it clearly.

Secondly, if they are accused of Remonstrantism, they have only themselves to blame. Although I gladly accept that they reject the view of the Remonstrants, it is, nevertheless, true that they expose themselves to this indictment. They do this especially when, in the expository part of the Baptism Form, as to God's "part" in the covenant, they separate the work of the Father and of the Son from that of the Holy Spirit. Heyns does the same thing. It is pointed out that, in regard to the "part" of God the Father and of God the Son, the language of the Baptism Form is positive: "God the Father witnesseth And sealeth unto us, that he *doth* make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized in the name of the Son, God the Son sealeth unto us, that he *doth* wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God." But, thus it is pointed out, when that same Baptism Form speaks of the work of the Holy Ghost, of His "part" in the covenant, the language becomes contingent: "In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us, that which we have in Christ, namely the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till

we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.”

You see, they pointed out, the “part” of God the Father and of God the Son is presented as absolutely and objectively sure: in both instances the word *doth* is used; but the “part” of God the Holy Spirit is presented as conditional and contingent: He *will* dwell in *us*, etc. In the former, the *bequest*, the objective *right* to the blessings of the covenant is stated; and this is sure to all. In the latter, however, the actual application of the benefits of the covenant is mentioned; and this is not sure at all: it is presented as conditional. The last sentence must be completed as follows: “He will dwell in us, etc. ...if we fulfill our “part” of the covenant, and walk in faith and obedience before God.”

Now, this interpretation of the Baptism Form is, of course, wide open to criticism. How is it possible thus to separate the work of the Father and of the Son from that of the Holy Spirit? If the Father promises, “witnesseth and sealeth unto us,” that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for His children and heirs, and will provide us with every good thing, etc., does He not assure us that He will and does do so in His Son and by His Spirit? And when the Son witnesseth and sealeth unto us,” that He washes us in His blood, incorporates us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are free from sin and righteous before God, does He not assure us that He will do so of the Father and through the Spirit? Moreover, when the Holy Spirit assures us that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us, and apply unto us all we have in Christ; does He not mean that He will make His dwelling with us efficaciously, of the Father and the Son, not because we fulfill any conditions, nor after we have fulfilled them, but before we can do anything to be received into God’s covenant and to receive any of its benefits?

More might be said against this interpretation of our Baptism Form.

However, the one thing I wish to point out in this connection is that the brethren of the liberated churches, by adopting this Heynsian interpretation, lay themselves wide open to the indictment of Remonstrantism. By thus making separation between the work of the Spirit and of the Father and the Son, they strongly suggest that God is willing to save all the baptized children, but that the realization of this will to save depends on something they must do. And this is Remonstrantism.

2. This view is in conflict with the plain language of our Baptism Form, The truth of this statement is already evident from what we quoted of that Form above. That expository part of the Form establishes the whole of God’s covenant and all its benefits as absolutely sure unto the “children of the promise.” God’s part of the covenant is that He realizes it completely; objectively and subjectively, both as to its

objective establishment and as to its subjective application. God assures the “children of the promise,” that He establishes His covenant with them, that He adopts them, that He forgives their sins and justifies them, that He delivers them and sanctifies them, that He preserves and glorifies them. This is absolutely *unconditional*. No condition whatever is mentioned in this part. Fact is, that if there were a condition attached to this, the covenant could never be realized, and that entire expository part of the Baptism Form would be made vain. But God’s work is never conditional. And the language of the Baptism Form is as positive and unconditional as it possibly could be. The mere fact that the future tense is used in connection with the work of the Holy Ghost (He will dwell in us) does no more make this work contingent and conditional than when the same tense is used with respect to the work of the Father (He *will* provide us with every good thing); it merely denotes that God the Holy Spirit will surely fulfill this promise in the future, i.e. all our life long, as well as in, the present.

To be sure, the Baptism Form makes mention of our ‘part’ in the covenant, that “we by God through baptism (are) admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.” But this part is not presented as a condition for the part of God, which we must fulfill before, and in order that God will fulfill His part, but as the new obligation of love which follows upon and from God’s part. And only when and after God has fulfilled His “part” of the covenant, can we begin to fulfill ours.

Moreover, it would appear that the language of the first question that is asked of the parents who present their children for baptism is equally positive: “Whether you acknowledge, that our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself; yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of his Church ought to be baptized?”

It seems quite impossible to me to interpret this “sanctified in Christ” ‘as referring to a certain objective, ecclesiastical holiness, as, for instance, the priests of the old dispensation were holy (consecrated in their office) unto the Lord, regardless of their own ethical, spiritual sanctification; or as even the vessels of the temple were holy unto Jehovah; and as all Israel are separated from the nations and holy unto God. For, first of all, the New Testament knows of no such objective holiness, not even in I Cor. 7:14. In the second place, the question of the Form speaks of being “sanctified *in Christ*,” And the only sanctification in Christ of which Scripture knows is real, spiritual, ethical deliverance from the power and the dominion of sin, the inner cleansing of the heart. Thirdly, the contrast in the question leads to the same conclusion: it is either or, one is still (as also our children are by nature) “in sin, and

therefore subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself, or he is “sanctified in Christ,” that is, according to the contrast, no longer in sin, etc.

If it should be objected, that, in that case, the Baptism Form requites of the parents the confession that all our children are, at the moment of baptism, already regenerated, we deny this. The question is not: “Whether you acknowledge that this child is here and now sanctified in Christ,” but: “Whether you acknowledge that our children are sanctified in Christ” an expression which is to be understood in the organic sense, without applying it to each baptized child; while the expression that they “are sanctified” may well be understood that before God, in virtue of the promise, they are holy in Christ, without containing any reference as to the time when this sanctification is to be applied to them: I believe that this way of speaking is thoroughly biblical.

Moreover, consider what is said in the thanksgiving of this Form of Baptism: “we thank and praise Thee, that Thou hast Forgiven us, and our children all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.” Here, at least, it becomes abundantly evident, that the Baptism Form does not intend to make a distinction and separation between the work of the Father and the Son and that of the Holy Spirit, and between the “bequest” and the application. Even if the forgiveness of sins, and the adoption of children, might be understood in that objective sense, the expression: “and received us *through* thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son,” certainly cannot possibly be exegeted in this same way.

We conclude, therefore, that the view that all the children of believing parents are equally in the covenant in virtue of a conditional promise, is in conflict with the plain language of our Baptism Form.

3. Finally, we believe that this view is also in conflict with the plain teaching of Scripture.

We were to prove that the general position of the Liberated Churches, viz., that all the children of believers are really in the covenant in virtue of the promise, i.e., that the promise is for them all, is contrary to the plain teaching of the Bible on this point.

It is exactly this teaching that is denied in Rom. 9:6-8.

The ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans teaches plainly that God’s sovereign predestination cuts right through the historical line of the covenant, and, in the

generations of believers, makes separation between children of the promise and children of the flesh.

That this is emphatically and exactly the point in Rom 9:6-8 is denied by the leaders of the Liberated churches. Instead of the antithesis: election and *reprobation*, they insist that the antithesis: *faith and unbelief* determines, according to the teaching of Rom. 9, who are children of the promise and who are children of the flesh.

That this is their contention may be proved from an article by the Rev. R. H. Bremmer, in *De Reformatie*, Vol. 20, No. 48, from which I translate the following:

“This concerns the great problem raised in Rom. 9-12 (9-11? H.H.) and in connection with it Galatians 3. It is this great problem: is the Word of God become of none effect, now the blessing of Abraham is bestowed on the Gentiles, and Israel is rejected? Is this in conflict with the faithfulness to His Word once given?

“That is the problem raised here: *The passage is not concerned with the relation of election to the covenant*, or with the relation of the carnal to the spiritual seed, even though these questions are touched upon here, but the great question underlying these chapters is this: can it be harmonized with God’s promise, and with His faithfulness, that Israel is being rejected and the Gentiles are accepted?”

The italics in the above quotation are mine. - HH

According to the Rev. Bemmer it is this question which the apostle Paul in the passage from Romans and in Galatians 3, answers negatively. And attend to the following:

“He purposed, already when He gave His promise to Abraham, to bestow His salvation upon the Gentiles. He waited long, centuries, in fact, with the realization of this purpose. He waited until out of Abraham’s seed the Christ should have been born, in order then to realize fully that which He already intended to do at the time of Abraham. But already in the tents of Abraham and Isaac, He showed them something of that which He intended to do later.

“For even then the Lord showed clearly that His salvation was not bound to the carnal seed. For Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Both were circumcised. *The covenant benefits were promised to both*. But what saith the Scripture? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ (Gal. 4:30). The

one is a son of the promise, born not out of the natural considerations of Abraham and Sarah, as Ishmael, but born from the supernatural power of the word of promise. This is Isaac. And the other is the son of Abraham's 'invention,' that he could perhaps be established through Hagar. And this son is now struck with the vengeance of the covenant. He is exiled from the camp of Abram, excommunicated as a covenant breaker. Even then, therefore, God partly revealed that carnal descent from Abraham does not guarantee eternal salvation, *but only faith in the promise of the Messiah Who would come in the line of Isaac.* Even then God cut a dead limb out of the tree of Abraham."

Again the italics in the above quotation are mine. -HH

They are intended to bring out that the writer presents both Ishmael and Isaac as having the promise of the covenant, while the fact that the former does not receive the promise is ascribed to his unbelief only. Whether this is in harmony with the teaching of Rom. 9, we will investigate presently.

The writer continues:

"Even as the Scriptures says of Esau that he was a fornicator (Heb. 12:16) that is, a covenant-breaker, who was struck by the curse of the covenant. Again God cut out a dead limb from the living tree of Abraham. And then, in the camp of Abraham, the tremendous law was revealed that not all are Israel that are of Israel; that carnal descent does not guarantee a spiritual, believing, God fearing disposition of the soul, cf. Matt. 3:9; John 8:36-44, nor reception or possession of, or participation in the promise of salvation. "There is a covenant-vengeance and a covenant-blessing, and the dreadful reality of this became already evident in Ishmael and Esau. Likewise the elective, sovereign good pleasure of the Lord became evident. Carnal descent surely does not guarantee participation in the blessings of the covenant. *For this faith in the promise is necessity, compliance with the covenant-demand that accompanies the covenant-promise and is inseparably connected with it.*"

Again I underscore, and for the same purpose that the writer makes faith and not predestination the deciding factor to determine whether one receives the blessings of the covenant.

One more quotation:

"Thus also must be understood vs. 8 of Romans 9: "That is, they which are of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. "Carnal descent does not determine the reception of the

blessings off salvation, only *faith in the promise does this* (I underscore, H.H.). But the reality of this law does indeed not exclude the fact that all the children of believing parents are really children of the covenant; if only, in the covenant, we maintain the covenant-curse and the covenant-blessing next to each other, and we do not separate promise and demand, but view the position of the children in this light.”

I might quote more.

But the above is sufficient to show that the Rev. Bremmer so interprets Rom. 9:6-8 that not election and reprobation, but faith and unbelief are the deciding factors in determining who receives the blessings of the covenant that are promised to all.

However, it should not be difficult to see that the author badly distorts the plain meaning of the words in Romans 9.

Let us follow the reasoning of the apostle.

He is dealing with a tremendous fact. Not only was the nation of Israel as such rejected, but thousands upon thousands of individual Jews did not enter into the kingdom of God, had no part with Christ and the blessings of salvation; now the promise of God was realized through the death and, resurrection of Christ, His exaltation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They did not receive the promise. Facing this fact, the apostle faces the question: how must this be explained in the light of the promise to Abraham and his seed? Were they not Israelites, children of Abraham? And if so, did not the covenant pertain to them? Did they not have the promise of God? And was not the promise of God: “I will established my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, to be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee?” Where then was the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham and to his seed, how must it be understood that so many of Abraham’s seed never received the blessings promised, were rejected?

This question the apostle puts in a very specific form, at least by implication: Is the Word of God fallen out, become of none effect? Did God fail to realize His promise to the seed of Abraham?

It is this question which he answers in the first part of Romans 9.

And how does he answer it?

Does he say: No, the promise of God is faithful, and the Word of God has not fallen out, but the promise was conditional, contingent upon the faith of those to whom it

was promised; and since many did not believe the promise they did not receive the blessings promised to them, bequeathed upon them, as the Rev. Bremmer would have it?

Not at all. There is not a word in this passage that suggests such an interpretation.

Moreover, in that case, the Word of God, the promise to Abraham, would indeed have become of none effect, and that, too through the unbelief of Abraham's seed. And it is exactly this that the apostle emphatically denies. The Word of God has not fallen out. Man's unbelief cannot bring to nought the faithfulness of God.

But, thus he informs us, under the promise to Abraham and his seed not all the children according to the flesh are comprehended!

The Word of God has not become of none effect: it never had reference to all the descendants of Abraham!

That is the meaning of Rom. 9.

The children of the promise are counted for the seed.

But who are these children of the promise?

We may note that, in Rom. 9, they are designated by four different terms: Israel, the seed, children of the promise, and children of God.

They are called Israel: "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel." The meaning is, evidently: all the descendants of Israel (Jacob) are not true Israel. The first *Israel* therefore, does not denote the Jews, that in these words a reason is offered for the statement in the first part of this verse, we may paraphrase the whole verse as follows: "The word of God concerning the promise has not become of none effect, for the promise concerns only the true Israel, and was never meant for all the natural seed of Jacob." The view, therefore, of the leaders of the Liberated Churches, as if God, by promise, bequeaths the blessings of salvation upon all the children of believers, is plainly contradicted in Rom. 9:6.

Secondly, this true Israel is called *the seed*. In vs. 7 the apostle quotes the word of God to Abraham: "in Isaac shall thy seed be called." And this, he explains in vs. 8 as meaning: "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Again, it is plain that there is only one seed of Abraham, *the seed*. And to this seed, in distinction from the children of the flesh, the promises pertain. This seed is, centrally, Christ. For thus

the apostle writes in Gal. 3:16: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." In the broader sense this seed comprehends all that are in Christ, but none other. *The seed*, for whom the promises are meant, cannot be said to include all the natural children of Abraham, or all the children of believers in the new dispensation. They are Christ and His brethren.

Thirdly, they are called children of *the promise*. Again, let us notice at once that the children of the promise are definitely not all the children of Abraham, not all the descendants of Jacob, for "they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." They are counted as "the seed" *in the promise*, in the word of God to Abraham. This is especially to be noted. The Word of God is not become of none effect. When God says to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and *thy seed after thee*....to be a God unto thee and *to thy seed after thee*;" the question arises: who is this seed of Abraham? Who are meant in the promise? The apostle answers: not the children of the flesh, not all the natural descendants of Abraham, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. And what may be meant by that expression? Does it mean: the children that accept the promise? Evidently not, for they are meant by the promise before they were born. All the children of the flesh were never meant. Does it, then, simply mean: the children for whom the promise is meant, the seed, true Israel? It does, yet, it means more than that. It also expresses the idea that they are spiritual children that are born in virtue of, by the power of the promise. Abraham could only bring forth children of the flesh. But God realized the power of promise in them, and made them spiritual children of God. They are those in whom the promise of salvation is realized. A comparison of this passage in Rom. 9 with Gal. 4:23, 28, will prove this view. There the apostle writes: "But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh: but he of the freewoman was born of the promise." The phrase "by promise" means, according to the original, through the promise. Isaac was born through the promise, by the power of the promise. And so are the spiritual children of the covenant in the new dispensation: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise." vs. 28. And that this does, indeed, refer to spiritual birth is evident from vs. 29: "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." The phrase "children of the promise," therefore, considers the true Israel, the seed, not from the viewpoint of their faith and acceptance of the promise, but: 1. From the viewpoint of the fact that it is they and they only that are meant in the promise; and 2. From the viewpoint of their being born, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit, through the power of the promise of God.

And so, finally, the children of the promise are children of God. They are those whom God adopted to be His children, whose adoption is realized in the death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in whom the adoption is spiritually fulfilled through the grace of God.

But the apostle advances his argument, to prove that the word of God has not become of none effect, one step farther. If there could be any, doubt left that it is not the faith of the promise of believers that renders them worthy of the name “children of the promise,” but God’s own free and sovereign determination, this doubt is removed by what the apostle writes in verses ten to thirteen of the ninth chapter of Romans. The example of Isaac already showed clearly that not all the children of the flesh are counted for the seed. But now the apostle refers to another example, that, of Jacob and Esau: “And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth); It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, But Esau have I hated.”

This should settle the question.

Was Esau also a child of the promise? Certainly not according to the meaning the ninth chapter of Romans attaches to the term

Was he then a child of the promise in the sense that, on God’s part, the promise was also for him? To use the language which the leaders of the Liberated Churches are wont to employ, could Rebecca say to Esau: “My son, the promise of God is sure, and it is for you. God gives you the birthright, has established His covenant with you, and bequeaths upon you all the blessings of salvation”? And did he fail to become a child of the promise in reality only because he refused to accept the promise?

No true exegesis of Romans 9:10-13 can yield that result. Jacob alone was the child of the promise, and that, too, by God’s sovereign election. And when not Esau, but Jacob receives the promise, the word of God is not become, of none effect.

The promise of God is for the elect only. And the realization of the promise is never contingent upon the will of man.

It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God which sheweth mercy !

That must suffice for us. And if we depart from this, attempt to go beyond this, and try to say something positive as to the salvation of all the children of believers, we depart from Scripture, present the word of God as becoming of none effect in them that are lost, and leave the Reformed track. H. H.

Binding Or Not Binding?

By Herman Hoeksema

Binding or not binding?

This is really the burning question today.

It is not a burning question for us as Protestant Reformed Churches, for we were always satisfied with the Three Forms of Unity, and consider ourselves to be bound by them alone. And we still are.

That we want to be bound by nothing else than the Confessions is very plain from the Declaration of Principles.

After all, the only question concerning this Declaration is whether it is according to the Confessions, or not. If it is not, we do not want it. In as far as it is not let us criticize it and correct it. But the question is pure and simple whether or not this Declaration is an expression of the Confessions.

But about this only question that is of import no one has written as yet.

The Declaration of Principles has been submitted to the consideration of our churches in order that they might express themselves about the question whether or not it is in harmony with the Confessions. A half a year has been wasted, and no one has as yet discussed the contents of this Declaration.

No, the question of binding or not binding is not important for us as Protestant Reformed Churches.

But it has been introduced into our churches by the Liberated.

And to put the matter in its simplest form: they do not agree with the Protestant Reformed truth of the covenant and of the promise of God. They insist upon maintaining their own view, which is Heynsian. And Heynsianism is in our conviction Arminianism, – common grace applied to the covenant. That this is true is plain from all that is written in the papers of the Netherlands, from the very earliest numbers of the *Reformatie* which we received after the war.

This conception of the covenant the Liberated mean to maintain.

On the basis of that conception they maintain that they are the true church. We are

not.

They want to throw the church doors wide open, well aware of the fact that only Liberated immigrants will enter through that wide open door. They want to make propaganda in our Protestant Reformed Churches for their Heynsian view of the covenant and refuse to answer the second question of baptism, whether they believe the doctrine as taught here in this Protestant Reformed Church.

For this I have by this time abundant proof.

If we allow this, the result will be that in a few years our churches will be swamped by thousands of Liberated immigrants and the Heynsian view of the covenant.

Some among us are openly aiding and abetting this pernicious cause. To prove this I have but to refer you to *Concordia*. On my part I will fight against it till my last breath. I will never go along with a church that adopts the Heynsian view of the covenant and of the promise of God. Nor will I ever belong to a church that officially opens its doors wide for that conception.

If this means a split in our churches, as some of us already suggest And as it is rumored in the old country, I would deplore, it, of course. But for the sake of our beautiful Protestant Reformed conception of the eternal covenant of God I cannot waver. And I lay the blame for the schism, if it comes, at the door of those that in late years have attacked or compromised our Protestant Reformed faith.

It is always better to be small and strong than to be big and corrupt.

Misleading

Since, however, no one has thus far discussed the contents of the Declaration of Principles, the *Standard Bearer* proposes to do so. But first of all, I want to reflect upon what is in my opinion a very misleading letter by Mr. V-- S -----, a letter which was published in *Concordia*.

I say that this letter is misleading because it attacks the Declaration of Principles without once referring to the Confessions. This is misleading because the Declaration of Principles does not mean to be anything at all but the Confessions themselves. But although V. S. does not refer to the Confessions, nor quote them in opposition to the Declaration of Principles, he nevertheless insinuates and suggests and leaves the impression that it is not in harmony with the confessions. And insinuations and suggestions are dangerous. We must not have them; but we must have clear language, – language that is to the point.

But of such clear language, that shows without any ambiguity that the Declaration is not based upon the Confessions, V. S. does not avail himself. Instead he writes:

“But I am willing to tell you something about the reaction of our churches in re: the proposal of your synod. In general we are very sorry about this decision. We have become extremely afraid of bindings, explanations of opinions, additions, etc. We have experienced much misery with such things in the Netherlands. Finally the church was torn by it. And according to my opinion such things are not necessary at all. Our confession is clear and plain enough, and all our interpretations make matters more complicated and more difficult. None of us can say it as clearly and plainly as our fathers did say it in their time. Besides, there is a great danger of one-sidedness, because the theologian who makes formulas to further explain the confession, is always in danger to put his own dogmatical construction in these ‘further explanations’. That is what Dr. Kuyper did, that’s what they did by us in 1944, and I fear that this will also, take place by you if you don’t watch out. And there is nothing more dangerous for the church than dogmatics. The Bible is not a dogmatical textbook. But it is the living Word of God, and that’s what our fathers also purposed with their confessions. When Calvin talked with a friend about the death bed of his wife he said: ‘Before she died we talked together about the doctrine’. From what follows it is clear that Calvin meant with this ‘doctrine’ nothing else but the abundant grace which a believer may have on his death bed by his unshakable faith in the all-cleansing blood of Christ. And thus we must read the Scriptures, and also preach out of them from the pulpits. Then it becomes rich and cogent both with a view to judgment and blessing. Above all there is a danger, in spite of our best intentions, that we give the wrong contents to the words of our fathers by trying, to ‘explain’ into a system what our fathers had in mind in their confessions.”

Let me clarify some of these ambiguous statements. V. S. writes: “Our confession is clear and plain enough.” With this I agree. And that means that our confession does not teach Heynsianism. Our confession does not teach that the promise of God is for all, that the promise of God is conditional, or that faith is a condition. Our confession teaches quite the contrary. And that that is true is plainly expressed in the Declaration of Principles. Hence, I agree with V. S. in a different sense than he means it that our confessions are plain enough. I can even admit to a certain extent that none of us can say it as clearly and plainly as our fathers did say it in their time.” But then I must include in our Confessions what I would call the Confessions of a minor order, such as especially the Baptism Form. That Baptism Form teaches as plainly as anyone can wish that God establishes and maintains and realizes His

covenant with His elect without fail and unconditionally, and that as a fruit of that part of God our part is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life. But our Baptism Form never speaks of a conditional covenant. Our Baptism Form asks the question whether the parents believe that the children must be baptized as members of His church that are “sanctified in Christ.” And that the fathers that composed our Baptism Form did not mean by this expression a mere outward sanctification, mere outward membership in the church, mere external separation from the world, is well-known. The Liberated view of that phrase is certainly not historically Reformed. By that phrase in the Baptism Form the fathers certainly writes meant nothing else than real spiritual sanctification. The same is true of the thanksgiving in the Baptism Form when it puts upon the lips of the believing church the following words:

“Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise thee, that thou hast forgiven us, and our children, all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ and received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.”

It is simply a distortion of the plain meaning of the words to make of all this nothing but an objective bequest that can still be accepted or rejected by those that are baptized. And therefore: I agree with V. S., although he certainly does not agree with me, and therefore not with the Confession, when he writes that none of us can say it as clearly and plainly as our fathers did say it in their time. Nevertheless, from the pen of V. S these words are misleading.

Misleading is too what V. S. writes about the danger of one-sidedness and about the theologian that makes formulas and that is always in danger to put his own dogmatical construction in these explanations. Misleading is too, for the same reason, what he writes in the last part of the words I quoted above, namely, about the danger that we give wrong contents to the words of our fathers by trying to explain into a system what our fathers had in mind in their confession. All these things are misleading because V. S. really says nothing. What he has to prove is that the Declaration is guilty of one-sidedness, that it is the mere opinion of a theologian, that the Declaration of Principles is guilty of putting a wrong dogmatical construction upon what our Confessions teach. I want to call the attention of our readers emphatically to the fact that V. S. says nothing, but that he does leave a certain impression that the Declaration of Principles is guilty of corrupting the Confessions.

Misleading is also the false contrast which V. S. makes between the Bible and

dogmatics or between true preaching of the Word of God and dogmatics. True, dogmatics, and that is what we are talking about, is nothing else than the systematic setting forth of the contents of Scripture. And although preaching is much more than dogmatics, and although I always warn our students against preaching dogmatics from the pulpit instead of the living Word God, yet true preaching is based upon true doctrine, true doctrine is dogmatics. And as far as the quotation that V. S. makes of what Calvin said concerning the death bed of his wife is concerned, we like to have him give us the reference or make full quotation in its context before we believe what he writes.

Unconditional Covenant

Misleading is the letter too, because after all V. S. defends his own covenant view, which is the Heynsian view, over against ours. And thus after all he tries to persuade our people to adopt his conception. Writes he:

“Furthermore, I hope, and pray God for it, that your ministers do not preach a non conditional covenant. Because Scripture knows no covenant without conditions. At home I read with my wife always through the entire Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. I believe we do this now for the seventeenth time; but, I maintain that wherever God gives His promise this promise is invariably connected to a condition, If you know a text where this is not the case, I hold myself recommended. Look for it once.”

Now, in the first place, I want to remind V. S. again that the Declaration of Principles is based first of all upon the Confessions. From the Confessions, including the Confessions of a minor order, he must prove the conditional covenant and the conditional promise. He must not argue against the Confessions. And the Confessions know nothing of a conditional promise.

But nevertheless, I intend to take up the challenge by V. S. And over against his prayer I put mine, that our ministers may never preach a conditional covenant. His challenge is rather bold. And I cannot disregard it.

To do this, however, I must needs elaborate on our conception of the covenant as it is based upon Scripture and upon the Confessions, especially upon the Baptism Form.

And, first of all, I want to state that the different views of the covenant that have been offered in Reformed circles can be distinguished under two heads, namely: those which consider the covenant as a means to an end, and secondly, those which consider it an end in itself.

According to the first conception, which is not ours, the covenant is either an agreement between two parties, or an agreement between two parties against a third, or it is identified with the promise, or it is termed a way to salvation.

According to the second conception, which is ours, the covenant is essential, and therefore an end in itself. It is that living relationship of most intimate fellowship of friendship which is a reflection of God's own Triune life according to which He makes Himself known and blesses His people and they know Him and find their delight in His fellowship and service.

Let me very briefly point out that this essential idea of the covenant is based upon Scripture.

First of all, the covenant with Adam, which certainly was not an agreement at all, nor an alliance between God and Adam, an agreement made after his creation, but was rather a relationship which was given with Adam's creation after the image of God, certainly was essentially a relation of friendship between God and Adam. God reveals Himself to Adam and speaks to Him as a friend to his friend, while Adam knows God as He speaks to him in the garden in the cool of day. Adam in his original state of righteousness was the friend of God. And that relation of friendship is essentially the covenant. It certainly was not an agreement or a way in which Adam might attain to eternal life, which was impossible.

We find support of this truth in what we read of the covenant people in their relation to God: "they walked with God," Gen. 5:22, 6:8. And to walk with someone is an act of friendship and fellowship. We read that they talked with Him and God reveals thereby His counsel to them and hides nothing from them. Gen. 6:13; 9:9, 8:17, ff. Moses knew and saw God face to face. Deut. 30:10. And Abraham is called "the 'friend of God'". Is. 41:8; James 2 :23.

This idea of friendship and fellowship is certainly the central notion that is symbolized in the tabernacle and temple. God dwells with His people under one roof. This idea is literally expressed in many texts. I refer to Ps. 2:11, Is. 55:3, Is. 61:8, Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 37:26, John 17:23, II Cor. 6:16, Rev. 21:3.

This covenant is established by God alone and is strictly unilateral. God therefore establishes His covenant sovereignly and without any condition on the part of man, even though He establishes that covenant with rational moral creatures, who as the fruit of the establishment of the covenant are bound to love the Lord their God with all their heart, etc. But that the covenant is established by God alone and is unconditional and unilateral is not only maintained in all Scripture, but is also plainly taught in all our Confessions. How could the Heidelberg Catechism speak of

the baptism of infants on the ground that they as well as their parents are in the covenant if God alone had not established His covenant with them? Children, infants, certainly cannot accept any conditions. If they as well as their parents are in the covenant, they must be in that covenant of God unconditionally. The unilateral conception of the covenant is also very strongly emphasized in our Form for Baptism. According to this Form, God the Father makes an eternal covenant of grace with us, God the Son washes us in His blood from all our sins, and God the Holy Spirit sanctifies us and dwells in us.

Besides, that the covenant is strictly unilateral and is established by God is evident from Scripture. It is plain:

1) From the Scriptural teaching concerning the covenant and from the equally Scriptural teaching that man of himself is totally depraved and incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. How could man, either as a creature or as a sinner, secure for himself any right or have any power to enter into that relation of friendship or make himself the friend of God. It is evident that the relation as well as his being taken into that relation must be of God only; otherwise it is absolutely impossible.

2) From the covenant as God established it with Adam. There is no reciprocal action recorded in the first chapter of Genesis or in the immediately subsequent chapters on the part of God and Adam to establish or to realize any covenant relationship. God simply created him a covenant creature after His image, and He placed him in the proper relation of such a creature to Himself. And Adam functions on the basis of that which God has made him as the friend-servant of his Creator.

3) From God's dealings with Adam after the fall, especially from Gen. 3:15, which, by the way, is the mother of promises and is surely absolutely unconditional. God offers nothing and makes no conditions to fallen man, but simply declares that in spite of the work of Satan and of Adam He will maintain His covenant and will put enmity between man and the devil in their generations, an enmity that is positively nothing but the friendship with God. There is on the very first pages of Scripture the first absolutely unconditional promise.

4) From the teaching throughout Scripture. Uniformly we read in Scripture: "I will establish my covenant..." Or "I will make an everlasting covenant of peace with you." Or again: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel." Gen. 6:18; Gen. 17:7; Is. 55:3; Ezek. 37:26; Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8-10.

5) From the vision of Gen. 15 Abraham is commanded to take sacrificial animals, heifer, she-goat, ram, turtle dove, young pigeon. And he is commanded to divide them

into halves and lay the halves of each animal over against each other in two rows. The Lord, under the symbols of a smoking furnace and burning lamp, passed between the pieces. The meaning of the vision is plain. The passing between the halves of the slaughtered animals signified or symbolized the ratification of the covenant. It was a testimony on the part of covenanting persons that they would be faithful in the covenant even unto and, if need be, through death. Naturally, in case of a man's covenant both persons passed between the halves of the slaughtered animals. But in this case Abraham is merely a witness. God passes through the halves of, the slaughtered animals alone. The covenant is His and He establishes it. It is based upon His faithfulness. And He will maintain and realize it even through the death of His Son. It is absolutely unconditional.

I have much more to write about this unconditional nature of the covenant of God with His people. But this must suffice for the present as an answer to the challenge of V. S.

V. S. writes further:

“Let us therefore not expose one another as heretics, neither let us lay bindings upon one another either to the one or to the other side. That tears the church of our Saviour. The church is not a communion of people who must in all things exactly think the same. That's foolishness and kills the power of prophecy in our midst. There is not a soul among us without heresy. We are all but fragmentary beings, who know but in part. It was the haughtiness and self-conceit of the Synodicals who thought that they knew everything and therefore bound others. This should, not be so in the Lord's church. We have a common confession, and within the framework of that confession there must be liberty to sharpen each other. They who in the church bind to human theories and dogmatical formulas make of the church a sect.”

There again you have some very general and very misleading statements, especially if viewed in the light of V. S's opposition to the Declaration of Principles, which he undoubtedly intends. Says he: “There is not a soul among us without heresy. We are all but fragmentary beings, who know but in part.” Let me apply this statement to myself. According to V. S. I am also heretical. Very well: I do not admit this; in fact, I deny it. Now let V. S. prove his statement. Then we have something concrete. We can do nothing with mere generalities and suggestions. Heretical is to my mind that which is contrary to Scripture and to the Confessions. I am not conscious of any heresy, in this regard. I certainly agree with V. S when he writes: “We have a common confession, and within the framework of that confession there must be liberty to sharpen each other.” I like that. And I fully agree with it. But do not forget that Heynsianism is not within the framework of the Confession. Within the church

we do not have to brand one another as heretics, for only our Confession is binding. But within the same church we certainly must not be the occasion to cause the members to be liars. And liars we make them if they do not agree with the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches and nevertheless answer the second question in Baptism affirmatively. Therefore, I maintain that if any Christian, a brother in Christ, cannot agree with the Protestant Reformed view of the covenant and of baptism and of the promise, cannot and must not have his child or his children baptized in our churches, and is bound to join himself to a church in which this is possible. And there are many.

That is how I think about it.

And that is the truth. And that is honest before God

True and False Church

Finally, I must say a few words, about V. S's conception of the true church. Writes he:

“I believe if there is one important question which you need to study, it is the question: ‘What is the church?; Where is the true church in America? This question must become an urgent one among you. You have to come so far that you dare to say: ‘We are the true church here.’ If you say this, you speak the language of the fathers who state that it can easily be determined where at a certain place the true church is. And if you are that far then you also understand that you must not soon bind to formulas, etc. For if they go away then you must be able to say: ‘This person is excluded from the kingdom of heaven.’ It becomes a question again of discipline, of the ban, of excommunication. We have learned that in the Netherlands again through our liberation. I believe that when you see this, the rest will take care of itself.”

Let us note the implication of this untenable position.

V. S. wants us to study the question concerning the church; more particularly he wants us to ask the question: what is the true church in America? And he wants us to reach the conclusion that we, the Protestant Reformed Churches, are the true church and that all the rest are false churches. That this is true is very plain from his statement that when anyone leaves our churches we must be able to say that such a person is excluded from the kingdom of heaven, in other words, that he goes to hell. That means of course, that here in Grand Rapids we must have the courage to say that anyone that belongs to a different church, than ours or that goes away from our fellowship is lost. The Protestant Reformed Churches are the only true church, and all the rest, the Christian Reformed and the Reformed Churches and the

Baptist and Methodist Churches and whatever other churches may be in our city,
– are the, false church.

No wonder that with such a conception of the true church V. S. wants nothing binding in the church. If we are the true church in the sense that anyone that leaves us, for whatever reason it may be, goes to hell, I, for one, would hesitate, – no, I will put it more strongly, – would refuse to accept even the Three Forms of Unity as binding and merely accept an open Bible as the basis for church fellowship.

Instead, I still prefer our conception of the true church as including all true believers in Christ, and then maintain that we, as Protestant Reformed churches, are the purest manifestation of that church in the world. If, in a certain community, there is no other church than the Protestant Reformed, I would say that any believer can join himself to our church, providing he promises to be instructed in our doctrine, submit to the preaching, and not to agitate within our communion against, our doctrine.

If one leaves that purest manifestation of the body of Christ on earth, which according to our conviction is represented by the Protestant Reformed Churches, the question still is: from what motive and for what reason does he leave? If he leaves it from the conviction that the Protestant Reformed Churches are not the purest manifestation of the church in the world, we will not excommunicate him from the kingdom of heaven. But if, he should leave for other reasons, and from other motives which are carnal and sinful, although he knows that the Protestant Reformed Churches are the purest manifestation of the body of Christ in the world, he deliberately walks in sin. And in such a case we would not hesitate to say that he is excluded from the kingdom of heaven. I think this is quite in harmony with the confession, which reads in article 27:

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

And in Art. 28, which speaks of the calling of I everyone to join himself to the true church we read: “We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and that out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or, condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving. to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them, And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty, of all believers, according to the word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes were against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the word of God.”

In Art. 29 we read of the marks of the true church and wherein she differs from the false church as follows:

“We believe, that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church. But we speak not here of the hypocrites, who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true church must be distinguished from all sects, who call themselves the church. The marks, by which the true church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintain the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only head of the church. Hereby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.

“With respect to those, who are members of the church, they may be known by the marks of Christians: namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Saviour, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour, neither turn aside to the right or left; and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them through the Spirit, all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in

the blood, death, passion and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they have remission of sins, through faith in him.

“As for the false church, 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. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word; but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those, who live holily according to the word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry. These two churches are easily known and distinguished from each other.”

H.H.