

# The Outlook

*Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith*

## Inside this *Outlook*

- Self Control* ..... *Rev. Paul T. Murphy* .....2**  
Rev. Murphy continues our look at the Fruits of the Spirit by focusing this month on the fruit of Self-Control.
- The Liturgy of Life* .....*Rev. Peter Kloosterman* .....4**  
Rev. Kloosterman explains the role of worship within the life of a Christian and then the role of liturgy within worship.
- God's Infallible Word* ..... *Dr. Edward J. Young* .....7**  
In this edited for length reprint from the April 1960 *Torch and Trumpet*, Dr. Young presents a defense of the Reformed doctrine of Inspiration against various departures from that doctrine which by this time have become familiar to leaders and members of our churches.
- Looking Back* ..... *Rev. Jelle Tuininga* .....13**  
Rev. Tuininga reflects on an aspect of the minister-in-training's education received outside of the seminary.
- Sound Bites - 1960* .....14**  
Quotes from the *Torch and Trumpet's* tenth year that still speak to us today.
- Election and the 'Free Offer' of the Gospel*.....*Dr. Cornel Venema* .....16**  
With this article Dr. Venema begins a series of articles explaining the Calvinist's view of the "well meant offer" in light of God's sovereignty.
- Jesus in the Koran* ..... '*Dick Wunnink*' .....20**  
Writing under the name "Dick Wunnink, the author of this article looks at the role of Jesus in the Muslim religion.

# The Danger of An Uncontrolled Self

*The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control*

*“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.” Proverbs 25:28, NIV.*

Originally this statement from Proverbs was a startling and shocking statement. Today it has lost its effect because cities no longer have walls. But until the 15th & 16th centuries they were common. Walls were necessary for security, for defense against an invading army, against thieves, against wild animals. A city without walls was unthinkable. It was an inevitable disaster, an accident waiting to happen. Nehemiah (1:3) wept and fasted at the thought of Jerusalem

without walls. The author of Proverbs considered such a city to be less than a city! So too, a man without self-control is less than a person because of the danger he is in!

Why is it necessary to have a wall of self-control? Because of what’s in your heart: sin. The seed of every known sin is in your heart. Without self-control they will blossom into destructive effects. Think of it like an acorn. At the start it is so small. Only when it grows is its potential truly seen. There is enough power in one acorn to completely cover the entire earth with a sea of woods. Yet, if an acorn drops all by itself in a parking lot, it will shrivel

and die. Why? Because it needs the proper conditions to reach its potential. Our hearts are seed beds for every known sin such as murder (anger) or adultery (lust). All the conditions are in there. So you need a wall of self-control or else you are an accident waiting to happen, an inevitable disaster. That is the danger of an uncontrolled self.

## The Levels of An Uncontrolled Self

We see them examined in Galatians 5:16 - 22:

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.



Volume 52, No. 3 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) “And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’ (Judges 7:20).

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For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want....The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

The first level we see is that of overt and addictive behavior, the kind of stuff you would find in the National Enquirer (orgies, drunkenness, idolatry). The second level is the root of such overt behavior where the whole person (mind, will, emotions) is inclined to make itself god, i.e. to live for your own glory, pleasure, and to determine for yourself what is right and wrong. This is the essence of sin. Look again at the list in Galatians - hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition, envy, pride. These are things controlled by your Self. They express a desire to be god rather than to be under God. They are the lusts of the flesh. They are experienced by every one, not just National Enquirer front page personalities!

Think of some examples with me. What about gossip? It puts you above the person you are talking about. That is selfish-ambition and pride. What about casual conversation? Often we steer it into places where we are comfortable

or we are the focus. That is just self-centeredness. What makes you angry? When God doesn't do things the way you think they should be done, when you don't get your way? These are all lusts of the flesh. You have a problem with self-control.

Still think you don't have a problem with self-control? Listen to what Scripture requires of you - Don't be

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***Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is not willpower. Willpower is a counterfeit. It is the exertion of your Self in your own strength not in dependence upon the strength of the Spirit of God.***

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anxious about anything, pray without ceasing, put your mind on what is excellent, never please yourself. What are your motivations? Jesus says we will be judged for every idle word. Look at those words. Can you really say you do not have a problem with self-control? They are all at the root level of sin.

If you are ever to make progress in your war against sin; if you are ever to deal effectively with it; or grow in grace, you need to deal with sin at the root level, you need the fruit of self-control.

Please note that this is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is not willpower. Willpower is a counterfeit. It is the exertion of your Self in your own

strength not in dependence upon the strength of the Spirit of God. Self-control comes from outside yourself not from within yourself.

### **What Are The Methods of Self-control**

In 1 Corinthians 9:24 - 27 we see the apostolic method:

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

Paul says do not get distracted but control your body. Make it your slave so that it is fixed on the goal. Self-control is discerning a goal and picking that over other urges. Paul uses the illustration of a runner. The runner runs for a goal, yet potentially he is distracted by many other messages (“I need a rest...”). It is the same with sin. The goal is Christ-likeness. Yet there are many distractions to deter us from that goal. Paul says that we are to ‘beat the body, make it a slave, devote all to attaining the goal.’

### **Aspiration**

What are you in Christ? You are a child of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, you have been raised with

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Christ, accepted by God in Christ. Remind yourself of this. The Puritan Richard Baxter said “sin is an infection of the imagination.”

When you remind yourself of what you are in Christ then sin becomes unimaginable! How could you entertain sinful thoughts, desires, attitudes, and those root level sins? How dare you bring those things into God’s sight! If a friend you loved and honored came to your home would you let pigs in and let them eat with you? Of course not. Then why would you let sin into imagination, into God’s sight? You need to discipline your mind to get self-control.

### **Mortification**

Take your sin to the cross, not Sinai. Deal with sin by grace not by guilt. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones used to say “Don’t heal yourself too fast when you sin, don’t be so quick to ‘claim’ I John 1:9. Instead see and consider how sin offends Christ, how it throws His blood back in His face, how the Holy Spirit is grieved by your sin. Think about it - the Holy Spirit lives in you. You wouldn’t want people to see or hear what your thoughts are but you subject the Holy Spirit to them all the time!

Take that sin to the foot of the Cross of Christ; sing the words of “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” and then, after spending some time there, read I John 1:9. Then you

begin to see sin as foul, filthy, and loathsome. Then it loses its attractive power.

We need to exercise both aspiration and mortification not just one or the other. Mortification without aspiration equals legalism (do’s & don’ts), it is superficial. But aspiration without mortification is simply positive thinking, it does not loosen sin at the root level. We need to do both. Then we will be like a city with walls made strong by the Spirit of the risen and reigning Christ.

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**Peter Kloosterman**

# The Liturgy of Life

Perhaps the title of this article puzzles you. What is the liturgy of life? By this I am suggesting that Christians must recover the comprehensive view of living life before the face of God. The church must diligently call her members to view life as an opportunity to work out the Word proclaimed from the pulpit each Sunday. Like Moses’ face radiated the glory of God when he came down the mountain, our lives must radiate the reality of our worship service: that each Lord’s Day, God announces the glory of the gospel to His covenant people.

To revive the liturgy of life, we must restore the centrality of the church’s worship. In doing this there are two prominent errors to

avoid. The first is thinking that worship is exclusively a “church” activity. The second is thinking that everyone is a church-into-himself. These errors are not as foreign as they may appear. If you listen closely to the conversations of others and examine your own conscience, you will hear these ideas portrayed in a variety of ways.

### **Formalism**

Those who think that worship is restricted to a “church” activity mean that they can meet God on Sundays and live how they please the remaining days of the week. This ultimately is the root of hypocrisy which leads to cold formalism. It stems from the idea that God is

served formally. That is, as long as I have the proper formula of 1 + 6, I have my relationship with God nailed down. One day is for God. The other six are mine. This makes Sunday and the gathering of God’s people a disjunction of the week. Like a toothache that comes and goes, the day of worship is something to be endured rather than a source of joy and delight. For many, even the consecration of an entire day as God’s holy day has been reduced to an hour of worship. In this way the disruption in the commerce of life can be minimized. This distortion is excused this way; “We’ve given God what He wants; now we can get on with life.”



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## Individualism

The second error is intensely individualistic. The church-in-worship is not God gathering His people, but a gathering of godly people. Christians are not members of one body, but members with their own body. It lays stress on the informal and exalts the individual and his/her gifts. Sunday worship is something the members agree to do all together so that I can serve the Lord better. It is the means to the greater end of my salvation.

This error looks at worship through utilitarian eyes. If it's useful and beneficial I will attend. The church's worship is merely a stepping-stone. Where and how I worship depends on what benefits me and what helps me serve the Lord. The Christian life is like a battery. Worship becomes the place where I have my batteries recharged. For some this means the church of yesterday is obsolete, we need new models and new methods. This fits well with the consumerism of our society. It tends toward audience-tailored worship rather than God-centered, God-focused and Word-dependent worship.

To avoid these two errors, we need to connect the corporate worship of the church to the private life of the individual. How do we do this? The most significant connection that we can make is recognizing that the liturgy of corporate worship reflects both a view of God and a view of life as members of His body. My intention in this article is not to offer a full biblical defense for worship. Rather, being fully convinced of the Biblical character and necessity of reformed worship, I offer these reflections as a means to help

Christians integrate worship with weekly life and vice versa.

## Corporate Worship

To do this some definitions are necessary. The first term that requires a definition is corporate worship. Corporate worship is when God's covenant people officially assemble to reflect back to Him the radiance of His worth. There are some ele-

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*The loving and caring God of the Bible is the only One worth our worship. We must reflect His worth. That is worship.*

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ments of this definition which require further comment. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* the term "worship" comes from the Old English "weorthscipe" or "worth-ship". We are called to assemble as God's people to praise and honor Him for His worth.

1 Chronicles 16:8-36 resounds with the summons for this activity. What God's people must recognize is that in Him they live and move and have their being (Acts 17:28). Their entire life is a reflection of God's sovereign care as He preserves and protects them from week to week. The loving and caring God of the Bible is the only One worth our worship. We must reflect His worth. That is worship. In worship the focus must shift from "me" to "Him". We are to reflect the radi-

ance of God's glory. What is amazing in this context is the privilege that God affords to His people. He does not need our worship (Acts 17:25), yet He invites/calls His people to gather for this purpose.

How does this invitation come? It comes from God's word through the overseers or elders of the congregation. This is what makes corporate worship an official activity. Similarly it is the assembly of God's people. There is a covenantal relationship between those worshipping and the God who is worshipped. This helps to understand the role that each party (God and His people) plays in the actions of worship. These actions are best understood as a conversation or a dialogue between the two parties. In this dialogue God is present and speaks by His Word through an ordained servant and His people respond to His Word.

## Liturgy

The components of worship are what we call the liturgy. This is the second term that requires a definition. Liturgy is a term used in the Old Testament to refer to the work of the priests in connection with the tabernacle and temple. With the Reformational emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, this term came to be associated with the worship of the church. Thus we can say that the liturgy of the church is the work which God and His people perform in corporate worship. This has direct implications for the order of worship.

The order of worship is what is normally printed in our bulletins. The order of worship is a schedule of events. It is the description of

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God's dialogue with His people with each party doing their part.

To better understand our order of worship, it is helpful to recognize the overarching structure of this conversation. The liturgy of God's people can be broken down into several components: a service of praise; confession; petition; Word; and gratitude. In what follows is a brief description of these components and how they help connect worship with life during the week.

The components of the liturgy are:

*Praise* - We are urged by the inspired Psalmist "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name" (Ps. 100:4). The service of praise is how we enter worship. The gracious character of God's call to converse with Him in worship should fill our hearts with praise.

*Confession* - There are two types of confession employed in our services. The confession of sin and the confession of faith. The confession of sin comes after the reading of God's law. God's law is holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7:12). It is a reflection of who God is and how God's people are to live. It convicts as well as it directs our life of sanctification. Thus a confession of our own sinfulness is an appropriate response to God's law.

God's people who live in the light of His holy law are penitent people. We live by grace received through

faith which causes us to cling to God's promise that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). The confession of sin is also a confession of faith. By confessing our sins before God we believe that He will wash us and cleanse us from our sins. That's the gospel. This gospel is summarized in the teaching of the Apostles' creed. This is the Church's historic confession. A confession that is to be believed in the heart and proceed from the mouth of every Christian (cf. Rom. 10:9).

*Prayer* - The service of prayer is almost a mini-liturgy in itself. There is adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Typically, the prayer is offered by the minister. He is not praying by himself, however. He is praying on behalf of the congregation. It is for this reason that he should use collective language. That is, he should pray as if the congregation were speaking using *we*, rather than *I*. (i.e. We pray that You..., Not, I pray that You...).

*Word* - The service of the word is best understood as the work of God's people hearing the word in faith. Listening with a believing heart to the word is an act of worship. It is the way that we reflect the radiance of God's worth. It is the source of spiritual life and growth for the Christian (Rom. 10:14-17). It is the way that the Holy Spirit takes the imperishable

seed of the gospel and plants it in the hearts of God's people (cf. Mt. 13:23; 1 Peter 1:23-25). This is the pinnacle of worship. It is the time when God's people are brought into the most intimate conversation with God and have opened up to them the mystery of His will through the person and work of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:9,10, 13).

*Gratitude* - The service of gratitude is the response of God's people to His present work of redemption through the proclamation of the word. We respond primarily by offering ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). We also offer gifts of gratitude that we may support the work of the ministry of the Word and share the burdens of fellow Christians (1 Cor. 9:12).

These five components should be reflected in every order of worship. One question remains, how does this affect the daily life of a church member? It is fundamental that we recognize what we are doing in corporate worship in order to avoid the hypocrisy of formalism and the arbitrariness of individualism. We must have a reason for all that we do in worship. John Calvin warns that if we worship God in any way without knowing why, we are engaged in superstition. For this reason I have attempted to outline the main reasons why our worship is the way it is.

The best way to overcome the formalism of worship is to understand what we are doing and why. The liturgy is not a formality but must be

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***John Calvin warns that if we worship God in any way without knowing why, we are engaged in superstition.***



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recognized as the reflection of our intimate relationship with a Sovereign God. The liturgy is the service of God's people under the direction and oversight of the elders. This also avoids making the worship of the church arbitrary (i.e. it's just what we feel like for the week). Worship is the arena where we pursue the glory of God above all else. This is not arbitrary but must be regulated by what God teaches in His word.

Finally, we must put the liturgy of our corporate worship into the extended service of our private lives. Our lives as individuals are to flow out of the reality of our membership

in the body of Christ. Here is the wonder of knowing what liturgy is all about. We can reflect the radiance of God's worth through the week when we make the components of worship the display of our daily lives. This is how we are called to live as Christians. Our lives are to reflect the components of praise, confession, prayer, the Word and gratitude. No worship is complete without these components, and no life is complete without them either.

How do we incorporate the liturgy of the church in personal lives? Self-consciously examining our

lives to see if they reflect these elements. This is the way Christians can show that they have been in the presence of the Lord: by showing with their lives the components of praise, confession, prayer, the Word, and thanksgiving. From the greatest endeavors to the most menial, these are an opportunity to reflect the truth that a Christian lives for the service of God. His daily life flows from his worship. That is the liturgy of life.

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Edward J. Young

## God's Infallible Word

In the second part of the *Age of Reason* Thomas Paine gave the following summary of the work which he believed he had accomplished. "I have now gone through the Bible as a man would go through a wood with an axe, and felled trees. Here they lie and the priests may replant them, but they will never make them grow!"

One reads such words with some amazement. Can one man really believe that he has separated the so-called "chaff" from the "wheat" in the Bible? Attempts have been made; I believe, to reestablish the writings of Thomas Paine, but such attempts have not met with much success. How many people today have ever read anything written by Paine? How many even know of his existence?

Paine was not the first who thought that he could go through the Bible

and dispose of what he believed should be disposed of. But his example may serve to remind us of the need for true humility in approaching the Scriptures.

### The Issue Before Us

Our concern is with the question of the infallibility of the Bible. If some thing is infallible, it is free from error. It is absolutely trustworthy and sure. When we apply this term to the Bible we mean that the Bible has an indefectible authority. In all that it says and teaches it possesses absolute authority, for it is the very Word of God. This is simply the position of our Lord Jesus Christ who said of the Scripture that it cannot be broken.

At the outset it is necessary to guard our usage of terms carefully. It is sometimes asserted that evangelical Christians all believe in the infallibility of the Bible but that they

believe in it in different ways. Some think that the entire Bible is infallible, true in all of its statements, containing no error. Others believe in a general infallibility of the Bible. In matters of faith and practice the Bible is infallible, they say, but in minor matters of historical detail it is not necessarily infallible. They tell us that we need merely believe that the Bible is generally infallible.

For the sake of clearing the atmosphere we must protest against such loose usage of language. Either the Scriptures are infallible, as the Lord Jesus Christ said they were, or they are not infallible. We may say that there are certain statements in the Bible which in themselves are infallible, and we may say that there are certain utterances which in themselves are not infallible. If we say that, we shall be saying something which is not true to fact, but at least we shall

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be saying something that makes sense. If we believe that there are statements in the Bible which are not infallible statements, let us cease talking about a general infallibility of the Bible. A Bible that is only generally infallible is a Bible which is not infallible at all.

The question is not whether the Bible is generally infallible, but rather whether the Bible is infallible or not. Those who hold that the Scriptures contain error embrace the position that the Bible is not infallible. They do not believe in the infallibility of the Bible at all, and to say that they believe in the infallibility of the Bible, but not in the orthodox sense, is to becloud the question. If a man thinks that there are errors in the Bible, he simply does not believe in an infallible Bible.

### **How Shall We Answer This Issue?**

We must go to the Bible itself and hear what it has to say. It is the Bible which tells us what we are to believe concerning God and what duty he requires of us. It is the Bible which is to tell us what we are to believe, for example, concerning God, predestination, the Person of Christ, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and every other article of our faith. And it is the Bible which alone can tell us what we are to believe concerning itself. Any doctrine of Scripture that is not taught in the Bible itself is one that must be rejected. Would we know what kind of book the Bible is,

we must listen to the Scripture.

The Bible is God's Word; it tells us what we are to believe about God and what duty God has demanded of us. This information we learn from the teaching of the Scriptures. In other words, it is the contents of the Bible which tell us what we are to believe, even concerning the Bible itself. The so-called didactic statements are the teaching of the Bible; they constitute the message which God would have us bear. We must, therefore, first of all, turn to the Scriptures to see what they have to say about themselves, and when once we have ascertained what they have to say concerning themselves, we must be guided by their statements.

II Timothy 3:16 makes the direct and explicit statement that all Scripture is God-breathed. But what has this to do with infallibility? It might be argued that to assert the infallibility of the Bible on the basis of the statement that all Scripture is God-breathed is to engage in making a deduction, drawing a conclusion, and to go beyond what is explicitly taught in the verse itself. "The passage says that Scripture is God-breathed," so it might be argued; "it does not explicitly state that Scripture is infallible. Possibly Scripture is infallible, but if so, we must ascertain that fact, not by an appeal to this present passage, but rather by a consideration of the phenomena of Scripture. Possibly the phrase 'God-breathed' permits us to deduce that

Scripture is infallible; possibly it does not."

There are several remarks which need to be made at this point. The procedure which we have just been discussing assumes that the mind of man is capable of judging, apart from didactic statements, and only upon the basis of the so-called data of Scripture, whether or not there are errors in the Bible. One can for example, compare Matthew 20 with Mark 10 and conclude that because they speak of a different number of blind men at Jericho, therefore the Bible at this point is in error. He has been examining the phenomena of the Bible, and upon the basis of an examination of these phenomena he concludes that there is error in the Bible.

To the present writer it has always been a source of amazement that any man could dare to speak in such a vein. He is surely a bold man indeed who dares to make the positive statement that there are actual errors in the Bible. Not only is he bold; he is reckless. One might be pardoned for questioning whether he had ever studied the many, many instances where archaeology, for example, has shown that so-called "errors" in the Bible were not errors at all. Let us consider a few of these.

Not so long ago, the mention of the Horites in Genesis was considered by men to be a mistake. These men had studied the phenomena of the Bible- they didn't seem to be particularly concerned with the Bible's di-

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*A Bible that is only generally infallible is a Bible which is not infallible at all.*



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dactic statements - and as a result of their study of the phenomena of the Scriptures they were sure that here was an error. The Horites didn't exist. Today such an opinion seems laughable; we possibly know more today about some phases of Horite life than we do about some phases of early American history.

Then again, we were once told, the book of Daniel had made a mistake in mentioning Belshazzar. But now the name of Belshazzar has occurred on the cuneiform tablets. And Daniel, it is said, surely made a mistake in mentioning Darius the Mede. Here, if ever, the data of the Bible was in conflict with secular history, and so the data was in error. And yet, during this past year, two excellent Bible-believing scholars have come forth with proposals for a solution of the problem, each of which can command approval. It is now perfectly possible to fit Darius the Mede into the scheme of history. The Bible had not been in error, but the men who thought that in their unaided strength they could interpret the phenomena of the Bible had been in grievous error.

Again, we read in the Bible that Shalmanezzer the king of Assyria came up against Hoshea and apparently took Samaria. But Sargon, the successor of Shalmanezzer, claims on his own inscription that he took Samaria. Here the data of the Bible was in conflict with the express claims of the Assyrian monuments. Hence, some were perfectly ready to assert that the data of the Bible showed that the Bible was in error; therefore it could not be infallible. The trouble with all this is that further study has shown that the error was not in the statements of the Bible but that it was made by those who de-

clared that there was here a mistake in the Bible. For, as a matter of fact, the one who took Samaria was not Sargon but Shalmanezzer.

All this brings us to the heart of the matter. Anyone who believes that he is competent to make the judgment that there is actual error in the original manuscripts of the Bible is setting himself up in the position of God. He is flying in the face of express statements of the Bible which assert the contrary. Jesus Christ says, "The Scripture cannot be bro-

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***He is surely a bold man indeed who dares to make the positive statement that there are actual errors in the Bible. Not only is he bold; he is reckless.***

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ken", a sinful man says, "The Scripture is broken." This is to elevate the human mind to the position of judge; it means that we substitute the human mind for the Word of God. It is to assume that the human mind knows so much that it can say with assurance that there is actual error in the original manuscripts of the Bible. It is rationalism of the worst kind.

Serious indeed is this charge, but there is no escaping it. If the Bible is the Word of God, He alone can tell us what we are to believe about the Bible. God has so told us; in statement after statement He has spoken to us about His Word. If we think that we can disregard these clear

statements and by simply examining the phenomena of the Bible conclude what the true nature of the Bible is, we have simply set our minds up as higher than God Himself. We have fallen into the worst kind of unbelief.

### **God-Breathed and Infallible**

Let us now return to II Timothy 3:16. Is it true that we can learn nothing about Scriptural infallibility from this verse? Must we resort to deduction, if we wish to appeal to this verse for support for our belief in the infallibility of the Bible? Those who speak in this vein do not to understand what this passage teaches. Paul declares here that every Scripture is "God-breathed." That is a strange word, but it is a remarkable word. It means simply that the Scriptures are the product of the breath of God; they are of divine origin. The same thought has been expressed throughout the Old Testament, not merely once or twice, but over and over again, in the words, "God said."

We read, for example, in the preface to the Ten Commandments, "And God spake all these words saying..." We read this Scripture each Sabbath in our churches and we read it because we believe that the Ten Commandments were spoken by God. Then, if the proponents of the theory which we are now considering are correct, we make a tremendous "deduction." Every time we read the Ten Commandments we make this "deduction" that inasmuch as God has spoken these commandments, they are therefore true, and are to be believed and obeyed.

But if that is only a deduction, would it then not be better if we simply said to our congregation, "Now, God spoke these words, that is true enough, but we cannot say that

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these words are true. We shall have to examine the phenomena of Scripture to ascertain whether these commandments are true and infallible. Possibly they are infallible commandments; possibly they are not. It may even be that our examination of the phenomena of the Bible will lead us to conclusions that we fear and prefer not to accept. Possibly it will turn, out, after all, when we have finished studying the data of the Bible, that it is not really wrong to break these commandments. But be of good cheer, let us not be afraid, Let us boldly accept what our studies bring to us.”

To talk this way is to talk nonsense, and yet that is the way men interpret II Timothy 3:16. The Scripture is God-breathed, they may say, but we must not deduce from that that Scripture is also infallible. But to say that Scripture is God-breathed is the same as saying that Scripture is spoken by God. What a terrible calumny we utter against the very nature of God when we conclude that when God has spoken something or breathed forth something, it is not therefore infallible! Let us rather boldly and with all confidence proclaim that God has breathed forth the Scripture and that for this very reason the Scripture must be infallible. To talk of a God-breathed Scripture that is not infallible is to say a meaningless thing. If Scripture is God-breathed, it is also Infallible; the two cannot be separated.

### **Further Reflections**

Possibly it may be granted that our interpretation of II Timothy 3:16 is correct. Granted that all Scripture is God-breathed, it may be argued, it

does not however, follow that every word of Scripture is God-breathed. The verse simply states that “all Scripture” is God-breathed; it does not state that every word thereof is God-breathed. This assertion would hardly seem worthy of refutation; and were it not for the fact that it has actually been employed to defend the position that there is error in the Bible.

“All Scripture,” states the Apostle; “is God-breathed.” We focus our

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attention now upon the word translated “scripture.” What is the Scripture? In itself the Greek word simply means “a writing,” “the thing written down.” Scripture is writing. Paul had previously (verse 15) designated the Scriptures the “holy scriptures” although there he used a different word (literally: the holy letters). But what is the Scripture? It is simply writing composed of individual words. We do not see how writing can be composed of anything else.

If therefore we say that the writing is God-breathed, we are in the very nature of the case saying that the

words which go to make up that writing are also God-breathed. How the writing could be God-breathed while the words of that writing are not God-breathed passes our comprehension. If words have any meaning whatsoever, then to state that the Scriptures are God-breathed is to make the assertion that the individual words of the Scriptures are God-breathed. Without the individual words there can be no Scripture.

If we assert that Paul here teaches only the God-breathed character of Scripture but not of every word of Scripture we are flying in the face of the plain Biblical evidence. Furthermore, what we say does not make good sense. Scripture and the words of Scripture are identical. The words go to make up the Scripture. If the words of Scripture are true, the Scripture is true. If the words of Scripture are false, the Scripture itself is false. Scripture and the words of which it is composed cannot be divorced.

### **How Is The Bible Infallible?**

And that brings us to another consideration. Certainly the Bible is God-breathed, and therefore infallible, it will be acknowledged. “But,” and now another charge is leveled against those of us who hold to the infallibility of the Scriptures, “this infallibility has to do only with matters of faith and morals.” Again we must look at II Timothy 3:16. If we take the first part of this verse, it is said, and then apply it to all matters, we are acting in an unwarranted fashion. The verse itself, so the argument runs, places a limit upon infallibility; it limits that infallibility to the realm of faith and morals. And so an-



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other objection to the infallibility of the Bible appears. What can be said concerning it?

What does Paul say? We must examine carefully what the apostle has written. In this remarkable verse Paul makes two statements which apply to all Scripture. In the first place he makes the statement that all Scripture is God-breathed. He then makes a second statement which is joined to the first by the word “and”. He says that all Scripture is profitable. Those are the two statements which Paul makes with respect to all Scripture.

How different this is from what we at times might be tempted to think! We are very prone to say that certain passages of the Bible have nothing to do with faith and ethics; that certain parts of the Bible are not important or necessary. Paul, however, in distinction from the modern practice, asserts that all Scripture (without exception) is profitable. Not only therefore is all Scripture God-breathed, but all Scripture is also profitable. The one thing Paul does not wish to say is that Scripture is God-breathed only with respect to the realm of faith and practice. To force such a construction upon this verse is to read one’s own ideas into it, and to do exegetical violence to a clear passage of Scripture.

There are many Christians today who seem to think that the doctrine of creation is a comparatively minor matter. Shall we therefore follow them and reject the first chapter of Genesis as irrelevant to faith and conduct? On the other hand, there are Christians who think that the first chapter of Genesis and the doctrine of creation are essential to

the Christian faith. Whom shall we believe? A very good friend of mine, a devout Christian, wrote some time ago that the Virgin Birth was of no theological consequence. On the other hand, a Christian like the late J. Gresham Machen has written a large volume on the subject, simply because he believes that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is very important and significant. To judge from what Karl Barth has written about the Trinity, one might conclude that Barth does not think

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***The one thing Paul does not wish to say is that Scripture is God-breathed only with respect to the realm of faith and practice.***

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that the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity is of much significance, for he does not present the Biblical doctrine correctly. On the other hand, think of the grand things that John Calvin has written on the Trinity! Evidently Calvin thought that the doctrine was of the utmost significance. Whom shall we follow, Barth or Calvin?

Of course, an objection is immediately at hand. Those who hold that the Bible is not infallible will say, “This is not what we mean. The Trinity is important; the Virgin Birth is important; the doctrines of Christianity are important. What we have reference to is such things as the numbers of the Old Testament,

the parallel passages, the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah and similar matters. In these minor matters,” they would say, “there may be error.” Even with this delimitation, however, we have not escaped difficulty. Even here, who is to tell us what is essential to faith and what is not; what is infallible and what is not?

What surprises one who reads the Bible attentively is the manner in which the Bible regards as important and significant matters which a reader might regard as being only of minor consequence. Let us note a few examples. In his first epistle to Timothy (5:17, 18), Paul makes an exhortation to the elders, especially to those who labor in the word and doctrine. To support his exhortation he quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn” (Deut. 25:4). What does this passage in Deuteronomy have to do with our Christian life? Surely, if ever there was a passage that might seem to us to be irrelevant and without weight; it is this one. What can this ancient Hebrew law possibly have to say to us today? Is this not one of the minor matters of the Bible, a matter so insignificant that it really is irrelevant, whether it is infallible or not?

Such is the way in which we might be tempted to reason. Plausible reasoning it might seem to be; plausible indeed, but utterly false. What does Paul do with this passage? He adduces it to support his charge to the elders. And he introduces it with the words, “For the scripture saith.” In other words, this passage, which we might have considered insignificant and irrelevant, is said by Paul to be

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Scripture; and because Scripture has spoken, men must obey. They must even obey this particular Scripture. Indeed, this particular Scripture is so relevant and important that Paul - rather the Holy Spirit - uses it to substantiate the charge made to the elders. The words, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn" are infallible Scripture. Because they are infallible, the elders must obey the charge which Paul makes to them.

And again, we have the conclusive and infallible statement of God, that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). I do not understand how a Christian can dare to go contrary to the clear language of this verse. Whatsoever things were written aforetime, we are told, were written for our learning. That is simply another way of saying that anything that was written aforetime, anything that can be called Scripture, was written for our benefit.

We might state the truth in still another manner. All Scripture written previous to Paul's time was written for our benefit. This verse does not say that only some things were for our good. It does not say that only those Scriptures that had to do with faith and morals are for us. It does not assert that only those Scriptures that are infallible are for our learning. No, it says that whatsoever things were written before - whether we think them relevant or not; whether we consider them significant or not - all that was written before is for our learning. Here is a

clear-cut, explicit statement that all the Scripture written before the time of Paul is for doctrine. From whatsoever was written aforetime we are to learn. We are not to pick and choose what sections of those Scriptures appeal to us. No, we are to consider whatsoever things were written aforetime and from these things we are to learn.

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***What surprises one who reads the Bible attentively is the manner in which the Bible regards as important and significant matters which a reader might regard as being only of minor consequence.***

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The great question with which the Church today must deal is that of the nature and authority of the Word of God. What kind of a book is the Bible? Is it a trustworthy revelation of the one living and Triune God, or is it a book in which error and truth are mixed? Can the Church any longer go to the Bible for her doctrine? She went to the Bible to learn what she was to believe about the Trinity, about the Fall of Man, about Sin and the Redeemer, about Justification by Faith. Can she also go to the Bible and learn from it what she is to believe about the Bible, itself? Is that Bible true and trustworthy or is it not? Is it free from error in the original manuscripts, or are there errors in the autographa? That, and precisely that, is the question that is before us today.

One thing is clear. The position that the Scripture is only generally infallible, or infallible only in certain spheres was not the position of J. Gresham Machen. If we adopt this position we part company with Machen. More than that, we part company with Warfield and Badge. And we certainly part company with Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper. And that is serious, for these men whom I have just named are some of the greatest theologians that God has given to his church during this and the past century. But we must go back further, Luther and Calvin would certainly separate from us. They would never have tolerated the idea of a generally infallible Bible. Nor would Augustine nor Paul. If we part from these men in our doctrine of Scripture it is surely serious, for these were great men in the church and Paul was an inspired apostle. It is tragic if we separate from them on this matter. But what is of infinitely greater sadness is to part from Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There can be no denying the fact that Jesus Christ; the eternal Son of God, believed that the Old Testament Scriptures in their entirety were the infallible Word of God. The evidence for this has been presented many times. Those who claim that the Scriptures are infallible only in the realm of ethics and faith are in disagreement with that Holy One who said, "The scripture cannot be broken." Before we dare to set our views in opposition to him let us count the cost of what we are doing.

**Dr. Edward J. Young** was a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia when this article was first published.



# Looking Back

Along with a sense of call (or perhaps a part of it) comes the ability and desire to study. We in Reformed circles have always insisted upon an educated clergy. And we must continue to insist on that, perhaps now more than ever before. Paul tells Timothy to guard the deposit which he has received, and to have nothing to do with myths and old wives' tales (1 Tim. 4:7). All the weird sects that have mushroomed in the last century have captured untold millions with their seductive teachings. People who are well-grounded in the Scriptures will not become victims of such cults. For that reason, too, we need ministers who can rightly divide (correctly handle) the word of truth. For that reason we need good Reformed seminaries who can teach others.

But ministers must also have an understanding of the kind of world we live in it. They must have a good general knowledge of life as we live it in the 21st century.

Lloyd Jones encourages prospective ministers to engage in some other vocation before entering the seminary. (Several Mid-American students have done this over the years. The ministry for them was a second career. This will stand them in good stead.) A student who has never been outside the four walls of a classroom is going to have trouble understanding the world beyond those walls. Listen to Lloyd Jones:

There are those who say, and I tend to agree with them, that it would be good for all men who enter the ministry to have some

preliminary experience of living life in the world, in a business or profession. They query the wisdom of a system whereby a young man goes from school and college directly to a seminary and then into the ministry without having any experience outside that. There is the danger of putting it at its lowest, of an over-theoretical and intellectual approach; so that the man in the pulpit is really divorced from the life of the people who are sitting in the pews and listening to him. So general knowledge and experience are of inestimable value ...

This general knowledge and information will be of great value to the preacher and his preaching. It will help him and clothe the message which he is giving to the people. It also will make it easier for the people to follow and assimilate his preaching into their lives.

These are basic qualifications. A man may be a good Christian, and he may be many other things; but if he is lacking in these qualities he is not going to make a preacher. He must be, furthermore, a man who has an understanding of people and of human nature. These are general qualities and characteristics that should be looked for and on which we must insist.

I have never regretted the fact that I farmed seven years before going into the ministry. Fact is,

I've often thanked the Lord for it. It has made me a better minister.

Closely related to the above, and something of vital importance, is *maturity*. Especially personal maturity and spiritual maturity. This is fundamentally important. A minister who lacks this is in the wrong place. Lloyd Jones says it well:

It is surely clear that if he is a man who is always struggling with problems and difficulties and perplexities himself and trying to discover truth or if he is so uncertain that he is always influenced by the last book he reads, and is 'carried about by every wind of doctrine' and every new theological fashion, it is clear that he is *ipso facto* a man who is not called to the ministry. A man who has great problems himself and is in a state of perplexity is clearly not one who is fitted to be a preacher, because he will be preaching to people with problems and his primary function is to help them to deal with them. 'How can the blind lead the blind?' is our Lord's own question in such a situation.

**Rev. Jelle Tuininga** is an emeritus pastor in the URC living in Lethbridge, Alberta.

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# Sound Bites

## *Torch and Trumpet 1960*

### January 1960

“We are determined before God to be a clear and fearless voice for the faith of our fathers in our time. We want to be a confessionally faithful witness. This is the only honest course for the church of Christ.”

*Our Magazine - 1960 - and You*  
Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

“**Question:** Sometime ago you wrote an article about “Smellies” in which you said that a new kind of movie is being produced in which smell will be added to sight and sound...”

**Answer:** As for my criticism of modern amusements...I do not hesitate to say the run of the mill productions of Hollywood already smell.”

*Teener's Corner: Movies That Smell*  
Leonard Greenway

### February 1960

“Sometimes, when public disagreement is expressed with views that were uttered in public, whether by the spoken or the written word, those who are displeased with the public dissent - either because they were in sympathy with the first speaker or writer, or because they are afflicted with the prevailing allergy to controversy - complain that Matthew 18 was violated and that those who took public issue with the views first aired are lacking in brotherly love.”

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“We know of no principle, rule, or passage in Scripture which forbids public refutation

of public utterances which are held to be unsound.”

*Use and Misuse of “Matthew 18”*  
Henry J. Kuiper

“Guilt defined as breaking God’s law and meriting the wrath of God has few spokesmen. Guilt has become narrowed merely to a bad conscience and has little relation to the flaming holiness of God. Hell too has withdrawn into the background, becoming one of the unmentionables of modern theology.”

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“[L]ove believeth all things, but is not blind. This love is altogether kind, but does not set aside the law of God.”

*Love and Sentiment*  
C. John Miller

“It is just not true that the church must have organizational unity to fulfill its evangelistic commission. We best serve the cause of Christ and our fellow Christians if we stand firmly for the gospel even at the apparent cost of creating disunity.”

*The Unity and Disunity of the Church*  
Peter De Jong

### March 1960

“It is very essential to realize that the dogmas confessed in the Standards have not been gathered from sources outside of Scripture.”

*Are Office-bearers Bound in Their Beliefs?*  
Nicholas J. Monsma

### April 1960

“The deepest root of all the violent outbreaks of youthful depravity

in present-day society is the lack of thorough religious and moral training in the homes of the nation. Because multitudes have departed from the teachings of the Word of God, there is no fear of God in their hearts and no sense of responsibility to a higher Being to whom all men will give an account some day of all they have said and done.”

*Juvenile Delinquency and the Book of Proverbs*  
Henry J. Kuipers

“Knowing the Word we must accept it. When it speaks, we must listen; when it commands, we must obey; when it promises, we must trust; when it chides, we must submit.”

*Faith: The Prerequisite for Prayer*  
John B. Hulst

### May - June 1960

“[T]he stone was rolled from the grave not so much for Christ’s exit as the disciple’s entrance; the body that entered the room with the locked door would find a stone no barrier either.”

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“Man since paradise stands under the divine curse, and Scripture knows no way of lifting that sentence but by the penal-substitutionary death of Christ. Scripture presents no hope of benefiting by that death but by incorporation into Christ.”

*Christ's Ascension, the Church's Enrichment*  
William F. Vander Hoven

“The Holy Spirit sustains a very special relation to the Word of God. He is not only its Author; he also uses it as his instrument for the performance of his work. He not only produced it; he alone



can make it a living Word in the hearts and lives of men.”

*Pentecost and the Word*  
Henry J. Kuiper

“The Christian who believes that Scriptures are God’s Word cannot consistently hold that Scriptures were originally corrupted by errors. To deny the truthfulness of God’s Word amounts to a denial of the truthfulness of God.”

*The Bible and Non-Inspired  
“Sources”*  
Joseph A. Hill

“[T]he great safeguard for our children lies in our prayers for them and with them and in the exposure we give them by our example of Christian living.”

*Insulation Against a Mad World  
- Is It Possible?*  
Wilma Por Bouman

### July - August 1960

“There is a true church and a false church and the false church may not merely be a religious organization distinct from the true church; both may be wrapped up in one and the same denomination. One congregation may be on the side of the seed of the serpent while another congregation of the same communion, located perhaps in the same city, may be on the side of the Seed of the Woman, namely Christ. Therefore every movement for the union of all churches, or of all Protestant churches only, is based on a false premise, namely, that the church is essentially a visible institution and that every church which professes to believe in Christ is part of the true church of Christ.”

*The Antithesis as a Cornerstone  
of Christian Life and Action*  
Henry J. Kuiper

### September 1960

“The curse of orthodoxy today is the silence of its advocates.”

*When Orthodoxy is Silent*  
Edwin H. Palmer

“[T]here exists a lack of appreciation of the heritage Reformed people possess; a heritage, yes, but one which cannot be kept alive without personal dedication.”

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“[P]eople seem to have delegated all theological power to the minister, thus lapsing into an attitude of stagnant security which asks no questions and makes no commitments.”

*As An “Outsider” Sees the  
Christian Reformed Church*  
Martha Hamilton

“We worry about our health or the health of our children, we are anxious about meeting monthly payments for car, tuition, and other things. We worry about the weather because if it doesn’t rain the crop will be a failure. But all our hand-wringing, fretting, and nail-biting does not produce one drop of rain, meet a single payment, or produce rosy cheeks on our children. The fact is we do have cares, and the only way to deal with them is to turn each one into a prayer.”

*Praying Mothers*  
Pearl Tadema

### October 1960

“All men who recognize that religion is a heart-matter and concerns the most sacred relationship of man to His God, will agree that a man’s politics are influenced by his religious convictions and that man ought to obey God rather than man.”

*Should Protestants Help Elect a  
Catholic President*  
Henry R. Van Til

### November 1960

“There are two things a minister can do to make his catechism preaching more lively and interesting. The first is: Study Scripture...the second: Study man.

*Catechism Preaching*  
William Hendricksen

“Christian liberty is the right to let our sanctified conscience be our guide only in those matters of conduct concerning which we have no clear divine command. Such matters are usually called adiaphora, things indifferent, though we must add that there would probably be no adiaphora if we understood all the implications of God’s law.”

*The Law of Liberty  
and the Law of Love*  
Henry J. Kuiper

“Heresy has a way of beginning in a seemingly innocent way. Almost always it originates, not with denial of truth, but with emphasis on one truth at the expense of another.”

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“[D]oes not history show that he who today places something else on a par with Scripture is in imminent peril of tomorrow placing that other thing above Scripture.”

*Withstand Beginnings!*  
R. B. Kuiper

### December 1960

“[I]f God sends the minister to the people, he likewise sends the people to the minister.”

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“If the minister has the conviction that he is where he is by the call of God, he should have the same confidence that the people to whom and for whom he speaks are where they are by the call of God.”

*God Sends The People  
to the Minister*  
Leonard Greenway

# Reformed Evangelism

## “Election and the ‘Free Offer’ of the Gospel”

### *Part One*

In the history of discussion of the biblical teaching of election, one of the more controversial issues is that of the so-called “free offer” of the gospel. At the time of the dispute between the Arminians and the Calvinists in the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century, the Arminians complained that the Calvinist doctrine of election nullified the genuineness of the gospel offer of salvation. The Arminians argued that, if God has unconditionally elected to save a certain number of persons, then the gospel-call could not *seriously* or *genuinely* summon to faith all persons to whom it is addressed. Since some of these persons are not elect and since God has no intention of bringing them to salvation, the call of the gospel, when extended to the non-elect, is disingenuous. The call of the gospel does not genuinely express, either on God’s part or on the part of the Christian believer, any good will or desire that all sinners should be saved. Indeed, the call of the gospel, when it concerns the non-elect, is but a camouflaged expression of ill will on God’s part. Though God calls all sinners through the gospel to believe and repent, He actually only desires this for the elect.

The importance of this discussion to

the subject of the Reformed faith and evangelism is readily evident. Critics of the Reformed faith, especially those who fault it for a lack of evangelistic fervor, often allege that its teaching regarding election serves as a hindrance to evangelism. Not only are Reformed believers reluctant to evangelize for fear of falling prey to an unbiblical activism, as if the salvation of sinners ultimately depended upon their efforts, Reformed believers are also stymied by their conviction that the gospel, with its promises and obligations, is only addressed, in the strictest sense, to the elect. Because God has no saving purpose or intention with respect to the non-elect, the church has no authority to extend indiscriminately the promise of the gospel to all sinners. Furthermore, because God’s disposition toward the non-elect is unfavorable, no presentation of the gospel is permissible that would suggest otherwise. Indeed, the preaching of the gospel, when it concerns the non-elect, serves by design only to advance God’s purpose *not* to save them.

Accordingly, whenever the gospel is preached to sinners, it must have

a very different meaning for the elect and the non-elect. For the elect believer, the gospel comes as good news, promising life and salvation through Jesus Christ. For the non-elect, the gospel comes as bad news, declaring only God’s intention and desire that they not be saved. The only thing that softens the gospel’s preaching, so far as the non-elect are concerned, is the fact that the church in her preaching of the gospel does not know whom God has chosen or not chosen to save.

In order to complete our consideration of the doctrine of election and evangelism, therefore, we need to address this subject of the gospel offer or call. Does the doctrine of election undermine the genuineness and sincerity of this call? And does this perhaps account in part for the reserve of Reformed believers when it comes to the work of evangelism or preaching the gospel to sinners?

#### **Some Preliminary Definitions**

When it comes to the subject of the gospel offer, the saying, “he that distinguishes well, thinks well,” is especially pertinent. One of the problems that often plagues discus-

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***One of the problems that often plagues discussions of this subject is the lack of clarity on the part of those who either favor or oppose the teaching of a well-meant offer.***



sions of this subject is the lack of clarity on the part of those who either favor or oppose the teaching of a well-meant offer. Proponents of differing views often use the same language or terms, but with widely different meanings. Before looking at several biblical passages that apparently teach a free and sincere offer of the gospel to all sinners, therefore, we need to begin with some preliminary definitions.

### Universal and Effectual Calling

In the Reformed tradition's reflection upon the presentation of the gospel, a common distinction is drawn between the *general* or *universal* call of the gospel, which is to be presented to all lost sinners without exception, and the *effectual* call of the gospel, which effectively draws elect sinners into living fellowship with the Triune God. This distinction, which goes back at least as far as the writings of Augustine, acknowledges that the call of the gospel, though indiscriminately and universally presented to lost sinners, only draws into fellowship with God those whom He purposes to save and to whom He grants faith and repentance.

The call extended to sinners through the Word of the gospel, unless it is accompanied by a sovereign working of the Holy Spirit, does not inwardly renew and enliven those who are dead in their trespasses and sins. Only in the case of the elect does the Holy Spirit so work through the ministry of the Word as to grant saving faith and repentance. For our purpose, the following definitions from the Westminster Larger Catechism will serve well as a point of reference:

Q. 67. *What is effectual calling?*

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his Word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing

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***In the biblical view of election, God not only chooses to save His people in Christ but He also, in order to effect this choice,***

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and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

Q. 68 *Are the elect only effectually called?*

A. All the elect, and they only, are effectually called; although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, and have some common operations of the Spirit; who, for their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.

The point of this distinction is not hard to discern. It helps to answer the question, how do we account for the fact that not all sinners respond to the gospel in faith and repentance? Does God call all sinners *in the same way, enabling all to respond but not actually effecting the response of any?* If we were to say that the gospel-call only invites sinners to believe, leaving the decision to believe or not to believe within the power of those to whom it is addressed, then we would have to conclude that the salvation of sinners *finally depends upon their choice either to believe or not to believe.* In this understanding of the call of the gospel, God's grace is merely an *enabling grace*; it enables otherwise depraved sinners to be able to respond appropriately to the gospel-call. Moreover, this grace of God, which is considered *common* to all recipients of the gospel-call, leaves to these recipients the choice either to embrace or reject what the gospel of Christ offers to them.

Upon this understanding of the gospel-call, God's election of some sinners would ultimately rest upon the *condition* of foreseen faith. When God foresees that some will believingly respond to the gospel-call, while others remain unbelieving, He chooses to save those who believe and to condemn those who will not believe. However, this teaching contradicts the biblical teaching of unconditional election. For in the biblical view of election, God not only chooses to save His people in Christ but He also, in order to effect this choice, effectively calls them into communion with Himself (Rom. 8:29). In distinction from the general call of the gospel,

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which is presented to all sinners without exception, there is an effectual call whereby God moves otherwise incompetent but elect sinners to respond appropriately to the gospel summons.

Though there is a general consensus among Reformed believers regarding this distinction between a universal and an effectual calling, differences quickly emerge when it comes to a definition of what is involved in this universal calling. Louis Berkhof provides a rather typical definition of the general call of the gospel, when he says that it is “[t]he presentation and offering of salvation in Christ to sinners, together with an earnest exhortation to accept Christ by faith, in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.”

However, though this definition seems simple and unobjectionable upon first reading, it leaves somewhat ambiguous what is meant by “an earnest exhortation to accept Christ by faith.” Does this language mean that, in the general call of the gospel, sinners are simply summoned or commanded to believe? Or does the gospel address sinners in the form of a “well-meant offer” of salvation in Christ, suggesting that the Author of the gospel-call genuinely entreats its recipients to respond in order that they might be saved? Or again, in perhaps the most acute form of the question, does the call of the gospel express any *sincere* or *well-meant* desire that sinners respond in faith in order to be saved? Is there any sense in which God Himself, in whose name the church presents the gospel, may *desire* or *be pleased* that sinners come to salvation through faith in Christ?

### Three Views of the Gospel-Call

To clarify what is at stake in the debate among Reformed believers regarding the so-called “well-meant offer” of the gospel, it may be helpful to distinguish *three different views* of the gospel-call.

The first of these views I would term a *strong* form of what is often

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***Hyper-Calvinism actually denies the legitimacy of a general call of the gospel to all sinners without distinction, since the call properly invites only the elect to faith and repentance.***

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called *hyper-Calvinism*. Though there are not many advocates of this view, it teaches that the call of the gospel addresses, strictly speaking, *only the elect*. Since gospel ministers are unable to discern infallibly who are and who are not elect, they should honor this restriction so far as possible by calling to faith and repentance *only those who give outward evidence that they are being spiritually enlivened or illumined*. This strong form of hyper-Calvinism actually denies the legitimacy of a general call of the gospel to all sinners without distinction, since the call properly invites only the elect to faith and repentance. Not only is the gospel-call not intended for the non-elect, but it is also misleading to address sinners indiscriminately with the call to faith

in Christ and repentance. Such an indiscriminate call invariably leads sinners to conclude that they have the *ability* to do what the call demands. In a not-so-subtle manner, an indiscriminate preaching of the gospel to sinners leads them to the improper inference that they have it within their capacity to believe and repent as the gospel-call demands.

The second of these views I would term a *mild* form of *hyper-Calvinism*. In this view, the general call of the gospel is affirmed, though it is not regarded as a “well-meant offer.” When the gospel-call is preached, it must be preached indiscriminately to all sinners, summoning elect and non-elect alike to believe and repent. No limitation is placed upon the preaching of the gospel to all sinners without distinction. However, this general call of the gospel may not be presented in a conditional form. To say to sinners, “if you believe and repent, then you will be saved,” is to imply that the gospel promise is conditional. Whenever the gospel is presented as an “offer,” inviting sinners to do something in order to be saved, rather than as an “unconditional promise of salvation” to the elect alone, an Arminian doctrine of conditional election is either wittingly or unwittingly assumed. In the strictest sense, the promise of the gospel is unconditionally addressed to the elect alone. Great care, therefore, must be exercised in preaching not to suggest that the recipient is obligated to do something, with the promise of salvation hanging upon his performance of this obligation.

Furthermore, in this milder form of hyper-Calvinism, the idea that God expresses any *favorable disposi-*



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*tion* or *desire* that all sinners believe and repent is strongly resisted. The call of the gospel declares objectively that all sinners must believe and repent. But it does not spring from any good will or benevolent attitude on God's part, or on the part of His human ambassador, toward all sinners. It does not express any desire for the salvation of its recipients, when those recipients are non-elect sinners. The call of the gospel is "good news" for the elect alone.

The third view of the general call of the gospel, which I regard as the more *classic* or *historic* view of the Reformed churches, does not merely insist that the gospel-call be indiscriminately extended to all sinners. It also insists that the call expresses something of God's good will or desire with respect to lost sinners. In the call of the gospel, God declares what is, according to His benevolence and good will, genuinely pleasing to Him, namely, that sinners believe in Christ and turn from their wicked way. John Murray, in his essay, "The Free Offer of the Gospel," clearly summarizes this view of the gospel-call:

The question then is: what is implicit in, or lies back of, the full and free offer of the gospel to all without distinction? The word 'desire' has come to be used in the debate, not because it is *necessarily* the most accurate or felicitous word but because it serves to set forth quite sharply a certain implication of the full and free offer of the gospel to all. This implication is that in the free offer there is expressed not simply the bare preceptive will of God but the disposition of loving-

kindness on the part of God pointing to the salvation to be gained through compliance with the overtures of gospel grace. In other words, the gospel is not simply an offer or invitation, but also implies that God delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness.

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***In the call of the gospel, God declares what is, according to His benevolence and good will, genuinely pleasing to Him, namely, that sinners believe in Christ and turn from their wicked way.***

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According to this view, the gospel-call is born from and expresses a compassionate disposition on God's part toward sinners. It sincerely summons all sinners to embrace Christ for salvation, promising all those who believe and repent that God stands ready to show them mercy. In this view, those who minister the gospel should do so out of a heartfelt desire for the good of all sinners, seeking to secure their salvation by an urgent and compassionate ministry of the Word of God.

### **Two Distinctions Regarding God's Will**

Though I will have occasion in what follows to return to this subject, it should be noted here, as Murray's statement of this third

view suggests, that this understanding of the gospel-call acknowledges the distinction between God's *will of decree* and His *will of precept*. Proponents of the well-meant offer view do not claim that God's good-will or favorable disposition toward sinners, which is expressed through the call of the gospel, represents his will of decree or *sovereign intention* to save all sinners without exception. Rather, they claim that, in addition to the general sense in which God is pleased whenever a creature obeys His precepts or commands (will of precept), the gospel-call expresses a special compassion toward lost sinners. This compassion in the call of the gospel is usually expressed in terms of God's good will or desire that sinners embrace Christ for salvation. Because God exhibits such good will toward all sinners in the gospel-call, it is incumbent upon His servants to show a like good will toward them in the overtures of the gospel. This good will, however, ought not to be treated as though it were identical with God's will so far as His sovereign counsel is concerned.

A related, though different, distinction is also important to a proper evaluation of the general call of the gospel. In addition to the distinction between God's will of decree and His will of precept, another distinction is often made between God's *secret will* and His *revealed will* (compare Deut. 29:29). Even though God has revealed His sovereign intention to save only the elect, He has not revealed the particular identity of the number of the elect. No minister of the gospel has an infallible or divinely revealed insight into the secret things of God. The gospel is always preached or admin-

# Jesus in the Koran

istered according to God’s revealed will. Thus, when the gospel is preached, it is addressed to an audience of *lost sinners* whose only hope for salvation lies in coming to Christ in faith and repentance. The call of the gospel is not preached as a distinct Word for elect and non-elect persons, but as a *revelation of God’s grace in Christ calling lost sinners to salvation*. The same Word addresses all sinners in *the same way*, that is, in accordance with what God has revealed regarding the way of salvation through faith in Christ.

## Conclusion

No doubt these preliminary definitions leave a number of questions unanswered. In the history of the discussion of the well-meant offer, advocates of one or another of these views have offered a variety of formulations of the gospel-call. Some of these are more sophisticated, some of them are less so, than the ones I have offered. However, the definitions I have offered are adequate to set the stage for a consideration of the more important questions relating to the call of the gospel, which we will take up in a subsequent article or two.

Since the most important question has to do with the testimony of Scripture, we will address the subject of the biblical basis for the well-meant offer in our next article.

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We cannot embark on a mission among Muslims until we know the crucial differences between Islam and Christianity. Islam vehemently denies the major truth claims of Christianity. The greatest obstacle in a discussion with a Muslim about the Gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

When we compare the Koranic Jesus with the Biblical Jesus, we soon discover the Koran’s distortion of Biblical revelation. George Fry claims that Islam “is the most dangerous and most durable deviation from Orthodox Christianity to appear in history. Muhammad, whether intentionally or not, has become the world’s most celebrated re-interpreter of the Gospels.”

Who is the Jesus of the Koran? He is not the Christ, the Son of living God. The Koranic and other inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, one of the earliest Muslim edifices outside Arabia, built in Jerusalem between 691 and 692 A.D. include a number of anti-Christian polemics which clearly express Islam’s view of Jesus: “Praise be to God, who begets no son, and has no partner,” and “He is God, one, eternal. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and he has no peer.”

Jesus is named ninety-seven times in the Koran. He is given more honour with titles and references than any other prophet before Muhammad. Muslims utter “praise be upon him” each time they mention Jesus’ name. Michael Youssef observes, “Many, I think, would be shocked to learn that Mohammed

thought very highly indeed of Jesus... Mohammed affirmed, for example, His virgin birth. He called Him the Spirit of God, the work of God. He believed that Jesus raised people from the dead and was a miracle worker. The Quran called Jesus pure and sinless.” Muslims view Jesus as prophet, teacher, healer, mediator, and miracle worker with great power. Even shrines are named after Him.

## The Word and Spirit of God.

Jesus’ special mission to the world is also recognized. Surah lvii:27 declares: “Then We caused our messengers to follow in their footsteps: and We caused Jesus, son of Mary to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him.” The two most significant titles assigned to Jesus are the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Surah iv: 171 asserts “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was not only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him.”

When the angels announced Jesus’ birth to the Virgin Mary, they said, “O Mary! Lo! Allah gives thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah).” (Surah iii: 45) But in Islam there is no connection whatsoever, as in Christianity, with Jesus the Son of God or with the incarnation of Jesus being the Word who becomes flesh (cf. John 1) Muslims scholars believe that the Word means the com-



mand of Allah. Yet the Koran says that John the Baptist was the one who came to proclaim the Word. The angels told Zechariah: "Allah giveth thee glad tidings of (as son whose name is) John, (who cometh) to confirm a word from Allah, lordly, chaste and a Prophet of righteousness." (Surah iii:39)

This Koranic description of Jesus may well serve as a point of contact to show Muslims that Jesus is God's eternal Word of redemption rather than another prophet. The word Spirit in connection with Jesus is used seven times in the Koran. George Braswell notes that Jesus is confirmed by the Spirit of Holiness or the Holy Spirit. "Not only at his birth but while Jesus was in the cradle and as a youth and adult," says Braswell, "the Quran reports that He was supported by the Holy Spirit. Later Muslims authors have written of Jesus as the Spirit and the Spirit of God. Tradition reports that Muhammad said that Jesus the Son of Mary was the Spirit of God and His Word which he cast to Mary the virgin." But the Spirit mentioned in the Koran is not identical to the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. Since Islam denies the Trinity, it does not accept the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. Yet pioneer missionary to Muslims, Dr. Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952) believed the Koran's description of Jesus as the "Word of God" and "The Spirit from God" offer "the greatest hope for leading Muslims into the depth of the (Christian) faith."

### **The Virgin Birth**

Popular talk-show host Larry King was once asked whom he would choose, if he had the choice to interview one person across history. He

replied that he would like to interview Jesus Christ and that he would ask Him just one question: "Are you indeed virgin born?" The answer to that question," said King, "would explain history for me." Jesus Christ, the virgin born Son of God, did change history. The virgin birth is a crucial Biblical doctrine. We confess with the ancient Apostles' Creed that we believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary."

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Muslims also believe in Jesus's virgin birth. Furthermore, Islam tradition does not only teach the immaculate conception of Mary, but also of her mother. The annunciation as told in the Koran bears many similarities to the Biblical narrative. The Koran says: "And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above (all) the women of creation. O Mary! Be obedient to the Lord, prostrate thyself and bow with those who bow (in worship)...O Mary! Lo! Allah giveth glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary....She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when

no mortal hath touched me? He said: so (it will be). Allah createth what He will. If He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! And it is. And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel." ( Surah iii: 42f.;45-48)

But from this Koranic version of the virgin birth, we cannot derive the deity of Christ. Muslims focus on His humanity, His creaturely nature. Surah iii: 59 clearly stress this point: "Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him out of dust, then he said unto him. Be! And he is." Ravi Zacharias comments in his book *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message* that Islam, while defending the virgin birth, has never been able to break free from a contradiction of its own making on the matter of Jesus' sonship. And he points out that if Muslims have already granted the virgin birth, then they have acknowledged that God, in His infinite power, can initiate life without sexual union.

### **Jesus' Deity Denied**

What do you think of Christ? This is still the question that decides our personal destiny and that of the nations of the world. While admitting Jesus' dignity, sinlessness, miracles, and presence in heaven, He remains in Islam no more than a human prophet. For a Muslim the very idea that God can have a son is anathema or simple blasphemy. The Koran declares:

"So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not "Three"—Cease! (it is) better for you! - Allah is only one God. Far is it removed

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from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son. His is all that is in the heaven and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender.” (Surah iv:171)

In Islam Muhammad is more prominent than Jesus. Zwemer observes:

“The sin and guilt of the Mohammedan world is that they give Christ’s glory for another, and that for all practical purposes Mohammed himself is the Moslim Christ....(Jesus Christ) is supplanted in the heart of all Moslims by Mohammed. They are jealous for his glory and resist any attempt to magnify the glory of Jesus Christ at the expense of Mohammed.”

### The Cross

The missing link in Islam is the Cross. Christians glory in the cross of Christ for His death is the believing sinners’ gain. But this core truth of the Gospel is denounced by the Koran. Yet the crucifixion event itself is not denied. What it does deny is the crucifixion of Christ.

Islam claims that the Jews were not able to crucify Christ. They were deceived, and mistaking someone else for him, they crucified that person. No details are given of how the Jews were deceived about Christ. The Koran says: “ And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger. They slew him not nor crucified

but it appeared so unto them; and lo! They have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain.” (Surah iv: 157) On the basis of this text, Muslim commentators teach that Christ did not die on the cross. They suggest that either Judas Iscariot or Simon of Cyrene was substituted at the last moment.

As for Jesus, Allah came to the rescue and saved Him from His enemies. Although the crucifixion is denied, some passages in the

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***The Gospel of faith and grace alone is for the Muslims a great stumbling block. It is kept from them behind a veil of prejudice and misunderstanding.***

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Koran refer to the death of Jesus. He is supposed have said: “Peace on the day I was born, and the day I die, and they say I shall be raised alive!” (Surah xix:33) Why do Muslims reject Jesus’s crucifixion? Because they don’t see the need for the sin-bearing-death of Christ on the cross.

They even believe that they give greater glory to God by denying the possibility of the crucifixion. Each human being has to pay for his/her own sins. The Koran states: “Each soul earneth only on its own account, nor doth any laden bear another’s load. Then unto your Lord is your return and He will tell you that wherein ye

differed.” (Surah v1:165) Kenneth Cragg summarizes the reasons for Islam’s rejection of the crucifixion in this terse statement: “There is the historical denial of its actuality, the moral refusal of its possibility and the doctrinal rejection of its necessity.”

### The Goodness of Human Beings

Why are Muslims so vehemently denying the death of Christ? Because they believe in the basic goodness of man. Zwemer, a convinced Calvinist, judged Islam as a religion of works, a faith without a concept of grace, a human search for God, and without hope. In other words, a Muslim can never sing:

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

The Muslim scholar Ismai’il R. Al Faruqi declared that in the Islamic view human beings are no more “fallen” than they are “saved.”

Because they are not fallen, they don’t need salvation. And he adds, “They need to do good works—which alone will earn them the ‘desired’ salvation..They are not helpless puppets capable of neither good nor evil. They are capable of both. To ‘save’ themselves is their pride and glory.” The Koran reveals an optimistic view of human nature. It says:”So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religions as a man by nature upright -the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created



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man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation."(Surah xxx: 30).

### Original Sin

Islam rejects the Biblical doctrine of original sin. Why is there salvation if all people are born as true Muslims, innocent, pure and free? No human being is born a sinner; sin is not hereditary. It is neither transferable nor communal in nature. Sin is neither acquired nor inevitable. Each human being has a free will to choose right or wrong, and is capable to turn to the right, to do good, and to please Allah. His innate goodness enables him to obey the law.

No one can count the number of sinners from the day of Adam's creation up to the present. How can we know the number of their sins? How then can the supposed death of Jesus atone for all their present and past sins? "In Islam," writes Muhammad Asad, "we know nothing of Original sin; we regard it as incongruent with the idea of God's justice; God does not make the child responsible for the doings of his father; and how could He have made all those numberless generations of mankind responsible for a sin of disobedience by a remote ancestor?...And if there is no hereditary sin, there is also no universal redemption of mankind in the teachings of Islam. Redemption and damnation are individual. Every Muslim is his own redeemer; he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure within his heart." But the Bible teaches a different path - the way of the cross. (Cf. John 14 :6).

### Conclusion

The Gospel of faith and grace alone is for the Muslims a great stumbling block. It is kept from them behind a veil of prejudice and misunderstanding. We may not remain silent and hide the treasures of the Gospel in the safe confines of home and church. How do we reach Muslims with the Gospel? Our calling is not to give them more information about Jesus, but to introduce them to the

Christ of the Scriptures -the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, crucified on Calvary's cross, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and returning in glory.

**The Author** of this article writes under the alias of "Dick Wunnink" due to past threats received from the Islam community when writing about this subject.

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