

Single or Double Track Theology?



Herman Hoeksema

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I.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PROF. KUIPER'S ARTICLE

*Emeritus Professor R. B. Kuiper has a very long article in *Torch and Trumpet* in which he discusses the present controversy in the Christian Reformed Church occasioned by the articles in the *Reformed Journal* written by Professor Harold Dekker and Dr. Henry Stob, the former on the love of God to all men, the latter on the theme that God hates no man.

However, he devotes several paragraphs to a discussion of the well-known "common grace" controversy and criticizes my and the late Rev. Danhof's view on the subject of "common grace." Our view is "single track theology," implying, of course, that the only proper conception (which is also and emphatically so Professor Kuiper's) is "double track theology." And he accuses me of rationalism and absolutism.

This cannot be left unchallenged. And, therefore, I intend to offer my criticism of the article of Professor Kuiper and his "double track theology."

First of all, I will present a brief outline of the article. He writes under the theme, "Is the Glory Departing?" By the "glory" he refers to the glory of the Christian Reformed Church, and that "glory" consists especially, as the whole article shows, in the double track theology of which Kuiper is one of the chief champions. In his article he starts out by referring to the well-known biblical narrative of the priests, Hophni and Phinehas and their taking the ark into the camp of the Israelites, the result of which was that the ark was taken by the Philistines. And when the wife of Phinehas, who was pregnant, heard of this, she gave birth to a premature son and, dying, she called his name Ichabod, expressing that the glory had departed from Israel.

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 39, no. 18 (July 1, 1963), pp. 412-414.

Now, Kuiper hastens to explain that he does not mean to say that the glory has departed from the Christian Reformed Church, but he raises the question nevertheless.

He then explains that the glory of the Christian Reformed Church is its *theology* and that its theology is eminently *biblical*. Scripturalness is the essence of the theology of the Christian Reformed Church.

In the next paragraph, he briefly reviews the Arminian controversy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Kuiper characterizes Arminianism as universalism, and universalism, according to him, is based not on Scripture but on human logic. But the fathers of Dort must have nothing of this. They were convinced that both doctrines (predestination and the sincere offer of salvation to all men) were taught in Scripture. And to this they adhered.

Next, Prof. Kuiper discusses the “common grace” controversy. The issue in 1924 concerned again the question of particularism and biblical universalism. Danhof and the undersigned surely believed and taught the truth of salvation by sovereign grace. But they denied scriptural universalism. But thus they subjected Scripture to human logic. They adhered to a “single track” theology. They destroyed certain scriptural paradoxes. “In short, in their interpretation of Scripture, they failed to subject finite and faulty human reason unreservedly to the divine logos.” He is well aware, evidently, that I vehemently would and do deny such insinuations, for he writes that I “would resent any and all of the foregoing statements.” And he asks the question, “Yet, are they not true?” My answer to this question is an absolute NO!

But let me not now criticize. At present it is my purpose simply to acquaint our readers with what Kuiper writes.

He further mentions, without quoting them, the notorious “Three Points” adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924. He even admits that they are not beyond criticism. Nevertheless, according to him, Synod upheld the doctrine of common grace “without detracting in the least from the historic Reformed doctrine of special or saving grace.” I ask: is this true? For an answer to this question the reader must wait till I offer my criticism.

After this long and very untrue criticism directed at me, occasioned perhaps by the fact that I wrote, in my articles on Prof. Dekker’s view, that if the matter ever came before Synod, he could always appeal to the First Point of 1924, he, Kuiper, comes to the present controversy in the Christian Reformed Church.

He introduces this matter by a paragraph under the heading “Our Present Plight.” In this paragraph he asks several questions, which, however, all amount to the same thing, namely, that we must always subject our human logic to the whole of Scripture, even if Scripture presents what Kuiper calls “complementary truths,” but which I would designate as flat contradictions. And, by the way, I do not believe that the Bible ever contradicts itself.

But of this later.

In a following paragraph, Kuiper briefly mentions the subject of the “infallibility” of Scripture. This subject was discussed, as most of us know, at the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1959. In this paragraph, however, he expresses doubt as to whether or not there is still “discord among us on so basic a doctrine as scriptural infallibility.”

Next, Kuiper briefly discusses the articles of Prof. Dekker in the *Reformed Journal* on the subject, “God So Loved—All Men.” He mentions in this connection the following items:

1. The conception of Dekker’s universal love in relation to the atonement of Christ is not scriptural, or to quote him verbally, “did not excel in scripturalness.”

2. Dekker, as well as Hoeksema, “obviously ... employ the same logic” with regard to the conception of the love of God, even though they fundamentally differ.

3. He quotes from the *Canons* to show that God’s love for the elect is not the same as His love for the reprobates. Writes he: “In reality there is nothing strange about the fact that many reject the gospel. The depravity of the human nature fully explains it. The wonder is that not *all* men do so. And that is a wonder indeed. It is a wonder of divine grace.” Here he quotes the *Canons* once more as well as some scriptural passages.

4. Nevertheless, Kuiper contradicts the immediately preceding when he quotes from Berkhof and H. J. Kuiper that God’s love is one. This, indeed, is also the contention of Prof. Dekker. But this, according to Kuiper, is a mystery: “That there is a mystery here need not be denied. In studying the transcendent and incomprehensible God we are beset by an unfathomable mystery.” Kuiper forgets that we are not studying and never can study God. We are dealing with God *as He has revealed Himself in His Word*. Indeed, the Word of God deals with profound mysteries. But a *biblical* mystery is something quite different from a contradiction, which is the meaning of the term in Kuiper’s article. But about this later.

Kuiper briefly sums up what he wrote on Dekker’s conception of the love of God in the following paragraph:

Professor Dekker errs in emphasizing scriptural universalism, as expressed in the universal and sincere offer of the gospel, to the detriment of scriptural particularism, as summarized in the five points of Calvinism, notably, limited atonement and efficacious grace.

Now Professor Kuiper devotes some space to “Dr. Henry Stob on God’s hate.”

As our readers know, Prof. Stob denies that God hates any man.

Kuiper, first of all, asks the question: where does Stob get his definition of hate? Certainly not from Scripture, for the Bible clearly teaches that God hates certain persons.

However, Kuiper fundamentally *agrees* with Prof. Stob, for he claims that God loves all men. He differs from him in that he proposes that God also *hates* the same persons whom He *loves*. Writes he: “The Bible tells us that God hated Esau ... It also tells us that God loves all men, Esau of course included.” This, of course, is another mystery. Stob cannot accept this, because, like Hoeksema, he employs human logic, and, like Hoeksema’s, his exegesis is marred by absolutism. But we shall see later about this.

In another section of his article, Kuiper speaks of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. By this he does not mean that God takes delight in the damnation of the non-elect as he does in the salvation of the elect; nor that He effectuates the damnation of the reprobate as he does the salvation of the elect; but that the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate are equally certain—both are unalterably determined in God’s eternal counsel. To deny this is a serious departure from the truth. Perhaps Kuiper refers to such views as those of Weidenaar.** This is also taught in Calvin College and no one takes action against it, not even Kuiper.

Another paragraph tells us that some in the Christian Reformed Church are of the opinion that love is the all controlling attribute of God in distinction from His justice. In this connection Kuiper writes: “May God keep us from Modernism. To say the very least, we are in peril of

** Prof. John Weidenaar was a theologian in Calvin College who taught that reprobation is not an eternal decree in God's counsel, but that it is in time. Moreover, he taught that reprobation is not sovereign on the part of God so that He determines who is to be reprobated, but that it is in man's power: in the way of his sin he *becomes* reprobate; in the way of sin he finally commits the unpardonable sin. For more on this, see *Standard Bearer*, vol. 39, no. 15 (May 1, 1963), pp. 340-342.

incipient Modernism.” But while Kuiper knows all this, does he do anything about it? He does not, except that he discusses it.

Again, another error in the Christian Reformed Church consists, according to Kuiper, in the denial of the kingship of Christ in every sphere of life. Writes he: “Am I wrong in surmising that there is an inclination among us to distinguish between two areas, the one under the direct rule of Christ, the other religiously neutral, and to seek to justify that limitation of the rule of Christ by an appeal to the fact of common grace?” But I would also ask a question: Am I wrong in declaring that, principally, all these errors in the Christian Reformed Church find their cause in the decisions made by the Synod of Kalamazoo 1924 and in the pernicious Three Points? My answer is emphatically *No!*

The rest of the article is of little significance. First, Kuiper mentions the student paper, *Stromata*, become notorious in connection with the infallibility question. And finally, he has a paragraph on “Of Babes And Theology,” and he concludes with the following paragraph:

Such is the glorious heritage of the Christian Reformed Church. Shall we not maintain it uncompromisingly? Shall we not in complete loyalty to the Word of God seek to augment it? Shall we not with holy zeal impart it unsullied to others? God grant that we may do all that in deep humility, as mere babes.

Next time I hope to begin my criticism, the Lord willing.

H.H.

II.

LOGIC? OR EXEGESIS?

*We were discussing, in our last *Standard Bearer*, the articles in *Torch and Trumpet* by Emeritus Professor R. B. Kuiper on the theme, “Is the Glory Departing?”

First of all, I wish to make a few remarks on this theme which is put in question form.

1. In the first place, when Kuiper speaks of the glory of the Christian Reformed Church, he refers to his “double track theology.” He does this, too, in distinction from our so-called “single track theology.” Evidently, according to him, also Arminianism believes in a single track theology, but their theology is false universalism.

2. What is meant by “double track” theology? First of all, according to him, it means that the theology of the Christian Reformed Church is eminently *scriptural*. It is *biblical*: “Its scripturalness is the essence of the theology of the Christian Reformed Church.” Of course, this does not mean much, for all heretics say the same thing. Arminianism also appeals to the Bible to prove the freewill of man and the will of God to save all men. The Baptists, too, quote Scripture for their denial of infant baptism. In other words, the statement that the “scripturalness” of the theology of the Christian Reformed Church is the essence of the theology of the Church stands itself in need of proof. In the second place, according to Kuiper, the “scripturalness” of the double-track theology of Kuiper consists in this: that, on the one hand, it teaches the sincere offer, on the part of God, to all men without exception. On the one track of Kuiper’s theology runs the train of sovereign grace and election and reprobation, while on the other track runs the train of what Kuiper calls “biblical universalism.” This is, indeed, a paradox or rather a profound mystery, but

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 39, no. 19 (Aug 1, 1963), pp. 436-437.

Scripture teaches both and, therefore, we must accept it. Human logic denies this, in fact, cannot possibly accept it; but faith always bows before the Word of God. I will come back to this presently.

3. But, secondly, since 1924 the glory has indeed departed from the Christian Reformed Church. This is my answer to the question which Kuiper makes the theme of his article in *Torch and Trumpet*. Even if we understand by the theology of the Christian Reformed Church Kuiper's "double track theology," this is true. Many, if not the majority of the Christian Reformed people and ministers do not care one whit for Reformed theology and doctrine. This is evident from many facts, both doctrinal and practical, such as the question concerning the infallibility of Scripture, the question concerning the universal love of God to all men the question concerning divorce, the question concerning membership of the worldly unions and even of the lodge. The Christian Reformed Church is no longer interested in the truth, specifically in Reformed truth; it is much rather interested in becoming big, large membership, and big buildings. And it is very worldly-minded. And I claim that all this has become the case especially since the Synod of 1924 that adopted the "Three Points" and the theory of "common grace." Besides, it adopted not only the Kuyperian version of "common grace," but also its Arminian form. This is the reason why Prof. R. B. Kuiper has no ground to stand on in his criticism of Prof. Dekker. Dekker teaches that God loves all men; Kuiper teaches the same thing. Does not the "First Point" literally express that "there is a *favorable attitude* of God to *humanity in general* and not only to the elect"? What is the difference between God's *favor* and His *love*? There is none. Besides, the Second and Third Points afford ample ground for the co-operation of the church and the world, for they teach that through the common grace of God sin is so restrained that the world and the unbelieving reprobate can do much good. And, therefore, I maintain that especially since 1924 the Christian Reformed Church has departed from the truth and from the way of the truth, both doctrinally and practically, and I answer the question which Kuiper makes the theme of his article in *Torch and Trumpet* with an unqualified *YES*: the glory has indeed departed from the Christian Reformed Church. But now let us proceed.

As I mentioned in my former article on this subject, Kuiper discusses the error of Arminianism, which, according to him, is universalism, and this is based, not on Scripture, but on human logic. Of this (of human logic instead of Scripture), the fathers of Dort must have

nothing. They believed, to be sure, in predestination, but also in the sincere offer, on the part of God, of salvation.

On this I wish to make the following observations:

1. According to Kuiper, while the Remonstrants base their doctrine on human logic, the fathers of Dort base their doctrine on Scripture no matter how the Scriptures may apparently contradict themselves. The latter (namely, that the Scriptures, as far as we can see, imply a contradiction when, on the one hand, they teach unconditional election and reprobation, while, on the other hand, they maintain the sincere offer of salvation) is what Kuiper teaches.

But is it true that the Remonstrants base their doctrine on “human logic”? I do not believe it.

Let us quote, for instance, the first article of the Remonstrants. It reads as follows:

That God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost shall believe on his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and the obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as alienate from Christ, according to the word of the gospel in John 3:36: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him,” and according to other passages of Scripture also.

Is this based on mere “human logic”? Their logic may be faulty as far as their interpretation of Scripture is concerned, but it surely is not based on mere human logic, but on the *Scriptures*, as is evident from the text they quote at the end of this article.

The *Canons* disagree with the first article of the Remonstrants, not because it is based on logic (for they themselves use logic, and, naturally, reason logically), but because the Remonstrants present a *wrong interpretation of Scripture*. Say they in *Canons* I, 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 15:15. “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, 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.

This, to my mind, is logic based on the Word of God.

And listen further to the logical definition which the *Canons* give, on the basis of Scripture, of the decree of election in I, 7:

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he has, 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.

Is not this logical reasoning without any expressed or implied contradiction, and reasoning that is based on the Word of God, as will be evident if we read further in the same article of the *Canons*?

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 them 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.

All this is, indeed, logical. It is a logic that is based on Scripture. For it is Scripture itself. And there are no contradictions in the Bible, as Kuiper would have it. It is not a question of logic, still less of contradictions in Scripture. It is, therefore, not true that Arminianism is logical, or based on logic, while Reformed truth is illogical. The truth is never contradictory. No human mind can grasp contradictions. But the truth is a question of exegesis or interpretation of Scripture.

But of this next time, the Lord willing.

H.H.

III.

“SCRIPTURAL PROOF” FOR THE FIRST POINT (I)

*“Single track theology” is a theology that, while it is based on Scripture, at the same time applies the rules of logic, exegetically, to all its principles. It proceeds from the sound supposition that Scripture itself is logical and that there are no contradictions in the Word of God.

On this presupposition I have always labored and explained the Word of God.

“Double track theology,” on the other hand, which is Kuiper’s, proceeds from the supposition that there is a fundamental contradiction in Scripture, which, although we may never be able to explain it, we must nevertheless accept by faith. On the one hand, there is the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God, the truth of election and reprobation; on the other hand, however, there is also the doctrine that God, in His love to all men, seriously and well-meaningly offers salvation to all men: He wills that all men shall be saved!

The latter is the doctrine of Arminius; the former is the doctrine of R. B. Kuiper and also of Prof. Dekker. In other words, Kuiper pretends to believe both: Arminianism and the Reformed truth.

But Kuiper contends that the fathers of Dort, in the *Canons*, teach the same thing.

2. And, therefore, the question is: Is this true? And my answer is: By no means.

It is true that the *Canons* use the word “offered.” They do this in III, IV, 9, which reads as follows:

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ, offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel, and confers upon them

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 39, no. 20 (Sept 1, 1963), pp. 460-461.

various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the word, refuse to come and be converted: the fault lies in themselves; some of which, when called, regardless of their danger, reject the word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression upon their hearts; therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the word, by perplexing cares, and the pleasures of the world, and produce no fruit—This our Saviour teaches in the parable of the sower. Matt. 13.

What, we ask, is the meaning of the word “offer” as used in the *Canons* at this place?

As Kuiper uses it, and also as it is used in the First Point of 1924, it denotes:

a. That God, on His part, is willing and eager that all who hear the gospel should be saved.

b. That, therefore, He causes the gospel to be preached to them. This preaching of the gospel is motivated by love and grace on the part of God.

c. That, in this preaching of the gospel, God “offers” Christ to all. He, as it were, extends His hand to all the hearers, and in this hand are all the blessings of salvation. He wants all to take those blessings. But if they refuse, He can do nothing more about it: they are lost. This is what Kuiper teaches. If this is not his interpretation of the term “offer,” I wish he would let me know, for it is not my purpose to misrepresent him.

However, this is not the teaching of the *Canons*. The term “offer” in this article of the *Canons* simply means “to present,” nothing more or less. In the gospel or in the preaching of the gospel, Christ is “presented” to all the hearers.

And to be sure, by nature they can and will surely reject that presented Christ as is also explained in that very article of the *Canons* in which the term “offer” occurs, but by nature they will never (and they can never) accept Him. How, then, it is possible that God, on His part, sincerely, and in love, to all without distinction and without exception, “offers” Christ in the sense in which Kuiper would explain the term? Does God mock the sinner? Be it far from us even to make such a suggestion!

But this surely is not the meaning of the *Canons*!

In general, and emphatically so in the *Canons*, the Reformed confessions teach the following:

a. God, from all eternity, predestinated a people in free and sovereign love. Them, and them only, He chose in Christ from before the foundation of the world. He chose them, and them only, unto eternal glory and that, too, through the deep way of sin and death and grace.

b. For them, i.e., in their stead as well as in their behalf, Christ came into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh. He took all the sins of the elect upon Himself and for these sins He suffered all His life but especially on the accursed tree. By His suffering and death He fully satisfied for all the sins of the elect upon Himself and for these sins He suffered all His life but especially on the accursed tree. By His suffering and death He fully satisfied for all the sins of the elect and theirs only, so that in Him they have the right to everlasting righteousness and glory.

c. But there is more, and there must be more. For if God merely “offered” all the blessings of salvation and did nothing more, no one would ever be saved: for they would all reject the proffered salvation. But Christ did not only die. But He was also raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, was exalted at the right hand of God and received the Spirit. Through that Spirit of Christ and by the Word preached in the gospel, the elect and they only, are irresistibly and efficaciously called into the fellowship of Christ through the bond of faith, are justified, sanctified, and ultimately glorified.

d. All this is, according to Scripture and the Reformed confessions, absolutely sure. If they were left to themselves, they would surely perish; but now, by the same efficacious grace, they are preserved and through the power of this divine grace they will persevere unto the end.

e. It follows, and is certainly in harmony with Scripture and the Reformed confessions, that the preaching of the gospel is, neither in God’s intention, nor in actual fact, a mere “offer” of salvation in the sense in which Kuiper would have it, nor is it *grace* to all the hearers. But it is, and is intended to be, grace for the elect and for the elect only.

Kuiper may call this “one track theology,” but it is nevertheless the only theology Scripture and the Reformed confessions know and support.

First of all, I will refer to Scripture, and I will explain those texts to which Kuiper and also the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924 refer.

The first of these texts to which Kuiper refers, although he does not interpret, but rather lets Calvin explain it, is the well-known passage from II Peter 3:9. But before I go into this I must needs quote from the context of Kuiper’s article in *Torch and Trumpet* to prove that he very really teaches such a conception of the “offer of salvation to all that hear the preaching of the gospel” as stands in irreconcilable conflict with the truth

of sovereign grace or with the doctrine of predestination, election and reprobation. He writes:

However, that was not the entire picture (Kuiper is writing about Arminianism, HH). A significant phase of a radically different kind of universalism, scriptural universalism, also came into purview. The Arminians contended that the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination cannot possibly be harmonized with the universality and sincerity of the gospel offer. They argued that, if God decreed irrevocably from eternity that only certain persons would be saved and that all others would be lost, it is inconceivable that God would in all sincerity invite all men without discrimination to eternal life. Therefore, embracing the latter doctrine, they rejected the former. And they told the Calvinists that, in case they held the former, they would by all rules of logic have to renounce the latter. From the viewpoint of finite human reason the Arminians were right. Thus the Calvinists confronted a strong temptation. Did they yield? By the grace of God they did not. They subjected human logic to the divine logos. Convinced that the two doctrines concerned were both of them unmistakably in the infallible Word of God and therefore in reality could not be contradictory, they accepted both uncompromisingly.

Now, I could wish that Kuiper would have quoted the Arminians particularly about their basing their doctrine on human logic rather than on the Word of God. As it stands now, we simply have to take his word for it.

But what I wanted to point out is that Kuiper's doctrinal train runs, indeed, on a double track and that, while on the one track runs the doctrine of predestination and on the other that of a sincere offer of salvation, the two doctrines are in irreconcilable conflict with each other. Kuiper claims that they are not contradictory for there can be no contradictions in Scripture, but this is a mere statement without any support.

And now the text in II Peter 3:9.

As I already mentioned, Kuiper does not explain this passage himself, but quotes the interpretation of Calvin. In brief Calvin explains this text as referring, not to the hidden, but to the revealed will of God. In other words, according to the so-called secret will of God, all men are not saved and are not intended to be saved; but, according to the revealed will of God, as in this text, God does, indeed, not will that any man should perish, but that all should be saved. I beg to differ with Calvin on this

interpretation. The distinction between the secret and revealed will of God is false, for the simple reason that also the so-called “hidden” will of God is *revealed*. It is true, of course, that there are many things in regard to the counsel of God that are not revealed: the number of the saved, who will be saved, the day and manner of one’s death, etc. But the fact that God wills not that all men should be saved and that some must perish (i.e., the counsel of predestination, election and reprobation) does not belong to the hidden but to the revealed will of God.

As to the text in II Peter 3:9, the following:

1. There are in the main three different interpretations of this passage of Scripture:

a. There is the explanation that makes this text of universal application. God, as far as He is concerned, wills that every human being shall be saved. For this reason He gives to every man abundant opportunity to come to repentance. This is the interpretation of all Arminians.

b. Secondly, there is the explanation that finds in this text an expression of the revealed will of God. According to the secret will of God’s decree, He does not will that all men should be saved, but according to the revealed will of God He does will that all come to repentance and should be saved. These two wills of God we cannot harmonize, neither do we need to harmonize them; we accept them by faith. This, as we have seen, is Calvin’s explanation. And Kuiper agrees with him.

c. Thirdly, there is also the interpretation that explains the word “all” in the text as referring to the elect only, the people of God. God is longsuffering over His people: He will not let the end of the world come until all the elect, all the people of God, are brought into the kingdom and are saved. This is the interpretation of men like Dr. A. Kuyper Sr.

Let us investigate this text and see which is the correct interpretation.

H.H.

IV.

“SCRIPTURAL PROOF” FOR THE FIRST POINT (II)

*We were interpreting the well-known text of II Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

According to the context, there were those, whether in the church or outside, that mocked at the people of God when they looked for the coming of the Lord and the final realization of the promise. They had, apparently, a good argument on which to base their contention that the Lord would not come again; all things remain as they were from the beginning. And to this the apostle replied, in the first place, that this contention is not true: things did not remain as they were from the beginning, for the flood intervened. Before the flood, the elements of destruction encompassed those who at that time mocked the people of God on all sides, namely, water. The same is true, secondly, with regard to those that mocked at the people of God at the time of the apostle Peter: the elements of destruction were round about them, for the heavens and the earth that are now are full of the very fire that will destroy them at the time of the coming of the Lord.

But the apostle is not writing to these mockers, even though he writes about them, but he is addressing the *church*. The church longed for the coming of the Lord; and they, the church, expected Him soon. And seeing that the Lord appeared to tarry, the cutting satire of the enemy impressed some of them. To these the apostle gives a twofold answer. The first is based on the Lord’s eternity. He is not bound to time; a thousand years for Him is as one day, and one day is as thousand years. The second deals with God’s work in and for the church. God is longsuffering over

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 39, no. 21 (Sept 15, 1963), pp. 484-485.

His people; He does not want that any of them should perish, but that every one of them should come to repentance. When every one of them has been saved, the Lord will surely fulfill His promise.

When the text is thus read and explained in the light of its context, it will be evident that it cannot teach that God wills that all men shall be saved.

But let us now look a little more closely at the text itself.

The main idea of this passage is, no doubt, expressed in the words: “the Lord is not slack concerning his promise ... but is longsuffering to us-ward.”

What is longsuffering?

We must remember that the early church was filled with an earnest and fervent longing for the coming of the Lord. They expected that He would come soon. And when it seemed as if He tarried, they, or at least some of them, considered that the Lord was slack concerning His promise.

This the apostle denies and instead he explains that the Lord is longsuffering with regard to His people.

Now we must not confuse longsuffering with forbearance. The latter term in Scripture is used with regard to the vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction, the former with respect to the people of God, the vessels of love. The vessels of wrath are the wicked, who provoke God with their wicked deeds and thoughts. The idea of forbearance is that, if the Lord followed His desire, He would destroy the wicked immediately, but they must first serve their purpose. When the purpose of their existence is reached, He sends them to their eternal destruction. Till then He *forbears*. We may say, therefore, that God restrains His wrath till the day of reckoning. There is no love in forbearance.

Longsuffering, however, is motivated by love over His people. Thus it is in the text which we are interpreting here. Thus it is also in Luke 18:7, 8, where we read: “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” The clause, “though he bear long with them,” is a wrong translation. It should be “though he is *longsuffering* over them;” (Greek: *makrothumei*, Dutch: *lankmoedig*). The same word is used in James 5:7, where we read: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth and hath *long patience* (*is longsuffering*; Greek: *makrothumoon*) for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.” The people of God suffer in this world, and they long for deliverance. And the Lord loves them; He, as it were suffers with them. If the Lord followed

the desire of His heart, He would lead them into glory. But this cannot be. Things must all be ready. They must be ripe. Even as the husbandman longs to cut the corn and gather it into his barns, but must wait till it is ripe, so the Lord restrains, as it were, the impulse of His love until all is ready.

And what is the *reason* for His longsuffering? Many reasons might be mentioned according to Scripture. The measure of iniquity must first be made full. The kingdom of antichrist must first be realized. The man of sin must first be revealed in all his power. But here only one reason is mentioned: God does not will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

What does this mean? That is the question. According to Kuiper, and also according to Dekker, the “not any” and “all” refer to all men without distinction. This is the Arminian theory. The text then means that God, on His part, wills that all men should be saved. This, however, contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture which emphasizes that God, according to election and reprobation, wills that only the elect shall be saved while the reprobate perish. Besides, the people of God, over against the mockers of the day and time of which the apostle speaks and over against the mockers of any time, longed and long for the coming of the Lord. But if this coming must wait till all men are saved the Lord will never come.

This Arminian theory assumes many forms; but principally it always comes down to the same thing: *the rejection of the truth of reprobation*. There is, of course, the most recent theory of Karl Barth: Christ is the reprobate; He took reprobation upon Himself, and, after His death on the cross, there is no more reprobation. There is the theory that God wills not that all men shall be saved according to the will of His counsel or His so-called secret will, but according to the gospel, or His revealed will, He, nevertheless, wants all men to be saved. Then we have two Gods. In actual fact, this is also a denial of reprobation. Or there is the theory that speaks of the will of command and the will of God’s counsel. Also this, in the practice of preaching, comes down to the same thing: the denial of reprobation.

But what does the text say, the text in II Peter 3:9?

Note the following:

1. The text in the original does not say “all men,” but simply “all.” It must, therefore, be determined from the text itself, in its context, who are included in this “all.”

2. The text says that God is longsuffering “to us-ward.” Who are they? Surely, not the mockers. And surely not all men. The apostle is writing to the *church*, the people of God. They and they only are included in the phrase “to us-ward.”

3. It is very plain, therefore, that, when in the last part of the text the apostle writes “not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance,” the words “any” and “all” refer to the same number of people as the “us.”

4. Hence, it is perfectly proper and according to the meaning of the text to explain the last part of the text as meaning: “not willing that any *of us* should perish, but that all *of us* should come to repentance.” And therefore, the text does not refer to all men without distinction, but to the people of God, i.e., the elect.

And this is in harmony with the entire context. Indeed, this is logic, of which Kuiper, apparently, must have nothing. But it is logic based on Scripture.

* * * * *

Two other passages that are supposed to teach, not only the theory of so-called common grace, but also that God loves all men, are Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11.

The former passage reads as follows: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways and live?” And in the latter passage we read: “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

Now, the question is: do these passages teach a sincere and well-meant offer of salvation to all men, or that God loves all men without distinction?

I do not believe it, for the following reasons:

1. In the first place, neither of these passages speak of an offer at all, an offer of salvation which must, of course, be accepted by men in order to be realized. If man does not want to accept the offer, God can do nothing about it. I just happened to hear, the other day, a sermon by Mr. Billy Graham over the radio, in which he strongly emphasized this very heresy. Man, according to this sermon, was created with a will and that will is sovereign: God never touches it or interferes with it. Salvation is offered to that man, but he must accept it, otherwise God cannot save him.

He forgot two things. The first is that, after the fall, man is free only to do evil. He cannot and will not and cannot will to accept any offer of salvation. The second is that grace is always first, and that the grace of God is not resistible ... But, apart from this, the texts in Ezekiel do not even mention such an offer. They merely contain emphatic statements, on the part of God, that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but He delights in the fact that the wicked turn and live. This He even swears, according to the text in Ezekiel 33.

2. Secondly, note that in both the texts of Ezekiel, the Lord does not address all men, but the house of Israel. And that house of Israel is the church of the old dispensation. Also this Billy Graham and he that finds in these texts of Ezekiel a general well-meant offer of salvation to all men without distinction forget. In the old dispensation the church was limited to only one nation, the nation of Israel. It is, therefore, not all men and not all the wicked, but *His own people* whom He assures of His forgiving mercy.

3. Thirdly, the context in both cases and especially in chapter 33, plainly reveals that the texts are an answer to the complaint of the people of God that their case is hopeless and they must needs die and cannot live. Say they: "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" They, evidently, were conscious of their sin, and felt that they were worthy of condemnation. They did not see a way out. To them the texts in Ezekiel 18 and 33 are an answer. There is abundant mercy in God: for He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in this is His delight: that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. 'Therefore, let them turn, and they shall live.

4. Finally, perhaps you say that the wicked, nevertheless, must turn, in order to live, and this is certainly true. But do not forget that, if they do turn, this is the effect of the grace of God. Of themselves they can never turn, but rather die in their sins. But when the irresistible grace of God, through the Holy Spirit, and by the efficacious calling, through the Word, is wrought in them, they surely turn. This calling, as far as the preaching and the word of the prophet is concerned, comes to all that hear the word, elect and reprobate, but it is efficacious unto salvation only in the elect.

H.H.

V.

THE SYNOD OF DORT & JOHN CALVIN

*The trouble with those that hold a double-track theology is that they claim that they are Reformed and, at the same time, they also agree with the doctrine of Arminianism. When the train of their doctrine runs on the one track they are Reformed; when, however, it runs on the other, they are Arminian. They claim that they believe the doctrine of predestination, election and reprobation, but they also defend and hold the error that God loves all men, as Prof. Dekker does: God wants and desires to save all men.

An example of this double track theology, which attempts to be Reformed and, at the same time, agrees with Arminianism, I find in the article by Prof. Kuiper in *Torch and Trumpet*, we are now discussing, May-June, page 9. I will quote the entire paragraph:

However, that was not the entire picture. A significant phase of a radically different kind of universalism (scriptural universalism) also came into purview. The Arminians contended that the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination cannot possibly be harmonized with the universality and sincerity of the gospel offer. They argued that, if God decreed irrevocably from eternity that only certain persons would be saved and that all others would be lost, it is inconceivable that God would in all sincerity invite all men without discrimination to eternal life. Therefore, embracing the latter doctrine, they rejected the former. And they told the Calvinists that, in case they held to the former, they would by all the rules of logic have to renounce the latter. From the viewpoint of finite human reason the Arminians were right. Thus the Calvinists confronted a strong temptation. Did they yield? By the grace of God they did not. They subjected human logic to the divine logos. Convinced that the two doctrines concerned were

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, no. 1 (Oct 1, 1963), pp. 4-6.

both of them taught unmistakably in the infallible Word of God and therefore in reality could not be contradictory, they accepted both uncompromisingly.

Here, then, you have an illustration of the double track theology, according to which both the Arminians and the Calvinists are right. According to the Arminians, God does in all sincerity invite all men without discrimination to eternal life. This is the one track. According to the Calvinists, God did not want to save all men, but only some. But the fathers of Dort accepted both, Arminianism and Calvinism.

And Prof. Kuiper also attempts to prove that the fathers of Dort taught both these doctrines. First, he proves that God wants to save, not all men, but only some. He does this by the article of the *Canons of Dordrecht* that speaks of reprobation (I, 15). And, further, he quotes from *Canons*, III, IV, 8, which reads as follows: “As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in his Word, what will be acceptable to him, namely, that all who are called should come unto him.” Thus far Kuiper quotes. But the article itself continues as follows: “He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.”

Now, I would ask Prof. Kuiper whether he really believes that all “who are called” are the same as all men. I would like to ask him whether he seriously believes that God desires all men, without discrimination, to come unto Him. Thirdly, I would like to ask him whether the fathers of Dort in this article of the *Canons*, really taught that the promise of eternal life is for all men or, at least, for all that hear the preaching of the gospel. Or is it not true that “as many as shall come to him and believe” refers to the elect only?

Did not the fathers of Dort condemn the doctrine of those who teach: that “the difference between meriting and appropriating,” is used

to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching that God, as far as he is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace[?]

This and this only is what the fathers of Dort maintained to be the truth.

The *Canons* surely do not teach “that the Calvinistic doctrine cannot possibly be harmonized with the universality and sincerity of the gospel offer.” They do, indeed, maintain that God “decreed irrevocably from eternity that only certain persons would be saved and that all others would be lost,” but they do not teach “that God would in all sincerity invite all men without discrimination to eternal life.”

Nor did Calvin teach this.

It is true that Calvin wrote very much, and I do not always agree with his interpretation of Scripture. But he certainly does not teach that God indiscriminately invites all men unto eternal life.

To prove this I will quote a few passages from *Calvin's Calvinism*. He writes (pp. 50-51):

Pighius will himself confess that there is need of illumination to bring unto Christ those that were adversaries to God; but he, at the same time, holds fast the fiction that grace is offered equally to all, but that it is ultimately rendered effectual by the will of man, just as each one is willing to receive it. Christ, however, testifies that the meaning of his words is very different from this. He adds immediately afterward, “There are some among you who believe not. Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father” ...

On pp. 81ff. Calvin writes:

Now let us listen to the Evangelist John. He will be no ambiguous interpreter of this same prophet Isaiah. “But though (says John) Jesus had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him, that the saying of the prophet might be fulfilled which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He bath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts,” etc. Now, most certainly John does not here give us to understand that the Jews were prevented from believing by their own sinfulness. For though this be quite true in one sense, yet the cause of their not believing must be traced to a far higher source. The secret and eternal purpose and counsel of God must be viewed as the original cause of their unbelief. It perplexed, in no small degree, the ignorant and weak, when they heard that there was no place for Christ. John explains the reason by showing that none believe save those to whom it is given, and

that there are few to whom God reveals his arm. This other prophecy concerning “the arm of the Lord,” the Evangelist weaved into his argument to prove the same great truth. And his words have a momentous weight. He says, “Therefore they could not believe.” Wherefore, let men torture themselves as long as they will with reasoning the cause of the difference made—why God does not reveal his arm equally to *all*—lies hidden in his eternal decree. The whole of the Evangelist’s argument amounts evidently to this: that faith is a special gift of God and the wisdom of Christ is too high and too deep to come within the compass of man’s understanding. The unbelief of the world therefore ought not to astonish us, if the wisest and most acute of men fail to believe. Hence, unless we would elude the plain and confessed meaning of the Evangelist, that few receive the gospel, we must fully conclude that the cause is the will of God, and that the outward sound of the Gospel strikes the ear in vain until God is pleased to touch by it the heart within.

Perhaps Prof. Kuiper will say that he fully agrees, yet, at the same time, he also maintains that God in all sincerity invites all men to eternal life.

But this is quite impossible. For Calvin, in his explanation of the text in John, insists that, under the preaching of the gospel, God hardens the hearts of the reprobate and blinds their eyes so that it is impossible for them to believe. And in the last sentence quoted, Calvin states that the sound of the gospel is vain unless God by it touches the heart.

But what about Ezekiel 18:23? I have already offered my own interpretation of this well-known text. But how about Calvin’s interpretation?

Pighius remarks in connection with this passage:

What else is this but making God a mocker of men, if God is represented as really not willing that which he professes to will, and as not having pleasure in that in which he in reality has pleasure?

But Calvin answers as follows (pp, 99-100):

But if these two members of the sentence be read in conjunction, as they ever ought to be—“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” and, “But that the wicked turn from his evil way and live”—read these two propositions in connection with each other, and the calumny is washed off at once. God requires of us this conversion or “turning away from our iniquity.” And in

whomsoever he finds it He does not disappoint such an one of the promised reward of eternal life. Wherefore God is as much said to have pleasure in, and to will, this eternal life, as to have pleasure in the repentance; and He has pleasure in the repentance, because He invites all men to it by His Word. Now all this is in perfect harmony with His secret and eternal counsel, by which He decreed to convert none but His own elect. None but His own elect, therefore, ever do turn from their wickedness. And yet, the adorable God is not, on these accounts, to be considered variable or capable of change, because, as a Law-giver, He enlightens all men with the external doctrine of conditional life. In this primary matter He calls or invites all men unto eternal life. But, in the latter case, He brings unto eternal life those whom He willed according to His eternal purpose, regenerating by His Spirit, as an eternal Father, His own children only ... It is quite certain that men do not “turn from their evil ways” to the Lord on their own accord, nor by any instinct of nature. Equally certain it is that the gift of conversion is not common to all men ...

Now, one may not entirely agree with this interpretation of Ezekiel 18:23 by Calvin. But this is not the point. The point is that he finds no contradiction, not even a seeming or apparent contradiction, between this passage of Scripture and the counsel of predestination.

The external calling, through the preaching of the gospel, comes, indeed, to all that hear, but without the internal calling by the Spirit of God, regenerating the heart, this external calling is worse than vain; it is a savor of death unto death. And this is, too, according to God’s purpose.

Such is the teaching of Calvin.

H.H.

VI.

“SCRIPTURAL PROOF” FOR THE FIRST POINT (III)

*There are still some texts which Prof. Kuiper quotes in his article which I must briefly discuss.

The first of these is Matthew 5:43-45. On this Kuiper writes:

To state the matter briefly, they taught that God loves only the elect and, proceeding from that basic tenet, they made several denials. In spite of such a passage, among others, as Matthew 5:43-45, where citizens of the kingdom are commanded to love their enemies in order that they may prove themselves children of the heavenly Father, who does that very thing, they denied that there is in God an attitude of favor toward the non-elect.

Now, the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924 also quoted the text as a proof that God is gracious to the wicked as well as to the righteous. It is too bad that the Synod merely quotes without even attempting to explain it. And the reader may find an interpretation in my book, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. In view of the fact, however, that many of our readers do not have this book, I will quote from it here.

I wrote as follows:

If the Synod’s interpretation of this text were the correct one, it would prove far too much and, besides, it would lead to absurdity. It is deplorable that the Synod merely quoted without even an attempt at explanation, otherwise it would soon have discovered how untenable this position is that in these verses we have a proof that God is gracious to all men. The interpretation which, evidently, Synod would offer runs as follows:

- a. We must love our enemies.

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Oct 15, 1963), pp. 28-29.

b. If we do, we will be children of God and reflect His love, for He loves all His enemies, as well as the good, in this present life.

c. This love of God is manifested in the rain and sunshine on all without distinction.

Of this interpretation we assert that, first, it proves too much, and, secondly, that it leads to absurdity and is untenable. It proves too much, for all the Scriptures witness that God does not love but *hates* His enemies and purposes to destroy them, except them that He chose in Christ Jesus, and not as His enemies, but as His redeemed people, justified and sanctified in Christ. God does indeed love His enemies, but not as such, but as His children in Christ. And it leads to absurdity, for if rain and sunshine were a manifestation of God’s *love* to all men, the just and the unjust, what are floods and droughts, pestilences and earthquakes, and all destructive forces and evils sent to all through nature, but manifestations of His *hatred* for all, the just and the unjust? But it is absurd to say that God hates the just, for He loves them. It is also absurd to say that God changes, now loving the just and the unjust, and manifesting this love in rain and sunshine, now hating them and revealing His hatred in upheavals and destruction. Hence, the interpretation that leads to this evident absurdity is itself absurd.

Besides, it must not be overlooked that the text does not at all state that God is *gracious* to the just and to the unjust, but He sends rain and causes His sun to shine on all.

How then must the text be interpreted?

We must take our starting point from vs. 44. The Lord admonishes His people that they shall love their enemies. Now, love is not a sentimental feeling or affection. It is, according to Scripture, the bond of perfectness. It is, therefore, the bond between two parties or persons that are ethically perfect, that seek each other and find delight in each other because of their ethical perfection, and that, in the sphere of ethical perfection seek each other’s good. It is in this true sense that God is love.

However, it stands to reason that, in the case of loving our enemies, that despitely use us, curse us and persecute us, love must needs be onesided. There cannot be a bond of fellowship between the wicked and the perfect in Christ. To love our enemy, therefore, is not to flatter him, to have fellowship with him, to play games with him and to speak sweetly to him, but rather to rebuke him, to demand that he leave his wicked way and thus to bless him and to pray for him. It is to bestow good things upon

him, walk in the light and thus to have fellowship with him. If he heed our love, which will be the case if he be of God's elect, and receive grace, he will turn from darkness into light and our love assumes the nature of a bond of perfectness. If he despises our love, our very act of love will be to his greater damnation. But the cursing and persecution of the wicked may never tempt the child of God to live and act from the principle of hatred, to reward evil for evil, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

As a single illustration from actual life and experience, the Lord points to the fact, that God rains and causes His sun to shine upon the just and upon the unjust alike, thus bestowing good things upon them all, demanding that they shall employ them as means to walk in righteousness and light. For with God is delight in perfection in the highest sense of the word. If now the wicked receive *grace* with rain and sunshine, they will walk in the light and have fellowship with God. If they do not receive grace they will employ the rain and sunshine in the service of sin and receive the greater damnation.

But rain and sunshine is never *grace*, and Matthew 5:44, 45 does not prove the contention of the first point.

This was my interpretation of this passage several years ago, and in the main, I still agree with this explanation.

Prof. Kuiper also mentions the text in Luke 6:33: "If ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for also sinners do even the same." This passage is quoted, not so much to prove that God loves all men, but to show that natural men are able to do good works through the power of common grace, something which, ever since 1924 and even before that, we deny.

But let us see.

Of course, it stands to reason, as I remarked before and more than once, we may never quote a single passage from Scripture all by itself, for then we can make Scripture prove almost anything. Always we must quote and explain a certain text in its immediate context as well as in the context of the whole Bible.

Now, the main question in this connection is whether sinners or natural men do good. And this brings up the further question: what is good?

The immediate context reads as follows:

But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe

unto you that laugh! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless them which curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smites thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke, forbid not to take away thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be children of the highest, for he is kind to the unthankful and evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is also merciful.

Now the question which we must answer is: What is good and what good do sinners, that is, the wicked and ungodly reprobate, do?

These questions I would answer as follows:

1. Negatively, the text does not say that the wicked or sinners—natural men—do good. I am referring now, first of all, to vs. 33, the text that is quoted by Prof. Kuiper. The very contrary is true. For the text plainly states that sinners do good to those that do good to them. They do not do good to all their fellowmen. In other words, their doing good is pure selfishness. They do no good before God. They do not do good to please God. They do not even do good in the natural sense of the word. The so-called good they do they do not even do to help or to please their fellowmen. They seek and please themselves. This is corroborated in the entire context. Sinners, natural men, love those that love them (v. 32). They lend to those from whom they receive again, vs. 34. They do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, nor those that belong to Him and walk in His ways. On the contrary, they hate them, they curse them, they despitefully use them, they smite them on the cheek, they take away their goods (vv. 25-30).

Now, would you say that the text in Luke 6:33 means that sinners do good? O, it is true that the Lord Jesus literally says they “do good,” but do not forget the Lord adds that they do good *only to those that do good to them*.

Also this text was quoted by the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924, as a would-be proof for the Third Point, and also this text I explained in my book, *The Protestant Reformed Churches*. There I wrote as follows:

But does not the text from Luke 6:33 plainly state that sinners do good?

On the contrary, it plainly states that they do no good. That Synod could quote passages such as this only proves how desperately hard pressed they were for even a semblance of evidence for the truth of the third point. It appears that in quoting this text the learned committee that presented their report to the Synod on this matter were led astray by the mere sound of the word *good*, and without even seriously reading the text, they concluded that here they had, indeed, found indubitable proof for the theory that the wicked can do good. What does the text teach? That sinners can do good? That there is an influence of the Holy Spirit upon them by which they are somewhat improved? To be sure there is not the slightest reference for these gross errors in the text. The Lord does not declare that sinners do good. It does not even state that they do good to man. Still more, He does not assert that they do good to one another. What it does state is that they do good to them that will reward them with good, that they love those that love them. And what is this? Is it good? No, it is mere selfishness of the sinful man. And the Lord uses their examples to warn His disciples not to do good in like manner. I suppose that the more earnest minded of the synodical delegates, looking back upon 1924, are ashamed of themselves that they could be led astray by the mere sound of words!

The positive idea implied in the text of Luke 6:33, taken in its entire context, I must discuss in our next editorial, D.V.

H.H.

VII.

WHAT IS GOOD?

*This editorial is a continuation of the article I wrote on Luke 6:33. I wrote the first part under number “1” as the negative part of my interpretation. Now I explain the positive part under number “2.”

The question is:

First: what is good?

Secondly: what good do sinners do?

As to the first question, the answer, in general, is: Good, in the true ethical and spiritual sense of the word, is that which is in harmony with the law of God. Nothing else is good. Besides, to answer the question “*what is good?*” we must not simply refer to the Ten Commandments, which are almost entirely negative, but we must consult the principle of the law to which our Lord Jesus Christ refers in answer to a question asked of Him by a lawyer. We may find this in Matthew 22:34-40:

But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying: Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

This is also the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Introducing “The Third Part—Of Thankfulness,” the *Catechism* teaches in Question and Answer 86:

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, no. 3 (Nov 1, 1963), p. 52.

Since, then, we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image, that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof, and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.

And in Lord's Day XXXIII, Question and Answer 91, the *Catechism* defines good works as follows:

But what are good works?

Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory, and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.

Such, then, is the teaching of the *Catechism* in answer to the question: what is good? Nothing is good except that which is performed from the root of faith, because only by faith can we love God; by nature we hate Him. Nothing is good except that which is in harmony with the law of God, because the law, principally, demands that we love God. Nothing is good, except that which is consciously performed to the glory of God.

All the rest is sin and nothing else.

But not only the *Catechism*, but also the *Netherland (Belgic) Confession* confesses the same truth. I will quote a few excerpts from Article 24 of this *Confession*:

Therefore it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that, on the contrary, without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation ... which works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by his grace ... For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good.

Also in this article of the *Confession* it is stated clearly that nothing is good that does not spring from the root of faith, unless we would call that good which is motivated by “self-love or fear of damnation.”

Of course, also the *Canons* speak, in chapters III & IV of the good that natural man can do, or rather of the fact that he can do no good whatsoever.

It is true, as I have said before, that the learned committee of the Synod of 1924 also quoted from the *Canons* to prove that the natural man can do good. They quoted from *Canons* III & IV, Art. 4. It is striking that, whether innocently or purposely (I think the latter), they quoted only the first part of the article. In the first part, the *Canons* speak of the remnants of natural light by which the natural man has some regard for virtue, good order in society, etc. But in the rest of the article it plainly condemns the theory that, even with this natural light, the natural man can do good. For there we read:

... But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, that he is *incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil*. Nay further, *this light such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness*, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.

Can the natural man do good?

Not according to the *Canons*.

H.H.

VIII.

THE “RESTRAINT OF SIN”

*It is high time that we return to our discussion of the article written by Prof. R. B. Kuiper under the caption, “Is the Glory Departing?”—written in *Torch and Trumpet*, May-June, 1963.

In our last article on this subject we were discussing the question whether the natural man, the sinner, can do good, especially in the light of the text in Luke 6:33, which was quoted by Kuiper.

On this we have a few more comments.

Kuiper himself refers in this connection to the still notorious “Three Points” of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of 1924.

Writes he:

Evidently the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, foregathered at Kalamazoo, so judged. Under the able leadership of such theologians as Professor Louis Berkhof and Dr. Clarence Bouma, it weighed the theology of these brethren in the balances of Scripture and found it wanting. Over against the denials noted above, Synod affirmed the so-called Three Points of Common Grace. To be sure, it did not claim to have said the last word on that subject. Nor is the formulation of the Three Points beyond criticism. In *To Be Or not To Be Reformed?*, published by Zondervan in 1959, I suggested some possible improvements. Others have done likewise. But exceedingly significant is the fact that Synod upheld the doctrine of common grace without detracting in the least from the historic Reformed doctrine of special or saving grace. In a word, the Synod of Kalamazoo, like the famous Synod of Dort, came through with flying colors. By insisting on the principle of *Scriptura tota* (the whole Scripture, H.H.) as well as on the principle of *Scriptura sola* (Scripture only,

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, no. 6 (Dec 15, 1963), pp. 124-126.

H.H.) it upheld the glory of the Reformed faith and incidentally the glory of the Christian Reformed Church.

So, the glory of the Christian Reformed Church is: 1) the doctrine that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel to all that hear it. And 2) that the natural man can do good.

Some glory!

This last point we are still discussing in connection with the article of Kuiper.

Let us, first of all, remind ourselves of the "Second Point" of Kalamazoo, 1924.

It reads as follows:

Relative to the second point, which is concerned with the restraint of sin in the life of the individual man and in the community, the synod declares that there is such a restraint of sin according to Scripture and the Confession. This is evident from the citations of Scripture and from the Netherland Confession, Art. 13 and 36, which teach that God, by the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin, by which human life in society remains possible, while it is also evident from the quotations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, that from ancient times our Reformed fathers were of the same opinion.

Now, it is not our purpose to offer a complete discussion and criticism of the "Three Points" in general or of the "Second Point" in particular. For this I may refer the interested reader to my book, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*.

Seeing, however, that Kuiper accuses me of distorting Scripture by human logic and that he claims that he and the Christian Reformed Church want the whole of Scripture and Scripture only, and that the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924, in this respect came through "with flying colors," we will briefly examine the quotations from Scripture which the aforesaid Synod adduces to prove this Second Point.

First of all, however, we must briefly explain what the Second Point teaches.

I call attention to the following:

1. It does not teach:
 - a. That God holds in His power all the wicked and ungodly and controls their deeds by His providence. We all believe that.

b. That God also restrains the ungodly and wicked *mediately* as, for instance, by occasions and circumstances, by their place and position, by their own fears and ambitions, by the power of the state, etc. We all believe that.

2. But it does teach:

a. That there is an inward restraint upon the mind and will of the natural man whereby some good is preserved so that he is not so depraved as he would otherwise be.

b. That this restraining operation is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart and mind of the natural man.

c. That this restraining operation of the Holy Spirit is not regenerating.

d. That this restraining operation of the Holy Spirit is such that sin is checked in such a way that a remnant of his original righteousness is constantly preserved.

e. That this remnant of original righteousness of the natural man includes such important elements as receptivity for moral persuasion, receptivity for the truth, good motives, good inclinations and desires, etc.

All this the Christian Reformed Church holds to be the truth. All this Prof. Kuiper, too, believes. All this we reject, not by human logic, but on the basis of the Word of God, of the whole Word of God, and also on the basis of our Reformed confessions.

And now we will turn to the scriptural proof which Synod 1924 adduces to substantiate the second point.

The first text quoted is Genesis 6:3. There we read: “And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man.”

According to the Synod of Kalamazoo, and according to Kuiper, although they do not offer any exegesis, this text means that God so restrains sin in the heart and mind of the natural man that he is improved and is capable of performing much good.

But this is an impossible interpretation for the following reasons:

1. Because, in that case, God and His Holy Spirit would then have suffered defeat: for God attempted to restrain sin in the heart and mind of the ungodly, but in spite of this, wickedness developed very fast.

2. In spite of the restraint of sin by the Holy Spirit, the wickedness of the prediluvian world had so far developed that they, in about sixteen hundred years, had become ripe for judgment.

3. The context militates against this interpretation. In verse 5 we read: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil

continually." How could this be if the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts and minds of the natural man continually?

What, then, is the meaning of the text? What is the sense of the word "strive"? Did God strive by an inward operation of the Holy Spirit to check the power of sin in the heart and mind of the ungodly? Let Scripture speak. In Jude 14-15 we read: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all. And convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

How, then, did God strive with men in the prediluvian world? The answer is: *through His Word as it was spoken by Enoch*. To be sure, also through His Spirit, but not in order to "restrain sin," but to make the Word spoken by Enoch powerful and to *harden their hearts*.

I feel rather sure that Prof. emeritus Kuiper will agree that this is the true interpretation of the text. If he has any other explanation, I wish he would let me know. Even Prof. Berkhof, who taught me exegesis in Calvin Seminary, would, I am sure, if he were still in the flesh, agree with me about this interpretation of Genesis 6:3.

Five other texts the 1924 Synod of Kalamazoo quoted to prove that God restrains sin. They are: Psalm 81:11-12, Acts 7:42, and Romans 1:24, 26 and 28.

It is very evident that these passages prove the very opposite from what Synod intends to prove: they all say that God gave the ungodly over to their lusts, desire and wickedness. It is clear, however, that Synod, instead of properly exegeting these passages, applied human reason and thus came to the conclusion that they prove that God restrains sin by the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of the wicked, the natural man. I could put it in the form of a syllogism as follows:

1. God gave the ungodly or natural man over unto unrighteousness.
2. This means that God ceased from restraining them any longer.
3. It follows that, before God gave them over, He restrained, by the power of the Spirit, sin in the hearts and minds of the natural man.

But let us, for a moment, see whether this is the true interpretation of the texts quoted.

I will not attempt to explain all the passages quoted, but will limit myself to the passage from Romans 1:18-23.

The text reads as follows:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and to fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

We have to take some of the others with the above quoted passage, because they speak of the Lord's giving the ungodly over to their own lusts.

Thus in verse 24: "God *gave them over* unto uncleanness"; in verse 26: "God *gave them up* unto vile affections"; in verse 28: "God *gave them up* unto a reprobate mind.

I briefly make the following remarks:

1. The people to whom the apostle refers in these verses, even all natural men, knew God from the revelation in creation, yet they did not want Him: they glorified Him not as God.

2. For this reason, not any form of common grace, but, the *wrath* of God was revealed from heaven, and that, too, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

3. It is evident from the immediately preceding that this wrath of God was revealed *from the beginning of the world*, as long as there were ungodly men who always hold the truth in unrighteousness. There never was a time when, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, sin was restrained.

4. How was the wrath of God revealed from heaven? Does God ever restrain sin? Not at all. According to the above quoted verses the very contrary is true: in His wrath He always punishes sin by *plunging the sinner into deeper corruption*. He "gave them up" to uncleanness (v. 24); He "gave them over" unto vile affections (v. 26); and to a reprobate mind (v. 28).

5. Hence, according to these verses, there never was an operation of the Holy Spirit whereby God restrains sin in the heart of the ungodly.

I could write much more about this, but let this be sufficient.

How the Synod of 1924—and that, too, under the leadership of such men as Berkhof—could ever commit the foolishness to so distort the above-mentioned section of the epistle to the Romans as to make them teach the very opposite of what they do teach, is a mystery to me.

I cannot believe that Prof. Kuiper, who admits that he believes in the Three Points, subscribes to this corruption.

H.H.

IX.

“CIVIL RIGHTEOUSNESS” DEFINED

*Kuiper, emeritus Professor of Calvin Seminary, believes that the notorious Three Points of Kalamazoo belong to the glory of the Christian Reformed Church even though they can be improved.

Thus far we have briefly reviewed the scriptural grounds on which they are supposed to be based, but we did not finish this discussion. We must still examine the proof for the Third Point.

This Third Point reads as follows:

Relative to the third point, which is concerned with the question of civil righteousness as performed by the unregenerated, Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confessions, the unregenerated, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. This is evident from the quotations of Scripture and from the Canons of Dordrecht, III, IV, 4, and from the Netherland Confession Art. 36, which teach that God, without renewing the heart, so influences man that he is able to perform civil good; while it also appears from the citations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, that our Reformed Fathers from ancient times were of the same opinion.

This Third Point speaks of civil good.

Now it is well to note that also the undersigned had written about the same subject, and that, too, before the Synod of 1924 had convened. I had done so in my pamphlet *Langs Zuivere Banen* (Along Straight Paths).

I wrote as follows:

And what, then, is civil righteousness? According to our view, the natural man discerns the relationships, laws, rules of life, and fellowship, etc. as they are ordained by God. He sees their propriety and utility. And he adapts himself to them for his own

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, no. 7 (Jan 1, 1964), pp. 149-150.

sake. If in this attempt he succeeds, the result is an outward and formal resemblance to the laws of God. Then we have civil righteousness, a regard for virtue and external deportment. And if in this attempt he fails, as is frequently the case, civil righteousness disappears, and the result is exactly the opposite. His fundamental error, however, is that he does not seek after God, nor aims at Him and His glory, even in this regard for virtue and external deportment. On the contrary, he seeks himself, both individually and in fellowship with other sinners and with the whole world, and it is his purpose to maintain himself even in his sin over against God. And this is sin. And in reality his work also has evil effects upon himself and his fellow creatures. For his actions with relation to men and his fellow creatures are performed according to the same rule and with similar results. And thus it happens that sin develops constantly and corruption increases, while still there remains a formal adaptation to the laws ordained of God for the present life. Yet, the natural man never attains to any ethical good. That is our view.

Now, what is wrong with this?

And why did the Synod of Kalamazoo actually condemn this?

My answer is: the Synod wanted to maintain that natural man can perform what is positively good in the sight of God!

H.H.

X.

AN ATTACK ON THE JUSTICE OF GOD!

*In my last editorial on the above-mentioned subject, I mentioned that in the “Third Point,” the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924, wanted to maintain that the natural man performs that which is positively good in the sight of God.

On this I would like to elaborate a little.

Please do not say that I write too much on this subject. Do not forget that, according to Kuiper, it belongs to the glory of the Christian Reformed Church that they adopted and still maintain the “Three Points.” In the second place, remember that the reason why we are Protestant Reformed lies exactly in the fact that, while the Christian Reformed Church maintains the “Three Points,” we as Protestant Reformed Churches *reject and condemn* them with all our heart. Finally, do not imagine that the question concerning the “Three Points” is a minor question; for this is not true at all. These points express something about God and man: about God they declare that His grace is general or universal; and about man that he is not totally depraved, but can do much good. Over against this the Protestant Reformed Churches maintain that the grace of God is particular and concerns only the elect; while about the natural man they confess that he is totally depraved and can do no good whatsoever.

I am well aware that the Christian Reformed Church does not express it the way I do it in the above lines. They would make the distinction between common and special grace, and they would make the distinction between natural and spiritual good. But to us that makes no principal difference. We emphasize that God hates the reprobate wicked and that the natural man always sins and is totally depraved.

And now we will continue our discussion of the “Third Point.”

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, no. 8 (Jan 15, 1964), pp. 172-173.

We may say that the “Third Point” contains the following erroneous elements:

1. It makes separation between good and good—between *natural* and *spiritual* good, between good before *men* and good before *God*. The “Third Point” declares that the natural man is incapable of doing any saving or spiritual good, such as believing in Christ, conversion, walking in the law of the Lord, etc., but that he is capable of doing much good in the sphere of his natural life. In other words, he is able to do good, even though he is totally corrupt and depraved. An act of the natural man may not be (and is not) rooted in faith, may be worthy of eternal damnation, and yet be pleasing in the sight of God.

2. In close connection with the preceding, stands the fact that, although the Christian Reformed Church, in the abstract, confesses to believe the doctrine of total depravity, in reality they deny it. They profess to believe that only those are good works that proceed from a true faith, are done according to the law of God, and are done to the glory of God. That is the confession of our *Heidelberg Catechism* in question and answer 91, and it adds, negatively, that those are not good works that are based on our own imagination or on the institutions of men. But although this is their formal and official confession, they do not believe and apply it in their practical life. And not only this, but they also officially deny this confession concerning the works of the natural man in the Third Point. In other words, although they profess to believe that the natural man is totally depraved, in actual reality there are no such totally depraved men. All men can do good works, according to the Third Point.

3. But strange to say, these good works of the natural man, have no reward. The reason for this seems to be, according to the exponents of “common grace” and the defenders of the “Three Points,” that, after all, these so-called “good works” of the natural man or of the ungodly, are not *his* works, but they are really the works of the *Holy Spirit*. Say, for instance, that an ungodly man sees that a child falls in the water and is on the point of drowning, and he rescues it; would we not say that this is a good work? The answer is, of course, in the affirmative. But is there no reward connected with this good work? “No,” say the defenders of the “Three Points.” But how can this be explained? The answer is that this good or any civil good is really not done by the natural man, but by the Holy Spirit: “If man were left to himself he would not be able to perform even this civil good ... For this reason the natural good does not entitle

man to any claim of reward” (Berkhof, *The Three Points In All Parts Reformed*).

This is a very strange doctrine indeed.

To be sure, also the *believer* in this world performs good works, and that he does so is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. But in this case, the Spirit radically changes the heart of man. And even then He does not leave him alone but, from the heart, He influences his whole life, his mind, and will. But even so, if the *believer* performs good works, it the *believer himself*, and not the Spirit, that performs them. He does so from the motive of the love of God.

But, according to the doctrine of the second and third points, the natural man may and does perform the same good works as the believer; he does, moreover, perform those good works also under the influence of the Holy Spirit; but now it is, after all, not the natural man that performs those works, but the *Holy Spirit* is the subject of them all. And, therefore, he receives no reward! And, what is worse, *because* of these very works which the Holy Spirit performs through him, he will be damned for ever!

Is it possible that a natural man can perform any good work of which, not he, but the Holy Spirit is the subject?

O, it is true that our Lord speaks of those that say “Lord, Lord,” that claim that they have prophesied in His name, have cast out devils, and have done many wonderful works, and to whom, in the day of judgment, the Lord will say: “I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22-23). But even this does not mean that it is not they, but the Holy Spirit, that performed those works. The very words they use, as they address the Lord in that day, proves the opposite. But, according to Berkhof, the natural man would not be able to perform civil good if he were left to himself, i.e., without the influence of the Holy Spirit; and because they are not his own, there is no reward connected with his good works.

4. In conclusion, I wish to state that the result of the teaching of the third point is, of course, that the doctrine of total depravity as taught in Scripture and the Reformed confessions is forgotten and denied. In theory, the natural man is depraved; but in reality he is, indeed, a very good man. And there is a good deal of harmony between the righteous and the wicked; much concord is established between Christ and Belial.

* * * * *

Hence, briefly, I would raise the following objections against the Third Point:

1. It presents the difference between good and evil as *relative*. It lowers the standard of what is ethically good and, to a large extent, obliterates the distinction between righteousness and unrighteousness, between light and darkness. The definition which the *Heidelberg Catechism* offers of what is good is not applicable anymore. According to it, as we said before, only that is good which proceeds from a true faith, is done according to the law of God, and to His glory. All the rest is sin. Surely, the so-called “good” of which the third point speaks has no place in this definition. The authors and exponents of the “Three Points” speak of a relative good and a relative evil. Prof. Berkhof speaks of a good that is relatively sinful and of sin that is relatively good. He condemns as absolutism the view that occurs in our confessions that the natural man can only sin and actually sins at all times and in all that he does.

This view of relativity with respect to morality and ethics is certainly pernicious. It creates a sphere in which Christ and Belial may live together in brotherhood. The antithesis is obliterated. The church is swallowed up by the world. The worldly unions are maintained. Presently, we will also confront the question: why is it necessary to maintain separate Christian schools, seeing that the world is so good?

2. The third point makes God the author and the cause of sin. Remember that, according to the third point, it is not the *natural man* that performs the so-called good works which he is supposed to do, but the *Holy Spirit* is the author of them. The Spirit of God so influences the corrupt nature of the unregenerated man that, in his case, the evil tree brings forth good fruit. The Spirit does not penetrate into the *heart* of the natural man. The heart remains corrupt. Yet God so influences the corrupt *nature* of the sinner, i.e., his will and his thoughts, his desires and his affections, that, with a heart filled with enmity against God, he performs many good works. The Spirit, as it were, *forces* the natural man to do good. Nevertheless, his so-called good works are all sin. That is why I wrote a moment ago that the third point makes God the author of sin.

3. The third point is guilty of moral determinism. It destroys the freedom of man as a moral agent. Man, the natural man, is no moral agent at all in performing the good which he does. This is the reason, too, why he can lay claim to no reward for the good work he does. For, do not forget that by the operation of the Holy Spirit, by which he performs the so-called

good works which he performs, the heart of man is not renewed. He is still dead in trespasses and sins. He is still incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. If he were left alone, he would do only evil. Hence, the Spirit *compels* the natural man to do good, though his heart is not in it at all. The Spirit, therefore, is the real author of the so-called good works of the sinner: the latter is a mere tool. Thus the moral character of man is destroyed, his responsibility is denied, and the theory of moral determinism is presented as Reformed truth!

4. In the fourth place, I object to the third point on the ground that it is contrary to the justice of God. Briefly, the justice of God consists in this, that it always rewards the good with good, and, on the other hand, punishes evil with evil. Now, according to the third point, the natural man performs much good in this world. It is true, that, according to the philosophy of the third point, the natural man himself does not perform this good, but the Holy Spirit does it for him and through him. He is really not the subject of the good works he performs. Nevertheless, according to all outward appearances, he is a good man, and he does many good things. The justice of God would require that he would receive a reward for the good works he performs. But he does not receive any reward whatsoever. The third point, therefore, is an attack on the justice of God.

You will say that the arguments I raise against the third point are sophistical. Let it be. But if this be the case, it is only because the *third point itself* is sophisticated. What else is the third point, as it teaches that the natural man does much good in this world which, nevertheless, is no good at all, but pure sophistry?

H.H.

XI.

“SCRIPTURAL PROOF” FOR THE THIRD POINT

*We must still discuss the scriptural passages to which the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church refers as proof for the “Third Point”.

In another connection we already discussed the text in Luke 6:33. We will not repeat this here.

We must bear in mind that these passages are quoted (without any interpretation) to prove that the natural man can do good.

The texts to which Synod referred are the following:

II Kings 10:29, 30: “Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan. And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”

II Kings 12:2: “And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.”

II Kings 14:3: “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did.”

II Chronicles 25:2: “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.”

Romans 2:14: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:”

* This article appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, no. 10 (Feb 15, 1964), pp. 220-221.

Romans 2:13: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.”

Romans 10:5: “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.”

Galatians 3:12: “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.”

Now, what shall we say to these things?

What about Jehu? Does the text from II Kings, quoted above, prove that Jehu, under the influence of the Holy Spirit (cf. Second Point), received grace (common grace is, after all, grace) by which he ‘could do’ good?

This, after all, is the question. It is not the question whether Jehu was an able general, or whether he was zealous in the accomplishment of the task assigned to him. All this may readily be granted. Also today the natural man is often very able and ambitious. But the question is whether he did *good* in the moral, ethical sense of the word. That is a question of motive. And motive is a matter of the inner man, of the mind, of the will, of the heart.

The Christian Reformed Synod, in the Third Point makes a distinction between saving good and civil good. Let that be as it may, although I do not want to subscribe to the distinction. Any act of man is either good or evil, i.e., in the moral or ethical sense of the word.

Good is an act when it is motivated by the love of God and of men; evil an act when in its deepest root it is motivated by hatred of God and our fellow men. There is nothing else. There can be nothing else. Now, according to the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924, the unregenerate man can do what is called *civil* good. Hence, the Synod maintains that a man that is not motivated by the love of God and of the neighbor, who, in fact, in his deepest heart is motivated by enmity against God and against the neighbor, can do good. You may call it natural or civil good, to me that makes no difference—it is not sin, but “good,” in the moral and ethical sense of the word.

This I, and all Protestant Reformed people, deny.

To me, and to all of our people, an act of man is either good or it is sin.

But what, then, about Jehu?

Did not God Himself say that Jehu did well in executing that which was right in the sight of God?

Concerning this I make the following remarks:

1. Jehu was, according to Scripture, a wicked man. Before and after the statement that he had done well in executing that which the Lord had commanded him, we read that “from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel and that were in Dan.” Is it possible, then, that he could do anything good in the moral, ethical sense of the word? The answer to this question is and must be negative.

2. It is evident that Jehu was a very able man. As a soldier and general, he was courageous and undaunted in battle. He was thorough in all his work.

3. It is very evident from the entire narrative that Jehu saw in the command of God to extinguish the house of Ahab a golden opportunity to further his own cause, namely, that he might occupy the throne of Israel. That was Jehu’s sole ambition. And that was also the motive for all that he did. His motive was not and could not be the love of God. O yes, he did well. Perhaps, we may say that he belonged to those men that are mentioned in Matthew 7: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works?” No doubt, they did all these things. Jehu did the same things; he also did wonderful works. But what did the Lord say to them? He answered: “I never knew you: Depart from me, ye that work in iniquity.”

4. Moreover, for the very thing which Jehu did so well he was punished. For thus we read in Hosea 1:4: “And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel, for yet a little while and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.” Indeed, Jehu did very well in destroying the house of Ahab, but in doing so he was not motivated by the fear of the Lord, but his own wicked ambition. Hence, in doing well he sinned.

Hence, the text does not sustain the doctrine of the third point that the natural man is able to do good, civil or otherwise.

After this rather long elaboration of the example of Jehu, we can afford to be brief on what Scripture relates about Jehoash and Amaziah. These examples certainly do not prove that there is a gracious influence (“common grace”) on the part of God upon the natural man whereby he is able to do good, civil or otherwise.

1. As to Jehoash we read that he did right, not from the love of God, nor from the motive of a certain “common grace”; but he was under the influence of Jehoiada, the priest. And when the priest had died, the king, as is evident from the record we find of him in the second book of Chronicles, chapter 24, forsook Jehovah and became wicked.

2. To Amaziah applies the same thing. Of him we read, too, that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord (II Kings 14:3). Thus also in II Chronicles 25:2: “he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.” We must understand, in the first place, that this “right in the sight of the Lord” refers to that which he did as king, particularly, to certain reforms he brought about. But, in the second place, he did this “not as David his father,” and he did it not “with a perfect heart.” Whatever his motives may have been, he did it *not* from “a perfect heart,” not from the love of Jehovah his God and, therefore, whatever he did was not good, but was sin. That this is true is evident from what we read in II Chronicles 25:14ff: “Now it came to pass, after Amaziah had come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense before them.” And when a prophet of God came to rebuke him, he said to the prophet: “Art thou made of the king’s counsel? Forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten?”

I say again that the mere fact that a man can and does something right is no proof at all that so-called “common grace” restrains him from sin. On the contrary, at the same time that he does well, he sins against God.

We must still call attention to Romans 2:14, the text I already quoted above.

It seems that the Synod meant to teach, on the basis of this text, that the heathen are able to keep the law of God, and, in fact, that they do keep it. For it refers to Romans 2:13: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” And it also refers to Romans 10:5: “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” And once more, it refers to Galatians 3:12: “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.” Apply all this to Romans 2:14, and you get the teaching: 1) that the Gentiles are able by nature to keep the law of God; and, 2) that the Gentiles, doing the things contained in the law, shall be justified and live by the things of the law!

How the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924, could ever teach such evident heresy and such palpable contradiction of Scripture, I cannot understand.

If this were true, the heathen would be saved without Christ.

But this is not the meaning of Romans 2:14.

The very contrary is true. Nor is this the teaching of the Bible in general.

What, then, is the meaning of Romans 2:14?

Literally, the text, according to the original reads: “For when the Gentiles, having not the law, do by nature the things of the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.” And in verse 15, which really belongs to vs. 14, we read: “Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” What does it mean? The text certainly does not mean that the Gentiles keep the law, but it does mean that without revelation they do themselves what the law did for Israel. And what did the law do for the Old Testament people of God? The law distinguished, in the various departments of life, between what is good and what is evil: it is good to serve the true God, to keep the sabbath, to obey those that are in authority over us, to preserve the neighbor’s life, to live chastely, to speak the truth; on the other hand, it is not good to serve false gods, to desecrate the sabbath, to violate or go against authority, to kill, to steal, to swear a false oath, etc. Those are the things which the law did for Israel. And those are the things which the Gentiles did, in a general way, for themselves. In making laws for and unto themselves, they plainly revealed that they could distinguish between good and evil. But this surely does not mean that they kept the law even as far as they knew it. The law was not written in their hearts, but the *work* of the law. And having that work of the law in their hearts, they, nevertheless, transgressed the law. And thus they were without excuse in the day of the righteous judgment of God.

At any rate, it is not difficult for anyone to admit that this is the correct interpretation of Romans 2:14. And the Synod of Kalamazoo utterly failed to produce scriptural proof for the Third Point.

If Prof. Kuiper disagrees, I wish he would offer his own explanation.

H.H.

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