

**KEEPING THE
SWORD DRAWN**

BRIAN HUIZINGA

KEEPING THE SWORD DRAWN

OUR CALLING AS THE CHURCH
OF THE MILITANT CHRIST

2017 Evangelism Committee
Southwest Protestant Reformed Church

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

This booklet is published by the evangelism committee of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. One of the tasks of this committee is to sponsor lectures on behalf of the council and congregation of Southwest church. In 2016 the committee invited Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California, to present a lecture at a venue in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, area. Building upon a topic suggested by the committee, Rev. Huizinga prepared the lecture "Keeping the Sword Drawn: Our Calling as the Church of the Militant Christ." This lecture was delivered on September 30, 2016. Following the lecture, Rev. Huizinga received questions from the audience. Some of the questions were answered that evening, and the rest were answered on the website dedicated to this lecture.

The committee is also charged with the task of publishing and distributing Reformed materials. This is done by using various forms of media, including the printed page, the church's website (www.southwestprc.org), as well as CDs and DVDs. After Rev. Huizinga presented the lecture, the committee decided that it needed wider distribution in the form of a booklet. Rev. Huizinga agreed to provide a written the manuscript of his lecture, slightly expanded and including the questions and answers that followed the lecture.

The committee is thankful to God for the spiritual and intellectual gifts he has given to Rev. Huizinga and for his willing, faithful service in God's church.

These two tasks, sponsoring lectures and publishing materials, are assigned to the committee with two aims: first, that the truth of God's word as it is taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches might be disseminated widely; and second, that Southwest Protestant Reformed Church might become known in the local community. It is our prayer and confidence that Christ will use this booklet to accomplish his will in gathering, defending, and preserving his church.

Additional copies of this booklet, a CD or DVD of the lecture, and other Reformed materials can be requested by using the "contact" form at www.southwestprc.org, by sending an email to mail@southwestprc.org, or

by mail to Southwest Protestant Reformed Evangelism, 4875 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI 49418. A video recording of the lecture is available at the website, as well as some associated reading materials.

For the King, the militant Christ,
The Evangelism Committee of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church

INTRODUCTION

OUR MILITANT CHRIST

We must believe and confess the whole revelation of scripture; therefore, we must believe and confess that the Christ of the church is a militant Christ. In his tender mercy to his beloved church, and in his zealous devotion to his beloved Father, Jesus is a militant Christ toward his enemies, his Father's enemies, and his church's enemies.

Who can forget the story of wicked Balaam riding his donkey to go curse God's Israel? The donkey saw something Balaam did not see, and in fear the donkey went off the path into the field. Balaam smote her. There in the vineyard the donkey saw the same terrifying sight and thrust herself against the wall, crushing Balaam's foot. Again, Balaam smote her. The donkey kept walking through a very narrow place, and she saw the fearful sight yet again and fell down under Balaam. Again, Balaam smote her. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey and she demanded of Balaam an explanation for those three beatings. Finally, the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam so that he could see the terrifying sight that the donkey had seen: "he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee [or literally, "to be an adversary unto thee"], because thy way is perverse before me" (Num. 22:31–32).

The angel of Jehovah whom Balaam encountered was not a common angel, but Jesus Christ in his Old Testament, preincarnate manifestation. Walking in a perverse way, Balaam and his donkey saw the Christ of Israel—a militant adversary standing in the way with his sword drawn. The

New Testament Christ who is the Son of God incarnate is not essentially different than the sword-bearing angel of Jehovah in the Old Testament; therefore, the enemies of the church today see a militant Christ as they walk in their perverse ways. When the buyers and sellers of Jerusalem made the Father's house of prayer a house of merchandise, they saw a whip-brandishing militant Christ (John 2:15). When the Jewish leaders corrupted true religion and killed the prophets, they were confronted by the militant Christ deftly wielding the sword of his effectual word and thrusting them through with denunciations: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Ye fools and blind! Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23).

After the false prophets bring their "damnable heresies" into the church (2 Pet. 2:1), it is said that they "have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (v. 15). Therefore they must see what Balaam saw—the militant Christ with his sword drawn.

When the enemies of the church in the final manifestation of the kingdom of antichrist see Christ returning on the clouds of glory, they will see a militant Christ, for "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels," he will come "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," and they will "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:7–9).

Moreover, on that last day the enemies of Christ will hide "themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains" and say to the rocks and mountains, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15–17).

To the eyes of faith, no clearer revelation of the militancy of the Christ can be found than in his death on the cross and subsequent resurrection. It is exactly there at the cross that we see not only the supreme manifestation of his tender mercy to his church and his zealous devotion to his Father, but also his militancy toward his enemies. For when he was nailed to the cross to blot out the "handwriting of ordinances that was against us," he was actively spoiling the "principalities and powers," which are Satan and his hordes of demons, making a "shew of them

openly [and] triumphing over them” (Col. 2:14–15). The cross was war. The cross was victory.

When the aged and persecuted apostle John was on the isle of Patmos and “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” he beheld Jesus and fell to the ground as a dead man (Rev. 1:9–10, 17). *John* fell down. John—the beloved disciple, who at the last passover so tenderly and intimately reclined in the bosom of Jesus (John 13:23)—fell to the ground in fear and awe. John saw the glorified Christ of heaven. Not only were Jesus’ head and hairs “white like wool,” his eyes “as a flame of fire, . . . his feet like unto fine brass, . . . his voice as the sound of many waters,” and his face as bright as the noon-day sun, but “out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword” (Rev. 1:14–16). Right now in heaven, the glorified Christ is a militant Christ.

Was not Christ the one who said, when sending out his apostles, “Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household” (Matt. 10:34–36)?

I say again, we must believe and confess the whole revelation of scripture; therefore, we must believe and confess that the Christ of the church is a *militant* Christ. If Christ, the head of the church, is a militant Christ, who stands in the way of his enemies with his sword drawn, it stands to reason that we Reformed believers confess that the church of Christ on earth is to be identified as the church *militant*. It is our solemn duty then, in love for the church, in faithfulness to Christ, and in zealous devotion to our great God, to be militant and keep the sword drawn.

KEEPING THE SWORD DRAWN

THE IDEA

THE SWORD AS THE WORD OF GOD

By sword, I do not mean a physical, steel sword that can pierce physical flesh and draw blood—a sword like those used by Islamic warlords to slaughter so-called infidels. By sword, I mean the word of God.

In Ephesians 6 the inspired apostle identifies the spiritual armor of the Christian soldier and exhorts us in verse 17 to take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The word of God is the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, proceeding out of his mouth as a living and effectual word. That word of God was written down as divine scripture by holy men moved by the Holy Ghost so that the Bible, from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22, *is* the word of God.

However, the sword of the Spirit is not primarily that word of God written, but that word of God written and then taken by the church and spoken—unofficially by all believers, but especially officially in the preaching of the gospel and in all the church’s official teaching ministry. That the sword refers especially to the spoken word is indicated by the meaning of “word” in the phrase, “Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). “Word” refers to an “utterance” that proceeds from the mouth.

What the use of this sword looks like can be seen in Jesus’ battle against the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. He drove Satan away by speaking what was written in the scriptures. For example, he *said*, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). When Jesus uttered the word of God, the enemy fled.

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

This sword that is the word of God is called “the sword of the Spirit” in Ephesians 6:17. That indicates first that it is a spiritual sword having a spiritual aim. This sword does not target church buildings, or church signs, or websites, or books, or magazines, or even sermons. The sword will address those things, but it targets people. Yet, it does not seek to sever the ears of men, slit their throats, cut asunder their brains, or even pierce their blood-pumping organ called a heart. Ultimately the sword targets and seeks to pierce the spiritual center of man that scripture calls his heart. The sword is a spiritual weapon aimed at man’s spiritual center. Hebrews 4:12 declares, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The sword of the Spirit aims within the man and penetrates to the heart, for in the heart are the spiritual strongholds of sin—proud love for false doctrine, such as evolutionary theory, and proud love for wickedness of life, such as homosexuality. The inspired apostle instructs in 2 Corinthians 10:4–5, “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” When the word is spoken, the Spirit takes the word and performs one of two divine acts in the sinner’s heart. Either he graciously casts down the spiritual strongholds of unbelief and love for wickedness and then leads all of the man’s thoughts unto Christ, or the mighty Spirit uses the word in judgment and hardens those strongholds of unbelief in the sinner, so that his thoughts remain consecrated to sin.

Moreover, that the sword is called “the sword of the Spirit” also indicates that it is powerful. What great things this mighty weapon of our warfare does! When the monk Martin Luther stood in the pulpit with the word of God, he wielded a weapon far more powerful than all the armed horsemen of Charles V in the Holy Roman Empire. When a faithful preacher takes the gospel of the scriptures to the pulpit on a Sunday morning, he wields a weapon far mightier than all the nuclear warheads of the nation state. A nuclear warhead is feeble compared to sword of the Spirit. The sword is “quick [living], and powerful”

(Heb. 4:12) because the Spirit enlivens and empowers it. And who is that Spirit that enlivens and empowers the word spoken by the church but the Spirit of the merciful, zealous, and militant Christ! When the word of God is faithfully proclaimed, the Spirit of Christ empowers that word, so that Christ himself is doing battle. And Christ is more powerful than any head of state like Charles V or than any nuclear warhead.

Did not Christ display the marked contrast between the power of physical swords and the sword of his word while he was being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane? Judas and a large cohort of Roman soldiers accompanied by the armed temple guards came with swords and staves to take Jesus. Peter, having his own sword and impetuously rushing to his master's aid with misguided zeal, even demonstrated the power of a steel sword by taking off the right ear of Malchus. But what kind of power is that? Jesus, who fights with the sword of his mouth (Rev. 2:16), demonstrated divine power by laying all those armed soldiers prostrate before him with his word, "I am he" (John 18:6).

Without denying the necessity of seminary training for preachers and faithfulness by the church institute in her official ministry, the power of the spoken word to go into the heart and pull down strongholds of unbelief and lead every thought unto Christ or harden that unbelieving heart unto everlasting condemnation is not in the preacher, or in his oratory, or in his energy. The power is in the Spirit.

THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

This sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God is a double-edged sword (Heb. 4:12); therefore, it is antithetical and polemical. Being antithetical in nature, the sword clearly draws the battle lines between God and Satan, truth and error, and the church and the world, while always magnifying God, the truth, and the church as good and exposing Satan, error, and the world as evil. Being polemical in nature, the sword wages war with all that is evil and assaults it as something offensive to God and dangerous to the church.

The sword is antithetical and polemical in purpose, and because it is the effectual sword of the Spirit its purpose is always accomplished. This sword saves. It quickens. It blesses. It illuminates. It brings sincere sorrow and repentance. It moves to awe and gratitude. It is a "savour of life unto life." It opens the door of the kingdom of heaven (2 Cor. 2:16).

At the same time, this sword damns. It kills. It curses. It hardens. It blinds. It makes the hearts of men fat, it makes their ears heavy, it shuts their eyes, “lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isa. 6:10). It moves to anger and resentment, sometimes causing people to storm out of the sanctuary or write slanderous letters or online posts about their consistories or denominations. It is a “savour of death unto death.” It shuts the doors of the kingdom of heaven (2 Cor. 2:16). Who is sufficient to wield the double-edged sword?

But the sword will only have an antithetical twofold effect when its content is a double-edged sword. If the word is not antithetical and even polemical in content, it is not a sword. It is something, but not a sword. And if it is not a sword, how can it pierce the heart? The Bible is antithetical in content. Only with a studied, heroic effort can a man open up and allege from the scriptures without being antithetical and polemical. Listen, for example, to the sharp line drawn in John 3:36: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”; or in Hebrews 13:4: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” As the Bible is, so are the Reformed creeds antithetical and even polemical, refuting false doctrines. The word of God does not come as a powerful double-edged sword when man tries to present it as an expression of the grace and love of God for all who hear it, saying, “God loves you. Christ died for all of you and wants to save all of you. Won’t you accept him?”

The word of God comes in power and pierces *as a double-edged sword*. The word we bring must be antithetical and polemical so that it not only promises salvation in Christ, but also calls sin, sin, refutes heresy as heresy, and warns of God’s abiding judgment upon impenitent sinners and unbelievers. Those who have love for false doctrine or love for wicked living in their hearts must hear the word as a double-edged sword; they must know that Christ stands in their way with sword drawn. No hypocrite may walk away from church Sunday night happy that in the sermon on chastity God’s blessing was pronounced upon the holy who are striving to walk in chastity while his own enslavement to pornography went untouched. When all the lights in the house go off Sunday night and he jovially reenters the door of hell that is his favorite

pornography site, he must not be allowed to enter without seeing the Christ with his sword drawn. Maybe he goes back to his pornography no matter what the sermon said. But let him not go back to his pornography comfortably and without consciously maneuvering himself past the militant Christ because the sermon only exalted chastity while failing to condemn sexual perversity.

And if I should walk in sin and proudly number the good things God has given me in my life, then I must know as David did that the same angel of Jehovah who stood in Balaam's way stands in *my* way with sword drawn. And even as the angel put up his sword only after David called upon the Lord with burnt offerings and peace offerings, so I will see the sword of God's displeasure put up only after I plead his mercies in Christ with a contrite heart (1 Chron. 21).

Throughout history the double-edged sword effectually works for the accomplishing of God's eternal purpose in predestination. For the reprobate, the sword will harden and destroy them; for the elect whom Christ loves, the sword will convict them of their sin, quicken them unto repentance, and lead their thoughts in thankful obedience unto Christ. Through the sword, God will be glorified.

AVOIDING POTENTIAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF THE SWORD

With respect to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, let us not misunderstand the antithetical and even polemical nature of the sword of the Spirit.

First, the church does not preach the gospel of Jesus in the congregation, in the catechism room, in local evangelism, and in mission work to the remotest regions of the earth with the aim of blinding and hardening sinners. If I mount the pulpit on Sunday and have in my heart the desire that God harden and condemn to hell some of the people in my audience, I must expect to exit the pulpit seeing Christ standing in *my* way as an adversary with his sword drawn. We do not train seminary students or call missionaries because we want to harden sinners. We do not go to work each day and earn a living so that on Sunday we can put an offering in the collection plate for foreign mission work with the sincere desire that we can in this small way contribute to the everlasting condemnation of souls from sea to sea.

Of course, we recognize and submit to God’s good purpose, which is to harden some to whom we bring the word; we recognize that some *will be* hardened, and we know we *must* bring a double-edged sword in the service of God’s purposes. Nevertheless, our sincere desire in preaching the gospel is not to harden sinners. We do not say, “Brethren my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be damned!” With Paul in Romans 10, we not only preach against any who go about to establish their own righteousness and have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. But we also plead for their perishing souls. Similarly, the Lord commissioned Isaiah to preach for the hardening of the people, making fat their hearts, making heavy their ears, and shutting their eyes, lest they convert and be healed (Isa. 6:9–10). Yet, Isaiah responded, “Lord, how long?” (v. 11). Isaiah was not complaining against God, but with a tender heart he was grieving over the destruction of Israelite men and women, saying, “How long do I have to preach this way? How long will this dreadful divine hardening endure?” The marginal notes of the Geneva Bible give this explanation of Isaiah’s question: “As he was moved with the zeal of God’s glory, so was he touched with a charitable affection toward the people.”¹

The spirit of Isaiah and Paul prevailed at the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19. After the exhausting and hotly contested struggle against the Arminians on the fields of Dordrecht, the sword-wielding champions of biblical orthodoxy, the delegates of the Synod of Dordt, departed the battle praying:

May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, seated at the Father’s right hand, gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, bring to truth those who err, shut the mouths of the calumniators of sound doctrine, and endue the faithful minister of His Word with the spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all their discourses may tend to the glory of God and the edification of those who hear them. Amen.²

In the same breath in which the soldiers of the cross pleaded for God to “shut the mouths of the calumniators of sound doctrine,” they first

1 Marginal notes for Isaiah 6:11, in *The Geneva Bible* (1599), ed. Mark Langley, *BibleWorks* (1992–2012).

2 Canons of Dordt, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 180.

pleaded for God to “bring to truth those who err.” God may bring to hell those who err. We submit to that. Not knowing his secret counsel concerning those who err, we pray, “Bring them to truth.”

Even when there is a stubborn rebel in our congregation who refuses to repent so that we must excommunicate him and deliver him over to Satan, we do it so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:5).

Although our aim with the double-edged sword is the salvation of souls, and we pray for that salvation of souls, we must recognize that there does come a time when it is obviously contrary to the will of God to pray for a particular man’s salvation. There may come a time when praying for a man’s salvation is tempting God. There may be a man born and raised in the church and taught the truth from youth. This man not only apostatizes, but becomes so hostile an enemy and so hardened in his heart that he makes it his life’s purpose to slander the church with malicious venom seeping out of his mouth. He desires to overthrow the cause of Christ and to destroy the truth. In so doing, he “crucifies to [himself] the Son of God afresh (Heb. 6:6); he counts “the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing” and does “despite unto [outrages] the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29); he commits the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31). When that man lives in that sin which is obviously unto death, I do not say that you must pray for him in that sin (1 John 5:16), but instead pray imprecations—that the Lord reward him according to his works, so that the church can be spared and the Holy Name honored. Paul also prayed in this manner: “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim. 4:14–15).

Furthermore, there are cunning false teachers, “who subvert whole houses” by “teaching things which they ought not” (Titus 1:11), whom we would never receive into our houses and to whom we would never bid Godspeed (2 John 10), who are heretics to be rejected “after the first and second admonition” (Titus 3:10), and who clearly demonstrate by their doctrine that they are, apart from a miracle of grace, dogs that will be kept outside the gate of the eternal city (Rev. 22:14–15). About these recalcitrant enemies of God we say, “Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against

thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies” (Ps. 139:21–22).

The existence of hardened, blasphemous false teachers and outrageous apostates—and our holy attitude of hatred for them insofar as they are the sworn enemies of our God—do not deny the main point. The main point is that we do not preach the gospel and engage in polemics with the aim that sinners be hardened, but that they be saved through repentance and faith for the extension of Christ’s kingdom. Even when we must excommunicate and deliver over to Satan the stubborn rebel in our congregation who refuses to repent, we do it so that his “spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5).

Secondly, wielding a double-edged sword does not mean that the church organizes walks through her community with her members holding signs, or uses her website or social media accounts to post messages, saying, “God hates Fags!” “God hates you!” “You are going to hell!” “Planes crash, God laughs!” “God hates evolutionists!” “All Arminians and Amyraldians are going to hell!” That these signs are inflammatory is not even the main reason we do not walk around with them, as some do. There is no Christ, no gospel in these signs, and the Spirit will not use them. They are not God’s swords, but man’s billy clubs. The truth of the gospel always offends and agitates unbelief, but let not unbelief be offended and agitated by a Christless gospel or by the sinful manner in which the true gospel is proclaimed.

Positively, we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Motivated by a heart of love for the neighbor and for God who saves by the word, we preach the glorious gospel of the good news of everlasting covenantal salvation for damnable sinners through the blood of Jesus Christ, so that sinners might be saved and the kingdom of God advanced unto the coming of Christ. The gospel presents Christ and all God has accomplished in Christ. The gospel promises everlasting life to all who believe. The gospel commands everyone to repent and believe in Christ. We never speak of sin or wrath or hell or heresy or wickedness for its own sake, but in the service of the gospel of Christ, who is the only way of escape from that judgment and the only way of entrance into communion with God.

When we write in magazines or write books or host special lectures to address specific pernicious errors that are presently threatening the true church of Christ, and through the sharpest and most passionate

polemics seek to vindicate sound doctrine and “convince the gainsayers” and stop the mouths of “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers” who are subverting whole houses (Titus 1:9–10), we expose and refute the false doctrine and warn the heretic whom we call a heretic. But we also show the way of escape and life in Jesus Christ! Always! The deceiver may go lost, but what about all those men, women, and children being tossed to and fro by his influential heresy? Love for their souls will unsheathe the sword so that they can come to know the sinfulness of heresy and the blessedness of Christ.

KEEPING THIS SWORD DRAWN

We must take the sword of the Spirit and keep it drawn. The meaning is simple to understand. First, we must have a sword. Take the sword! Second, we may never sheathe it. Wield the sword! Having a sword is not enough, we must unsheathe it and keep it drawn, always proclaiming the antithetical and polemical word in the service of the gospel of Christ.

We are in the midst of battle. The smoke is heavy. The blood is fresh. The cries are desperate. The trumpet blasts wax louder and louder. Physical territory is not at stake; souls are. Despite the unpopularity of the sword in the church world today; despite almost never hearing of public lectures on the subject of the church militant; despite the incredible pressures even within Reformed and Presbyterian Christianity to sheathe the sword on certain doctrinal issues; despite it being said that swords are mean, and polemics are harmful, and that those who wield the sword are not nice for they hurt feelings and create unnecessary division, keep the sword drawn.

There were probably many Jews in Jerusalem who did not think Jesus was very nice when he called the Pharisees a generation of vipers. He was at war with his sword. As the church of Christ, we keep the sword drawn, even if it means being condemned by others for not being nice. We are at war.

CHAPTER 2

KEEPING THE SWORD DRAWN THE URGENCY

FALSE DOCTRINE

The threatening presence of false doctrine everywhere in the sphere of Christianity, including, most ominously, in Reformed and Presbyterian Christianity, where the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Standards are recognized, makes our wielding of the sword urgent. The following doctrines are representative of these essential truths of the Christian faith the church militant must defend.

We must earnestly contend for the truth of creation by keeping the sword drawn. Atheistic evolution and theistic evolution continue their vicious assaults upon the simple truth of creation that was once delivered to the saints and believed by faith. Wicked evolutionary theory teaches, among other things, that the human being did not first appear on the earth as the creative work of God on the sixth day of history as God declares in Genesis 1, but that over the course of millions of years simple organisms evolved into more complex organisms, and eventually evolutionary processes brought forth what we now know as the human being. In other words, if there was a man named Adam, he had ancestors and there was death in the world before his sin. It has become fashionable for Christians who are evidently impressed with this theory and the number of influential people in academia who teach it to deny the Bible by calling the literal history of the opening chapters of Genesis a myth or, at the very least, a creation account that has no interest in teaching us how long creation took or when it took place. Instead of turning to the Bible for an understanding of origins, many want to turn

to the interpretations and conclusions given by unbelieving scientists as they study nature (God's handiwork in the creation). If we do not believe what the Bible declares about the origin of things, particularly what it says about our first head Adam, then we have no reason to believe what the Bible says about the second and last head Jesus. And if we don't believe what the Bible says about Jesus, then as Jesus himself says, we "shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on [us]" (John 3:36).

Unbelief relentlessly attacks the doctrine of scripture and the truth that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, trustworthy, sufficient, perspicuous, profitable revelation of God. Clever is the intent of Satan to undermine the veracity of the Bible and weaken our faith in it because the Bible is our sword. If we lose the battle for the Bible, we lose our sword, and, losing our sword, we lose the war. We must believe and teach that Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21 is the very word of God and not the word of man. The battle for the doctrine of creation, as revealed in the literal history of the opening chapters of Genesis, is only one example of the battle for the doctrine of scripture. Keep the sword drawn for the Bible's sake.

The reality of the glorious spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ now being realized in the hearts of the elect through the worldwide preaching of the gospel, and to be fully realized and perfected in heaven, is under assault by the teaching that urges believers to transform their society and redeem their culture by the power of common grace. The goal is to make all things and institutions at least outwardly Christian in preparation for a glorious future earthly kingdom of Christ. Keep the sword drawn for the kingdom's sake.

The doctrine of particular, sovereign grace is continually assaulted in the teaching of a universal, resistible, ineffectual saving grace that comes to all men, elect and reprobate, in the preaching of a sincere desire of God to save all who hear the preaching, or through a conditional covenantal promise given to every child at baptism. It is a grace that in many instances does not save, a grace that fails, a grace that requires for its perfection something in the will and work of the sinner, a grace that is in the end no grace at all. In the name of the sovereign God of saving grace, keep the sword drawn.

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment is assailed in the teaching that there is no enduring Sabbath that New Testament Christians are

bound to observe in obedience to God's law. In the United States there was formerly a kind of outward respect for the Sabbath even among unbelievers who closed their shops on Sundays. Now many professing Christians disregard the Sabbath in practice. Even worse, Christians deny the Sabbath *in doctrine*. What an unimaginable loss for the church if she loses the battle for the Sabbath. Satan knows that. How anemic our souls would quickly become without the Sabbath and our frequenting God's house for worship and spiritual edification in the gospel of rest! And how impoverished would be our life of praise to our Maker and Savior! For the sake of the Sabbath, keep the sword drawn.

Finally, the church must always battle against the deadly heresy of justification by faith *and . . .* The apostle Paul marveled that the Galatian churches were so soon removed from the gospel truth of justification by faith *alone*. Every true church will quickly apostatize from the gospel of justification by faith alone if the sword is not faithfully wielded. Preaching the positive truth of justification by faith alone is not sufficient. The church must incessantly and faithfully combat every new appearance of the heretical and monstrous notion that there is righteousness acceptable to God that is based upon some work, some merit, some obedience, some holiness, or some good in man. Let that doctrine be accursed. The apostle puts it still stronger: let the *preacher* of it be accursed (Gal. 1:8–9). For the sake of justification by faith alone, keep the sword wielded.

Satan uses these false doctrines and a host of others to establish strongholds of love for them in the hearts of people, sometimes even for a time in the people of God. Most urgent is the drawing of the sword.

LAWLESSNESS

In addition to the attacks of false doctrine, there is the ongoing danger of the abounding lawlessness in society as it threatens to seep and even pour into the church. What unbelievably terrifying lawlessness, especially *sexual* lawlessness, prevails in the world of our day! Sodomy, transgenderism, and unlawful remarriage after divorce are three notable examples.

When millions of defiant Americans march through city streets and university plazas decrying the results of the 2016 presidential election by shouting of the forty-fifth president of the United States, "Not my president!" and by smashing windows, overturning cars, and burning

anything that will ignite, man is simply doing what shamefully rebellious man has always done. Marches, revolts, and entitlement-crazed temper tantrums are not new. They are old. But in the realm of marriage and sex, lawlessness is advancing at an alarming and even breathtaking pace, bringing the battle into new frontiers.

The antichristian spirit of our age is unmistakable as man thinks “to change times and laws” (Dan. 7:25). There is not only sodomy, but also the state’s and even the church’s sanctioning of sodomy so that a man may legally marry another man and a woman another woman. Homosexual unions are not new; they were visible in Sodom and celebrated in Rome millennia ago. But the expression of sexual sin is developing. Homosexuality is no longer merely a perverse practice, or even an openly celebrated perverse practice. Homosexuality is the substance of a carefully orchestrated and growing, organized global—especially Western—movement. The pushers of homosexuality refuse to rest until they have overturned every law, institution, corporation, and person who stands in opposition to it, and they have accomplished universal acceptance and celebration of it. If anyone dares oppose their movement, the advocates of homosexuality bare their teeth and threaten to boycott and march until there is conformity or extinction.

Furthermore, there is advancement as the Christian church now stands behind the perversity of homosexuality. While homosexuality was visible in the streets of Sodom, neither the spiritually stronger Abraham nor the spiritually weaker Lot were advocating for the recognition of homosexuals in the covenant of God. While men were free to cavort and lounge around ancient Rome with male partners, neither the true apostolic church of that day nor the false church of apostate Israel, represented by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, were trying to sanction ecclesiastically homosexual practice or homosexual unions. That the nominal Christian church, including apostatizing Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, is joining the movement in support of so-called same-sex marriage signals the nearness of the end. And then what comes next? God designed marriage as the one-flesh union of one man and one woman for life. Once a society begins tampering with that divine formula, the possibilities are endless. Pretty soon might not a man legally marry multiple men, or his biological father, or his pet pot belly pig, or his sex robot? Keep the sword drawn!

History has heard of homosexuality in which biological males who identify as biological males work “that which is unseemly” with other biological males who likewise identify as biological males (Rom. 1:27); the same applies to females. But what is this recent movement of transgenderism moving to the mainstream and reshaping the way a society thinks to a degree unimaginable a decade ago? What lawlessness and confusion abound in the attempt to overturn and obliterate the most basic and rudimentary law of creation in the God-ordained creation distinction between the male and the female (Gen. 1:27). God wonderfully makes one male or female. The exception of a small number of intersex babies with genetic abnormalities in this broken and sorrowful world, in which the curse can even affect biological makeup, does not abolish but instead establishes the rule. God makes one male or female. In rebellion against the Creator, men choose to identify as, be called, and be treated as females, and women choose to identify as, be called, and be treated as males.

Today it is taught that gender is something different than sex. Sex refers to biological sex determined by birth. Gender refers to socially constructed roles and behaviors that a society deems appropriate for an individual. It is taught that gender is assigned at birth when the doctor, or nurse, or midwife, or parent looks at the baby’s anatomy and then checks the box “male” or the box “female.” But that checking of the box should not determine an individual’s true identity. The individual, through the course of his or her life, and especially in adolescence, should determine his or her true identity by examining deep personal desires and what his or her gender really is. One’s biological sex could be male, but if he does not feel like a male, he is not a male. If birth sex is an objective biological fact, it is not determinative for identity. Although every cell in one’s body is divinely programmed as either male or female, this does not determine identity. Rather, what an individual *feels*, and then *claims* to be, so that individual truly *is*. God does not determine our identity; we determine our identity. So man thinks.

All human beings are, apart from the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, desperately wicked sinners with deceitful hearts (Jer. 17:9) who only imagine evil (Gen. 6:5); their understanding is darkened, and they are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (Eph. 4:18). Therefore, it should not surprise us when a person’s

feelings conflict with divinely-created reality. But those feelings must be conformed to reality. How confusing is this world in 2017 that each person must determine through his or her feelings who or what he or she really is. For an increasing number of human beings, what gender they *feel* like is always changing, so many do not even identify as male or female but identify as gender-fluid or gender-creative and use the pronoun *they* instead of *he* or *she*. This is sheer madness! The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots (Jer. 13:23), but the boy can change his gender and become a girl or something between a boy and a girl whenever he feels like it?

Less than twelve hours after I gave the lecture for Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in September 2016, I was sitting in an airplane at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport awaiting takeoff, and I saw something that confirmed the necessity of the previous night's speech and the urgency of our calling to wield the sword. I was paging through an issue of *Time* magazine and came across a photograph that was so revolting and initially confusing that I can still remember exactly where I was sitting when my eyes fell upon it. The experience was so counter-reality that it momentarily took my breath away. In the photo was a stocky, bearded, hairy man sitting cross legged on a bed, but he had two large, mostly exposed, pregnant-woman-like breasts and an infant suckling one of them. The male-looking human being doing the female act of breastfeeding was actually a woman who through hormonal therapy had attempted to erase her biology and transition into a man. She is a woman; her cells have two "X" chromosomes. This explains her female activities of conceiving, carrying, delivering, and breastfeeding a child. She is a woman with female anatomy. She is a woman and wants to do women things, but at the same time wants to be, look like, be called, and be treated as a man. Maybe I brought displeasure to God by not grieving in my heart for that woman's miserable, sin-enslaved soul and desiring her salvation. I mean that in all sincerity. After the initial shock and confusion, my response was not a loving sorrow for her soul but a very real fear for what my own children will be exposed to in this wicked world. Shortly after thinking of my own children, and the children of our churches, and all the children of God on earth, my heart did ache for that infant and the tragedy that his upbringing will be and already is. How will this poor child come to definite conclusions regarding reality when from

birth he was betrayed concerning one of the most fundamental truth propositions of created reality: men are men and women are women?

But this madness is not limited to adults. The highly celebrated and even “historic” January 2017 special edition of *National Geographic* entitled “Gender Revolution” featured on its cover a nine-year-old boy in pink hair and pink pajamas. The boy identifies as a female. This magazine issue focuses on eighty children and young people from eight countries and explores “evolving notions about what it means to be a woman or a man and the meanings of transgender, cisgender, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, agender, or any of the more than 50 terms Facebook offers users for their profiles.”¹ The transgender movement is a swift-moving current of iniquity sweeping away children—lots of them. Adults are happily taking children along with them on the ride to perdition. More and more parents allow and even encourage their children to choose whether they want to identify as the sex opposite of what they are biologically, and then help them try to transition into their new identity by seeking hormone treatments and even sex reassignment surgery. Or parents seek for their children puberty-blocking drugs to “pause” their sexual development and give them more time to figure out who they really are. These parents are guilty of what is perhaps the worst form of child abuse that has ever been perpetrated in the history of the world. “It were better” for such a parent “that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6) than he set such a stumbling block before his child.

Like “gay marriage,” the transgender revolution is also the substance of a powerful movement that uses vehicles like *National Geographic* and *Time*, as well as plenty of other influential media outlets to transport the glorification of this lawlessness into every home and hand. How the sin of the human race has developed since the eating of the forbidden fruit! Depraved man thinks to rewrite the very laws of biological sex imbedded in the creation order. This is sheer madness and bold rebellion! Where is it heading?

It is doubtful that such wickedness is a mere social-media-fed social fad that, like bellbottoms in one era or skinny jeans in another, will have

1 Robin Marantz Heinig, quoted in Susan Goldberg, “Why We Put a Transgender Girl on the Cover of National Geographic,” *National Geographic*, accessed May 2017, <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/01/editors-note-gender/>.

its day in the sun and then quietly pass. This madness is a harbinger of things to come. It is a significant part of the iniquity with which the human race's cup of iniquity quickly fills. As sexual perversion continues to develop and opposition to it continues to be punished, it will no longer be possible for the church to exist in iniquity-intoxicated Babylon. Christ must soon come to deliver her from this present abominable age of disdain for the almighty Maker of heaven and earth.

Society is continuing to work out the implications of its wicked philosophy of the autonomy of man coupled with the postmodern notion that there is no absolute truth; everything is relative, and truth is determined by the individual. It is striking that *Oxford Dictionaries* has selected "post-truth" as 2016's international word of the year. The dictionary defines "post-truth" as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."² The term was chosen especially because of the 2016 presidential election in the United States. Both candidates repeatedly accused each other of lies, "facts" were always being checked, and more and more people conceded that the majority of politicians are liars. We live in a post-truth culture, and out of its womb has come the monstrosity of transgenderism in which personal identification is not based upon objective facts but upon the feelings of each autonomous individual.

If a five-year-old were to identify as a senior citizen at the local donut shop and peer over the counter on his tiptoes trying to claim a free coffee via the senior citizen discount, the store clerk would giggle at him and even think his preposterous request is cute tomfoolery. But if a biologically male human being identifies as a woman and walks into the women's restroom at the donut shop, no one is allowed to balk. Pretty soon the clerk at the store won't giggle at the five-year-old who claims to be a senior citizen, because it will be a crime to deny the five-year-old the senior discount he claims is rightfully his. Truth propositions expressed in objective statements of fact will simply *not exist* in the eyes of men. As every man *did* what was right in his own eyes during the days of the Judges when there was no king in Israel, so the cup of iniquity is

2 "Post Truth," *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, accessed May 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth>

being filled, sin progresses, and every man now *determines* what is right in his own eyes as if he were the king of the universe. Everything in the universe will be up for redefinition. If a man says his cocker spaniel is god, then his cocker spaniel is god. If a man says killing unborn babies is good, then killing unborn babies is good. If a man *feels* that the sun is the moon, then the sun is the moon. If a white man *feels* like he is black, then he is black. If my boss, the whole world, and the atomic clock say it is nine o'clock in the morning where I live, but I *feel* it is seven o'clock in the morning, and therefore I am not late for work, then it's seven o'clock in the morning and I am not late for work. If I, a man, say I am a woman, then I am a woman. If a five-year-old boy has a deep inner feeling that he is a sixty-five-year-old man, then he is a sixty-five-year-old man. If the leopard could speak and tell us he feels like he has no spots, and therefore he concludes that he has no spots, we would dismiss him as a fool; but the boy can say he is no boy because he feels like a girl, and we must regard and rear him as a girl?

Pious saints have formerly found it difficult and even impossible to engage in serious doctrinal discussions with others who will not accept the absolute authority of scripture as the inspired word of God. But how can you discuss anything with one who does not accept any objective facts in God's universe, including something as basic as the fact God creates us. This road of rebellion has an end. The appearance and rise of the antichrist is the ominous end of this post-truth road our society traverses. If a human being "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4), then he *is* God? God does not determine truth, we do. If a man feels he is God, thinks he is God, claims to be God, and has enough influence to bend public opinion into conformity with his thinking, then he *is* God. So man thinks.

Antichrist will exalt himself as God and try to demonstrate that he is God. How? By creating a world out of nothing? He cannot do that. By performing (lying) wonders (2 Thess. 2:9)? In part. Beware! But, especially, he will "think to change times and laws" (Dan. 7:25) and thereby determine good and evil—determine truth. With the mouth given him he will speak "great things and blasphemies" against God (Rev. 13:5–6) as if he were the voice of truth. All of the bitter fruit of Satan's first attempt to lure man into thinking he is God, determining good and

evil, will be manifested in the antichrist. The whole world will worship this beast (Rev. 13:8). The church will have to conform to and accept what the antichrist as “God” blasphemously declares as truth or perish in the fiery furnaces of his kingdom.

Thankfully the rise of antichrist will not be the end, but the beginning of the end in which he who is the way, the truth, and the life will come quickly to destroy antichrist by the brightness of his coming and to bring us to the Father in heaven. Psalm 94:20–23 says, “Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge. And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.”

Until the Lord comes with his sword, we must keep the sword drawn. Can you imagine what would happen to the church of Christ if we kept the sword sheathed and were not waging war with this rebellion and confusion of transgenderism? What if we did not diligently teach our children the truth of God’s word and the truth of all things in creation as we understand the creation properly through God’s word? What if we sent our boys and girls to the schools of the state where they are taught that their genders are their choices? Satan is determined to bring and already has brought this lawlessness into nominal Christianity, paving the way for antichrist. Satan desires to establish a stronghold of love for such abominations in the hearts of us and our children, corrupting our minds through powerful influences, especially in technology. The devil’s sights are set on our sons and daughters. Keep the sword drawn!

Furthermore, there is, sadly and regrettably, the lawlessness of the permission of remarriage after divorce in almost all of the Reformed and Presbyterian church world. Finding a church on earth that teaches all of God’s doctrine of marriage is almost like searching for the proverbial needle in the haystack. Such churches are around, but finding them is difficult. Do you belong to one? That is a soul-searching question. That question especially penetrates in 2017 because God’s doctrine of marriage is being violently besieged as never before. Where do you stand? Dear reader, will you please consider the scriptures honestly and

then measure your church's doctrine of marriage according to God's standard in sacred scripture?

Remarriage after divorce while the divorced spouse is still alive is lawlessness against the will of God—the God who from the very beginning instituted marriage as a bond between one man and one woman for life (see and compare Gen. 2:18–25; Jer. 3:1–14, Matt. 5:32; 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:1–4; 1 Cor. 7; Eph. 5:22–33). Such remarriage is lawlessness against the very vows that were made before God, family, and friends when the man and woman promised each other unconditionally, “Until death do us part.” It is lawlessness that interferes with and even ruins the possibility of reconciliation between the estranged husband and wife. It is lawlessness that puts a stumbling block before children and usually creates a new family dynamic in which the children have two sets of parents—for after the divorce the “innocent” party is allowed to remarry and, most of the time, the “guilty” party also.

What breaks the heart is a consideration of the poor children who are subjected to that monstrosity of having two dads and two moms and the confusion of being under the authority of three marriages: the marriage of their father and mother into which they were born as children, the adulterous marriage of their father and his new wife, and the adulterous marriage of their mother and her new husband. This is a monstrosity that is in principle no different than the monstrosities now sanctioned by an antichristian state, granting marriage to two sodomites or two lesbians. This is a monstrosity to which the church gives its blessing by granting the remarried the status of being members in good standing, welcoming them to the table of the Lord, and sometimes even ordaining remarried men into ecclesiastical office. Thinking about such children breaks a pastor's heart. It makes the servant of the Lord weep, weeping for the children, and weeping for God's covenant. This lawlessness may not be permitted. Keep the sword drawn, even if—and Jesus warned it would—it creates division between you and your father or mother or son or daughter who hates the sword when it touches his or her adulterous marriage. Keep the sword drawn as John the Baptist did to the losing of his head (Mark 6:17–28). Keep it drawn for God and his covenant. Keep it drawn for the dear children.

UNHOLY ALLIANCES

In addition to false doctrine and lawlessness—and all of these subjects follow in logical order—the urgency in keeping the sword drawn is the real temptation to establish, in the name of ecumenicity, official ecclesiastical alliances that are unholy, alliances that are not grounded in common love for the truth.

The temptation for churches to flirt ecclesiastically and to pursue and establish official alliances or relationships, even when there are significant doctrinal differences, is a threat. It was a grave threat to good King Jehoshaphat of Judah, who fell for the temptation of Satan and established an unholy alliance with Baal-worshiping Israel (2 Chron. 18–19:2). I don't hesitate to acknowledge that the caliber of Jehoshaphat's godliness must have been far superior to my own. If Satan lured so great a man into false ecumenicity, how easy would it be to lure me also? Wouldn't you say the same for yourself?

False ecumenicity is still a temptation today, perhaps more today than ever. As Western society continues its catastrophic moral collapse in attempting to overturn the very laws of nature, all those who stand against the immorality of this sexual revolution feel the pressure and desire to unite in opposition to it. Decades ago history witnessed the signing of ECT, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, a document drafted and signed as a response to rising societal immorality. If there are Roman Catholics and Protestants of every stripe considering joining affinity in opposition to the immorality of society, and if they can all stand together against a common enemy, then surely all Reformed and Presbyterian churches who subscribe to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt and/or the Westminster Standards can unite and establish one denomination of churches to fight together against that which is opposed to God.

However, just because Israel and Judah in Jehoshaphat's time were both *against* the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead did not necessarily mean they were both *for* Jehovah God. Just because Reformed churches hate a common enemy does not necessarily mean they love the same truth, and just because churches claim for themselves the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt does not mean they all agree on what the Reformed faith of these confessions actually teach. This is lamentable, but this is reality.

False ecumenicity must be condemned by the drawn sword. Furthermore, in the name of holy ecumenicity expressed in *true* ecclesiastical unity, we must keep the sword drawn. False ecumenicity is to be condemned in the interests of God-glorifying communion and fellowship in the truth. Personal experience in the pastorate has impressed upon me the beauty of and an appreciation for true ecumenicity, albeit on a small scale.

I serve as the pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California. As a congregation we have rich unity in a common love for the gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the historic Reformed confessions. However, in the marvelous grace of God, we do not stand alone. In the name of holy ecumenicity we have a vibrant, living relationship with over thirty other churches throughout the United States and Canada that which make up the Protestant Reformed denomination; in addition, we have sister church relationships of full ecclesiastical communion enjoyed with congregations in Northern Ireland and in Singapore, and very soon, God willing, with several more in the Philippines. All these churches share the same love for the same truth of Christ.

There are two expressions of this holy ecumenicity that I especially savor. First, there is unity around the Lord's table. While more than the members of one's own denomination or sister churches may, under specified conditions, be permitted to the table, I am thinking now of denominational unity in which others are welcomed to the table, not by undergoing an extensive examination, but by confirming before the consistory that they are confessing members in good standing in their home congregations. Growing up I never appreciated the manifestation of holy ecumenicity in holy communion, largely because I did not think about it, but partially because I rarely experienced it in any tangible way. Celebrating holy communion at the table of the Lord in a particular congregation with more than the members of that congregation participating is one of the most beautiful, visible expressions of holy ecumenicity on earth. How it warms the cockles of my heart as a servant of Christ to administer the Lord's supper when there are worshiping with our congregation visitors from other congregations throughout our denomination. I do not believe I have ever administered the sacrament without having at least one visitor from outside our congregation partaking with us; typically there are many visitors from sister congregations. Multiple times there have been over a dozen

visitors, and once close to twenty. It is a beautiful and rich expression of true unity in the cross of Jesus—unity in life, unity in doctrine, and unity in worship. How good and pleasant for a congregation whose nearest sister congregation is one thousand miles away to see that she is not an isolated church all alone in the world; instead, she enjoys God-pleasing communion in the gospel with others.

Second, there is unity in the pulpit. Serving in the far western edge of Classis West has afforded me the opportunity to travel great distances in order to go to a meeting of classis or to fill the pulpit for a vacant congregation on assignment by classical appointment. All of the cities or towns in which the churches are found—from Lynden, Washington, to Loveland, Colorado, to Doon, Iowa, to Crete, Illinois—are situated in varied economic, social, cultural, and political contexts. Each congregation has its own unique personality. No two are the same. No matter what church I have visited and no matter what officebearers shake hands with me after I exit the pulpit, there is always the same expectation and appreciation for the same truth.

I recall a soul-gratifying email that came to me after preaching for another congregation. The email came from a young wife and mother and it expressed sincere appreciation for the truth of the sermon that expounded a passage in the Old Testament prophecy of Jeremiah and condemned as unholy to God remarriage after divorce. Because of her situation, the truth touched her personally. Instead of offending, it emboldened. The irony was too striking to miss. When the words of the prophecy of Jeremiah were originally spoken, they offended the Jews in Judea so deeply that Jeremiah was despised and persecuted. His family in his hometown of Anathoth conspired to kill him. For his word he was attacked. Over two thousand years later his inspired word was the basis for a sermon and for an application made to a subject as offensive as any, and the listener did not chase me out the door with a stave, but wrote in appreciation. We still have this—unity in the truth as that truth is loved and confessed. It is amazing and beautiful. But will it last? Satan hates it. O God, preserve us for in thee alone our trust has stood, our souls have said thou art our Lord, our chief and only good!

Furthermore, more than once while I have been absent from my pulpit because of a classical appointment or for vacation, and a Protestant Reformed minister, seminarian, or seminary professor fills the pulpit,

those who are new to my congregation and have joined from the outside invariably remark, “I cannot believe how all the men preach the exact same doctrine. No wonder there is real unity in life and worship and doctrine, there is the same word coming from the pulpits each Sunday. I have been to so many other churches over the years, and when a visiting minister comes from here or there, you never know what he will preach, or because there was no denominational seminary, you never knew what the students would be like.” May God defend our pulpits from Satan’s attacks.

God is to be thanked for these yet imperfect but blessed expressions of unity. It is a wonderful thing to have doctrinal unity in a congregation, in a denomination, and with sister churches outside the denomination. This is precious Spirit-worked ecumenicity. However, because even the faithful who love the truth have cleaving sinful natures, and because there is always a reprobate element in every true denomination, and because the devil and his demons cease not to watch for the ruin of the souls of those in the churches, we must keep the sword drawn.

It is urgent that we keep the sword drawn for the *advancement* of greater expressions of unity at home and abroad and for the *preservation* of existing unity. If the double-edge sword of the word is not unsheathed and drawn, unholy ecclesiastical alliances will certainly be established, and the holy ecumenism will be destroyed. Keep the sword drawn.

In signing the Formula of Subscription, officebearers vow to reject all errors that militate against the doctrine of the Reformed confessions, particularly those condemned by the Synod of Dordt. The officebearers also vow that they are disposed to refute and contradict these errors and that they will exert themselves in keeping the church free from such errors. This last statement applies to the danger of false ecumenicity. We must not merely *concern* ourselves with, but must *exert* ourselves to keep the church free from doctrinal errors; we do that by keeping the sword drawn amid pressures of false ecumenicity.

KEEPING THE SWORD DRAWN

THE COMMAND

WIELD THE SWORD CONTINUALLY

Our calling as the church of the militant Christ is to draw the double-edged sword and continually wield it in the pulpit, in church magazines, in public lectures, in the catechism room, on the mission field, on the airwaves, on family visitation, and even as heads in our Christian homes.

Can you imagine a preacher of the gospel who preaches through the opening chapters of Genesis and does not do battle with atheistic and theistic evolution, or worse does not even mention these enemies? Or can you imagine a preacher expounding the book of James without mentioning antinomianism, let alone attempting to drive every last vestige of it from our flesh? What dereliction of duty! Such a preacher is like the captain of the United States' forces on D-Day who does not tell his platoon storming the beaches of Normandy that there are German soldiers and heavy artillery up ahead. Can you imagine a Reformed preacher who preaches through the warm and comforting Heidelberg Catechism but engages in no polemics? What a travesty, for the Catechism itself is consistently and explicitly polemical for the purpose of comfort. For example, when the false doctrine of purgatory is condemned in Lord's Day 22, then we, especially those well-stricken in years, more fully appreciate the comfort we have in our unbreakable union to Christ, which union death itself cannot sever. Keep the sword drawn and wield it continually in the pulpit!

Some enemies of the church angrily scorn the church institute as a kind of cult, where church leaders like seminary professors and ministers weary themselves simply trying to protect an institution and

name that they have built, saying they do that by brainwashing people into supporting their denomination. Other enemies find the church institute contemptible, alleging it to be a gathering of hypocrites who hate, just as much as these enemies themselves do, going to church and sitting through a boring and lifeless hour-and-a-half long worship service but who gut it out because it's the thing to do, and if you don't you'll get those surly elders breathing down your neck. Some enemies of doctrinal truth praise the idea of a congregational gathering not for the preaching of the pure gospel, but as an exhilarating opportunity to connect with others who aren't into preachy people, psalms, sermons, dressing up, and dry and heady theological jargon like *imputation* and *propitiation*, but who are just real people craving the feeling of a personal relationship with Jesus.

To these mentalities the youth are exposed, and because the flesh is weak, the real temptation is to say, "You know what? Why do I go to church, *this* church? I *am* wasting my life." Can you imagine a minister or elder in the catechism room teaching the high-school-aged young people the doctrine of the church but failing to take the time to expose the wicked attitudes toward the church that are so prevalent today? But in the end, warnings alone will never keep the youth in the true church of God. God uses the preaching and teaching that not only exposes the lies, but also enthusiastically leads the youth to stand before and behold all of the eternal glories that are stored in the church as the body and stunningly beautiful bride of Christ. Keep the doubled-edged sword drawn and wield it continually in the catechism room!

Can you imagine the father of the Christian home who reads for family devotions Genesis 26 and its account of Isaac and Rebekah's great grief in son Esau's marriage to heathen wives, but that Christian father does not take the time to explain to his children the necessity and great blessing of marrying in the Lord, while warning them about dating and marrying individuals who may be attractive but share no sincere love for Christ and his sacred truth? Keep the sword drawn and wield it continually in family worship!

And because this sword is our one offensive weapon, our calling is not merely to stand back and defend ourselves against attacks, but our calling is to take the battle into enemy territory, to go on the *offensive*, to advance the kingdom of Christ through the sword—continually!

It is not too late in the battle when a young man in the congregation is spotted walking through the mall wearing a dress and carrying a purse, when gradually it becomes public knowledge that he believes he is a female imprisoned in a male body. It is not too late to use the sharp admonitions and wonderful encouragements of the word of God to defend him from his wicked desires and to show him the straight and narrow path to heaven. But the church must go on the offensive, continually wielding the sword against such abominable confusion long before a concrete case ever appears. Then, when that first inclination to identify as a woman ever arises in the young man's heart, it is immediately challenged by his own conscience, which has been continually informed by the word of God and its teaching that inclinations to identify as a biological sex other than what God gave you is terrible rebellion against the Creator. Maybe the sinful desire continues in the young man, but at least the warning has been sounded, and he does it against better knowledge. May the Spirit graciously tear down these strongholds within us and our children and lead our thoughts to Christ, so that we never despise the way God made us. Keep the sword drawn!

It is not too late in the battle when a lawfully divorced woman in the church asks the consistory for her membership papers and wants to leave because, well, it finally comes out that she is dating another man with the desire of marrying him. It is not too late to admonish and instruct her. But long before such a sorrowful encounter, the church had better be going on the offensive, teaching the lifelong bond of marriage and warning against the adultery of remarriage after divorce. Keep the sword drawn!

It is not too late in the battle when a young husband and father comes to the consistory asking for his families' papers because he wants to take his family down the street to the nondenominational megachurch where the atmosphere is more "comfortable" and "less judgmental," or even to another Reformed church that is not so one-sided and where there is much less emphasis on the sovereignty of God and much more emphasis on the responsibility of man. It is not too late to use the admonitions and encouragements of the word of God to defend him and deliver him and his family from his treacherous inclinations. But the church must go on the offensive, wielding the sword continually in preaching the whole counsel of God, so that love for false doctrine or coldness toward God never arises. May God grant it! Keep the sword drawn!

It is not too late when the teenage daughter tells her family at the supper table that her professor in the Christian college has convinced her that the days of Genesis 1 are not literal, twenty-four-hour days but million or even billions of years, and that theistic evolution better explains the origin of the universe, and that this position is still compatible with the Bible and the gospel of Christ. It is not too late to defend her with admonitions and encouragements from the word. Let the father do so, compassionately exhorting his daughter to remember her Creator now in her youth. But long before his daughter drives off to college, that father had better be continually wielding the offensive weapon of the sword, so that when he reads a passage about God the creator at family devotions, he not only engages his children in contemplation of the wonder of creation, but he also warns about the wickedness of evolution.

I beseech you, dear reader, never put down the sword. Pray that your church never does. The battle rages and never relents. And the stakes are so high—souls.

WIELD THE SWORD CAREFULLY

We sword-bearing soldiers of the church of the militant Lord Jesus Christ had better make sure we are handling the word of God carefully so that our words, as to content and manner of expression, are not blameworthy. We had better not be condemning what God does not condemn or calling unholy what God calls holy. It is not commanded but assumed by the inspired apostle that we will be “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). We will speak *the truth*. We will speak the truth *in love*.

We had better not be fighters who just like to fight. Sometimes there are people like that in the church. They have no interest in peace and do not war for the sake of Zion’s peace, but are proud antagonists who like to fight for the sake of fighting, while fancying themselves the zealous guardians of orthodoxy. Occasionally people leave a true church and forsake their inheritance because they are fed up with the stubborn pride and divisive spirit they discover in others. Shame on them for leaving. Greater shame on those fighters who occasioned the departure.

Regrettably, some in the church of Christ may secretly, or not so secretly, wish for controversy, saying that controversy is good in purifying the church. None will dispute that doctrinal controversy always proves to be good for the church in testing the faith of the faithful and exposing

and weeding out the unfaithful. If schism must come, then schism must come. However, *acknowledging* that good will come from controversy is one thing. *Desiring* controversy to come is an entirely different thing. Desiring the evil of controversy is like wishing for the evil of a cancerous tumor to appear on your brain because it will prove to be beneficial in purifying your faith. Controversy is an evil. If it cannot be averted but must come according to the determinate counsel of the good God, then it will come, and God will work it to our advantage. But do not *desire* it. Desire peace! Only a divisive warmonger who loves to fight would yearn for controversy and go about gendering strife through useless questions until he gets the controversy he desires. Psalm 122 exhorts us to desire and to pray for Jerusalem's peace. Soldiers who desire controversy give a bad name to the whole army and to all faithful soldiers who are militant for the sake of true peace.

Could it perhaps be said that the preacher or the member in the church who handles his drawn sword recklessly and impetuously by thrashing heresy with a boastful tongue, or by wildly swinging at anything that he does not like or that does not have the right denominational label attached to it, does more damage to the cause of Christ than one who keeps his sword sheathed? Woe be unto us if we are separatists who love an institution more than Jesus, an earthly vineyard more than the spiritual heritage it represents. We had better not be unapproachable, cruel-spirited, and arrogant with the sword. God forbid we *have* the truth but offend because of how we inappropriately *convey* the truth. Let pride never reign in our hearts, and clear of great sin we shall be. Wield the sword carefully.

What a shame it would be if someone wanted to join a true church of Christ for the sake of the truth and the purity of the doctrine that is preached, but does not join—and he does not join because the scriptures are handled arrogantly, menacingly, and carelessly. When, for example, the elect, unbelieving homosexual hears the sword's condemnation of his lifestyle, and the Holy Spirit tears down the stronghold of wicked lust in his heart and leads his thoughts unto Christ, that convert who now hates his sin and desires to live in holiness had better be able to have the confidence that the preacher who spoke the word and the church who sent that preacher will welcome him, the penitent sinner, with open arms and make him feel at home in the fellowship of the gospel. Swords must be handled carefully.

WIELD THE SWORD CONCERNEDLY

Look at the big picture. There are only two roads in life—a narrow road to heaven and a wide road to hell. Every man walks on one of those two roads. Wield the sword concernedly with a heart of love for those who by their confession and walk demonstrate they are on the path to destruction. Attempt to stand in the way of a hell-bound soul and warn him not to proceed. The temporal and eternal judgment of God comes upon those who stubbornly continue to adhere to wicked false doctrine and persist in an unholy life. Does not the perishing of souls concern the church enough to take up the sword of the Spirit? Why is the true church decried as mean-spirited when in her polemics she endeavors to keep fools from destruction?

Even if theologians or churches have only one or two seemingly minor doctrinal flaws in their theological system as they walk the path to glory, those errors work their way through the entire system like leaven, corrupting it all, and soon enough the generations are not walking the path to glory but the path of apostasy that eventually ends in perdition. Let no man play fast and loose with doctrine, asking, “What is the minimal doctrinal content you must believe in order to remain on the path to heaven?” Or to put it differently, “How much error can you get away with and still escape hell?” False doctrine is serious. God is not unrighteous to overlook love for false doctrine over against the sword’s repudiation of it. In one way or another and at one time or another, God visits his judgments upon error and evil. We must warn all unbelievers. We must also warn believers who knowingly embrace or unknowingly confess falsehood, because, though they might be graciously spared, their errors are lies that God hates, paving a way to destruction for their posterity. Concern for souls should motivate us to take up the sword against doctrinal error. And let us always begin at home. Are we embracing falsehood?

Godly concern for souls should also fill our breasts when taking up the sword against gross, immoral lifestyles. If in this present sexual revolution of modern society we have opportunity to talk to a sexually confused young person who is walking a dangerous path, we must do it with firmness and careful compassion. We must “let no corrupt communication proceed out of [our] mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

Wielding the sword does not mean hating, bullying, mocking, and gossiping about those struggling with so-called gender dysphoria. The sin is vile but not unpardonable. Young people and adults who are sexually confused are ensnared by Satan and enslaved in sin. They are not remembering but warring against their Creator in the days of their youth (Eccl. 12:1). They are miserable. To fight with God is death. They are hurting. They are broken. They need help. They have deep psychological, mental, emotional, and spiritual problems. Jesus says, “Blessed [happy] are they that mourn [over their sins]: for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). The implication is, “Unhappy, and even miserable, are they who continue in and celebrate their sins: for they shall not be comforted.”

The best help to give individuals struggling with contentment in their sexuality is the reading, explaining, and applying of the truth of divine scripture—with prayer. Teach them from the scriptures concerning the deadly seriousness of their sin, the calling to flee it, and the blessedness of pardon and spiritual empowerment unto obedience in Christ. Let the word of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ take down these strongholds of sin in the heart and lead into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Teach them the glorious liberty of the gospel that reality is not determined by feelings. I find liberty in that, don’t you? Sometimes when I look around in the world and into various homes, I *feel* like the victory belongs to Satan. It does not. Scripture says the victory belongs to the Lord. Sometimes as a terrible and guilty sinner I *feel* like God could not love me and forgive me, the chief of sinners. He does love me; the Bible tells me so, and I believe it by faith. Not our *subjective feelings*, but the *objective truth of God* is the basis for life. Jesus said so in John 8:31–32: “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

God’s grace administered through the word has the power to bring contentment to those struggling to be content with their sexuality. Grace can lead them to confess that they are not enslaved to a gender arbitrarily assigned to them at birth, but that they are living with the biological sex in which a wise Father beautifully created them already in their mother’s womb, and that wonderful liberty and peace comes in embracing their true God-given identity. There is even hope for a believer whose sexuality is blurred, which happens on occasion in the birth of

intersex babies. God's grace is as wide as the ocean, supplying any need of the sinner. Sinners must know that and be called to repentance and faith in Christ. Wield the sword in concern for souls.

WIELD THE SWORD HOLILY

To be holy is to be consecrated unto God. The sword is the word of God, and we keep it drawn because we love God. Wield the sword holily in consecration to God, because you love God, you love him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and you want his name and his truth and his covenant and his church to stand forever.

God hates lies. God hates nothing more than lies about him. False doctrine is a lie against God. Preaching false doctrine is teaching people lies against God. Wicked living that flows out of false doctrine is a lie against God.

Do not let your family members stand between you and God. The prophet Zechariah prophesied of the day when the God would "pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zech. 12:10). Making families zealous for God's holiness will be one fruit of that Spirit's operation. So zealous will parents be for God that when their son speaks lies against God, the parents will say to him, "Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD," and those "shall thrust him through when he prophesieth," (13:3). In the day of the Holy Spirit of Christ, parents will not make excuses for their rebellious children, and they will not interfere with the process of discipline by the church; parents will seek that discipline. Why? Why, when it pierces like a sword of sorrow through their hearts? God! God's name! God's truth! God's church! God is greater than any man, even our own sons. To God be the glory forever! May his truth stand forever!

When soldiers falter as spiritual battle draws near, it is because their hearts are not filled with love for God as he is revealed in Christ Jesus the Lord. God is God! No one and nothing are more worthy of our reverent devotion than God. May God ever fill our hearts with love for him so that we wield the sword holily.

CONCLUSION

We end where we began. God has shown his love for us in giving to us his militant Son, Jesus Christ.

When I stand as one insignificant little pastor in the camp of Judah, in the church of God, surrounded by both aged saints and little boys and girls, including my own, and I peer over the walls, I see terrifying sights. I see all these sword-bearing militant Muslims infiltrating the West and marching toward Zion. I see Balaams, cursing God's people with their antichristian laws and boisterous marches through city streets and championing rebellion and the idolatry of man. I see men of all nations and races and religions coming together and attempting to silence the true gospel of Jesus Christ and its very offensive, exclusive claim, "Jesus is the only Savior; believe in him or you shall perish." I see former Jehovah-confessors now making peace with apostate Israel. I see all kinds of seducing spirits and pressures to conform to the world. You see the same don't you? Out in the distance we see antichrist himself marshalling an army the likes of which no city has ever seen. We see the devil himself with all his wicked stratagems setting his eyes upon us in Zion. His wrath is great, for he knows his time is short. He wants our pulpits, our consistory rooms, our sanctuaries, our Christian schools, our homes, our dining room tables, our marriage beds, our youth, our babies in the cradle, and most of all our hearts so that strongholds of love for wickedness can be established within us.

Seeing that sight, which is the sight of war, we exclaim, "O God, I thank and praise thee, that Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior is the militant Christ who stands before all our adversaries as an avenger with sword drawn! And that he uses his sword to save us and our children from the sin within and without! And that he is coming again on the clouds of glory to deliver us from this present evil age!"

The battle belongs to Christ. He will keep his sword drawn through us his church to the very end.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS GENERATED BY THE LECTURE

- 1. At least two words for *sword* are used in the New Testament, for example, one word in Revelation 1:16, 2:16, and 19:15; another in Ephesians 6:17 and elsewhere in scripture. What is the Spirit's purpose in using different words for *sword* in the Greek New Testament?**

Evidently this questioner has some knowledge of the New Testament Greek language, and the questioner is correct in stating that there are two different Greek words used for *sword* in the New Testament.

We must believe in verbal inspiration; therefore, the individual words inspired by the Holy Spirit are important. When the Holy Spirit uses two different words for the same thing or concept, there is significance, whether we can see it or not.

The Greek word used in the Revelation passages mentioned by the questioner is *rhomphaia*, and it refers to a long sword. The Greek word used in the two passages upon which I heavily relied in explanation of the word of God as a sword, Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12, is *machaira*, and it refers to a short sword or dagger used for killing animals or cutting up flesh. The important difference between the two kinds of swords is function. The function of the *rhomphaia* (long sword) is to cut and slash by swinging. The function of the *machaira* (short sword) is to pierce deeply by stabbing and thrusting. The Spirit calls God's word a *machaira*, and therefore it is not designed to slash but to pierce. As Hebrews 4:12 points out, the word pierces deeply into the heart, and as it goes it separates the good from the evil, cutting away the evil. Preaching does not slash, preaching pierces. We ought not press the difference between these two words to limits the Spirit did not intend, however, for in Luke 2:35 the *rhomphaia* (long sword) is given a piercing function: "(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

2. It has been said of some non-doctrinal issues in the Protestant Reformed Churches that we have “lost the battle.” Are we to keep the sword drawn on these and other non-doctrinal issues or just on the major (doctrinal) issues?

This is a great question and it allows me to make some additional applications to vitally important areas of Christian living which I, for the sake of time, could not sufficiently address in the lecture. The promotional blurb that advertised the public lecture indicated that I would consider our subject from the perspective of the church’s living in the last days and being assaulted by the devil, whose wrath is great because he knows that his time is short. Thus I focused on lawlessness in the form of “gay marriage” and transgenderism. These issues loom large in society today, and, as I pointed out earlier, have a presence never seen before in history. Both have in common that they are assaults upon creation ordinances. There is something striking about the fact that at the very end of history the devil is going back to the very beginning in order to assault the foundational principles of life, not merely for Bible-believing Christians, but also for all men who live in God’s creation. Marriage, sex, and gender do not fall into the realm of church ordinances but creation ordinances governing all men.

While the assaults upon marriage, sex, and gender are shocking in these last days, nevertheless, there are a host of “non-doctrinal,” Christian-living type dangers that must always be the object of the sword. If we “lose the battle” on these, we are becoming more and more carnal, our denial of common grace and our confession of the antithesis is becoming more and more hypocritical, and soon we will not tolerate sound preaching but after our “own lusts [will] heap to [ourselves] teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3). We must keep the sword drawn, and that is more than official preaching; it also includes friendly admonishment of one another in day-to-day living. What follow are a handful of ever-present dangers to guard against, and I’m sure you could add plenty of others.

Movies: Probably about movies and unholy screen entertainment of all kinds many would say, “We have lost the battle, and that a while ago.” Movies are a plague. The rise of Hollywood and the advancement of technological devices to bring Hollywood’s productions before man’s eyes have been devastating for the church. But does Satan even need the professionals of Hollywood any longer with the birth of YouTube?

YouTube can be a valuable tool. Who has not used it to diagnose and remedy a malfunction in a kitchen appliance or to watch a stirring choir performance? YouTube can even be, and is, pressed into the service of Christ's church in disseminating the gospel. But YouTube is also pressed into the service of hell and the contamination of souls. So are many other tools.

The eyes of God are upon all our works; what does he see those in the Protestant Reformed Churches watching? What do you watch? Would you be comfortable watching it with the elders on family visitation or with God? What are your children viewing while doing "homework" on the laptop? It is not too late for reformation in your home or personal life. If a newly married couple does not talk about entertainment and establish some basic rules and take some simple measures, their home could be built upon sand; by the time children come, that home could be the devil's workshop for molding little souls in pollution. A spiritual collapse of the home is imminent.

Preaching against viewing corruption is vitally important, but I wonder what kind of an impact there would be if groups of friends candidly discussed among themselves entertainment and what is pleasing to God. No doubt some do this profitably. More should, and should be willing to encourage their friends to set no wicked thing before their and their children's eyes (Ps. 101:3). Let's "set the LORD always before [us]," and "because he is at [our] right hand, [we] shall not be moved" (16:8).

Sabbath desecration: The regular preaching of Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism and simple, sanctified parenting should, among other things, help us here. There is an ever-present calling to steer clear of legalism and licentiousness. Legalism seeks to make all kinds of petty rules for the Sabbath and then judge and condemn others as unholy when they fail to keep these man-made rules. Licentiousness might be the greater danger; it is the ditch into which an individual or family falls when they keep pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable behavior on the Sabbath, conforming more and more to the world, as so many apostate Christians and churches do, and failing to fix their hearts on the Lord of the Sabbath. Only God can cause our hearts to faint his hallowed courts to see. Praise him that he does.

Immodesty: Here again, principles can be established from the pulpit in the exposition of God's word, but heads of homes need to take

responsibility and need to establish expectations for their children—especially for their growing daughters—and then work hard to keep those expectations. And we need to help each other and not set stumbling blocks before each other. Once one woman wears something slightly immodest, another says, “Well, so-and-so wears these kinds of skirts, tops, leggings, and the like,” and the downward spiral begins. How will the glorious King have us and our children dress ourselves so that we please him, put no stumbling block before our neighbors, and shine as lights in a world of darkness? Shopping is difficult, but wise women have found ways to make it work. And fathers must be vigilant so that when the teenage daughter dons a mini-skirt Sunday morning, she can expect to meet opposition from her father *and mother*, and she can expect to be told that her choice of apparel is not fit for a daughter of God, and certainly not a daughter of God in a sanctuary of worshippers.

Working mothers: All mothers work, but by “working mothers” I mean those who abandon and neglect their children and their calling to keep the home in order to join the husband in earning a wage in some occupation. The inspired apostle Paul taught young Timothy that “the love of money is the root of *all* evil” (1 Tim. 6:10; emphasis added). The love of money and material things is certainly the root of most child neglect. Some children get neglected by the mother God gave them, because that mother and father love money so much that they each hold a job to satisfy their carnal desires. Sometimes it is argued, “But we cannot provide Christian education for our children on one income,” when in fact, they can; they simply do not want to lose some of their material possessions, pleasures, and vacations for Christian education. When, in fact, a man’s wage cannot meet the financial demands of his home, the home does not have to suffer collapse by the removal of its precious mother into the workplace, for Christ is merciful to help through the diaconate. Other women are simply discontent with the unglamorous life of rearing children in the home each day, so they pine after a career where there is “recognition,” “benefits,” and “promotions.”

Covenant children are neglected by mothers who leave the home and go to work. Other children are neglected by mothers who stay at home and ignore their children because these mothers are so busy working in the shop they set up in their house. Not only are children often sacrificed on the altar of greed, but so are the church and school, as mothers have

no time to contribute to their jobs, their homes, the church, and the school. I have never met an adult who was bitter because he grew up in a low-income home with a stay-at-home mother who loved the home, church, and school in word and deed. But how many adults are bitter, or even worse, spiritually anemic, because they grew up in a home with many possessions and vacations but no mother?

Some mothers have pure hearts and find themselves in difficult positions. Some are single and have a hard time juggling responsibilities. May God be merciful to them—through our loving care. Some have self-employed husbands trying to keep their family business afloat, and the work of the business comes into the home, giving the wife opportunities to pitch in a few hours here and there. The warning against working mothers is not to torment the consciences of pious mothers whose hands may handle something other than their children, but it is to keep our focus. Motherhood is noble and demanding. Children in the home need their mothers. Satan knows that and wants mothers away from their children.

Drinking/Drunkenness: Here also, the parental example and word are so important to back up what God declares in his word. Underage drinking is not cool; it is wicked and disrespectful of authority. A weekend party of drinking for high schoolers and college students is not harmless, legitimate entertainment; parties are unholy and ready the youth to be overtaken as a thief by the great day of the Lord. Drinking is not an acceptable social practice in the covenant; it is sinful and grieves the Spirit. Drinking is not medicine for the broken spirit; it is idolatry. Under the judgment of God, drinking ruins relationships, ruins lives and if not forsaken will eventually lead to public shame. Alcohol is a mocker (Prov. 20:1), as Noah's life demonstrates. Alcohol is a good creature of God. Alcohol is not forbidden, but misuse of it is forbidden—strongly forbidden.

Unholy dating: Never may the sword be sheathed on the important subject of dating and marrying in the Lord. Some of the greatest sorrows in the church come in painfully watching marriages implode, most often because the foolish young man or woman did not heed the admonition of wise family and friends who warned against dating and marrying another who does not love the Lord. Or were there admonitions? Keep the sword drawn. Regardless of what grievous sorrows may ever come down the road, the very union of a believer and an unbeliever is sin against God's holy covenant. No unholy alliances! But even more basic

is the open communication that parents must have with their maturing children and the important instruction they must give regarding what dating is (and what it is not!), what purpose dating serves (and does not serve!), and what to look for (and avoid!) in a young man or woman in order to know the approval of God. May God bless the hurting hearts of that father and mother whose child refuses to walk in the way he or she was trained.

Finally, brethren: If in any of these areas there are doubts about what is permissible or impermissible, then with an honest heart before God, let's apply 1 Corinthians 6:12, and say, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." And Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." And let's remember also that scripture describes the experience of the obedient in all of these matters as blessed.

3. Christ called the Jews "a generation of vipers." Should we say the same, or is it only for Jesus Christ? You mentioned no name-calling. What is proper for preaching?

It is proper for Jesus and for us, taking our direction from scripture, to identify the enemies of the gospel for who they really are. There is a proper place in preaching for rightly identifying the church's enemies according to a careful biblical assessment of their teachings.

Name-calling is forbidden. Name-calling has a negative connotation and refers to the shameless and unholy act of a theological poor sport or sore loser who has lost the argument or battle and, in an attempt to incite others to negative opinions regarding his opponent or complete rejection of his opponent, the sore loser resorts to hurling insults at his opponent. While name-calling has a prominent place in political campaigns, it ought to have no place in the polemics of the church militant.

Jesus was not resorting to name-calling when he called the Jews a "generation of vipers" (Matt. 23:33), neither was John the Baptist (3:7), nor was Paul when he called Bar-Jesus a "child of the devil" (Acts 13:10). By their opposition to the Messiah of God, the Jewish leaders had

revealed that behind their outward piety lurked the malice, hypocrisy, and corruption of Satan himself. They were a generation of vipers, and it was necessary for Jesus to identify them that way in order to rebuke them sternly and to warn all others to guard their souls by fleeing those poisonous teachers.

Rightly identifying the enemies of the gospel in polemics is necessary for the protection of the church. In a particular situation, I will let the reader judge whether a specific term or phrase constitutes unholy name calling or whether it is a necessary and beneficial identification of the foe. And in the end, only God knows the heart and motive.

During the Reformation Martin Luther and John Calvin described their opponents with words that would make us cringe today. I have no doubt that sometimes they sinned by not speaking the truth in love, but I have no doubt that most of the time they were blameless in their zealous defense of the faith before blasphemers. People like to collect “Luther’s insults” and laugh at his “over-the-top” and “hilarious potty mouth.” However, Luther’s words were not uttered for sport or entertainment. Luther was waging war against the gates of hell. Although Luther and Calvin used terms that would be abhorred today in a society that is oversensitive to political correctness and in an ecclesiastical climate in which Christians bend over backwards to be nice to heretics and refuse to call them the heretics that they are, Luther and Calvin were, like their Master, jealous for the glory of their God and the preservation of his church.

If I am hiking through the wilderness of a national park in the Desert Southwest of the United States, and I happen upon a western diamondback rattlesnake, I will hope my tourist’s brochure warns me ahead of time of this creature’s possible presence on my path and rightly identifies this creature and its characteristics, so that I can take necessary precaution. So also I will hope that in her polemics the church will rightly identify heresy as heresy and heretics as heretics, so that believers can be ware. If personal names must be mentioned for the preservation of the church, then the inspired apostle Paul was not hesitant to use names (Hymenaeus, Alexander, Philetus, Alexander the coppersmith, and others).

Indeed, it may be permissible for the church to call others “a generation of vipers.”

4. How do we explain Mark 6:11 or Matthew 10:14: "shaking off the dust of our feet" when we are not heard? Is this a sheathing of the sword? If not, how would you explain this action?

These passages give Jesus' instruction to the twelve apostles and the church of the new dispensation in bringing the gospel to the nations. In those cities in which the word of God is steadfastly despised and rejected, the calling of the apostles and us is to discontinue our labors there and move on. The act of shaking the dust off our feet as "a testimony against them" (Mark 6:11) is symbolic and indicates that the city is so polluted that even the ground on which the gospel-haters stand is polluted. The ambassadors of Christ may no longer have anything to do with that city. God has reserved the inhabitants for severe judgment. In the day of the Lord, the judgment of gospel-rejecting cities will be worse than the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah because gospel-rejecting cities not only denied the natural light of God's revelation in creation, but also the far brighter light of God's saving revelation in Jesus Christ.

Leaving the city and shaking the dust off our feet is not sheathing the sword. The sword has worked its divine purpose according to God's eternal decree of double predestination. It has obviously hardened many as they visibly hold the gospel in contempt. Now it is time to move on. The sword is not being sheathed, but the sword is being taken into other battlefields to work, and by God's grace, we pray, to work salvation.

5. Is it considered false ecumenicity for a church to encourage or support its members to attend conservative conferences where the truth is not purely taught? Or is the church to be against such activities, considering them a careless wielding of the sword? I pray for and thank God for your work and thank you in advance for your response.

I do not consider the believer's attendance at "conservative conferences where the truth is not purely taught" to be "false ecumenicity." Certainly the degree to which the truth is taught will determine which conferences the believer attends, but attendance as such is not false ecumenicity.

I do consider it to be careless or reckless use of the sword of the word of God to condemn as "false ecumenicity" attendance at conferences in which the truth is not or might not be taught exactly, point for point, as

it is in one's own denomination. To condemn as unusable any instruction that is not produced by one's own denomination, whether that be books, magazines, blogs, podcasts, downloaded sermons and speeches, or even conferences is reckless.

I will say without any hesitation that as a seminarian and now a pastor, I have grown in knowledge and understanding for the advancement of my own personal life of godliness and ministerial work by attending various conservative conferences where I would not necessarily agree with every statement made by each speaker. I have been to very few conferences in which I have had an objection with some of the content of the presentation, but even when a statement was erroneous, that bone in the fish could easily be spit out without hindering edification. Even when the speeches were sound but shallower than I had hoped, or when some necessary and timely applications were left unsaid, there was still benefit. At such conferences, truths I love and confess can be uttered by another in new and refreshing ways, there is exposure to helpful books and other resources, and there are profitable personal conversations with other attendees or the speakers that open up new and helpful understandings and insights to me for my work as a pastor.

Conferences often attract people who are new to the Reformed faith and struggling to navigate their ways through the theological waters of Reformed Christianity and all the different denominations; opportunities to share the doctrines of sovereign, particular grace with them are always rewarding. Occasionally opportunities to attempt to correct those who hold errors or have misunderstandings are presented.

Additionally, learning some of the mechanics of effective public speaking by observing different dynamic speakers has been profitable for my pulpit ministry. I have found beneficial what Rev. Herman Hoeksema once called "rubbing shoulders with other Reformed men." There is knowledge of the things of God that exists outside the walls of one's own church or denomination. To deny it is pride. To reject it out of hand it is folly. To use it with careful discretion is wise.

That said, I have not answered the question. The question is *not*, "Is it considered false ecumenicity to *attend* conservative conferences . . . ?" The question is, "Is it considered false ecumenicity *for a church to encourage or support* its members to attend conservative conferences . . . ?" It might be. False ecumenicity is the attempt of the church institute

to establish, experience, and express unity with others where there is not agreement in the essential truths of Christ. And while the church's *encouraging* of her members to attend various conferences might not be false ecumenicity as such, what could be motivating and driving the church in her *encouragement* but the spirit of false ecumenism? "Encourage" is a strong word. If the church is *encouraging* her members, some of whom are spiritually weak and lack discretion, to go to various conferences, even conservative conferences, she is working the undoing of her own distinctive identity. Let the church host her own conferences—conferences with sound, hearty, lively, and distinctive teaching—and then let her "encourage" her members (and non-members!) to attend these conferences. I am not sure what "support" all entails in this context. However, the church, generally speaking, must permit but not "encourage" her members to go to the various conservative conferences concerning which you inquire.

For your prayers I thank God.

6. Can I pray for someone who believes in creation, believes in the Bible, but doesn't believe in the fact that he will be saved because of his sins? Or does he not have grace?

You must pray for the brother who believes in creation and the Bible but doubts his own salvation. Love for him will be your motive. And may the effectual fervent prayer for the brother avail much unto the increase of assurance in his doubting soul. Yes, he has grace; pray that God will give him a richer season of it.

7. Must the Protestant Reformed Churches allow members who were divorced and remarried before coming to the Protestant Reformed Churches to remain married?

Regarding the divorced and remarried who come to the Protestant Reformed Churches, it is the way of wisdom for us to apply strictly, firmly, carefully, and compassionately the infallible doctrine of our Lord. This will be best for all involved and will honor God. The doctrine of our Lord guides us in how to view those who come to the Protestant Reformed Churches as divorced and remarried. We are taught to view and even call them "adulteresses" or, as the case may be, "adulterers" (Rom. 7:2–3). As we would with anyone living in sin against the seventh

commandment, we would exhort them to repentance, which includes fleeing their sin. In this case it will mean separation from the spouse in the adulterous remarriage. Separation is deeply painful, but separation is also possible, because our Lord not only gives his doctrine of marriage but also the gracious power to live it.

8. What is my calling to fight against homosexuality or abortion in the world today?

First, examine your own heart. The fight must always begin within. If you are struggling with homosexual desires or the desire to murder your baby in abortion, then repent and plead for the mercy of forgiveness and the gracious power to fight against any remnants of the sin within you. If you are free from such sins, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but praise God's grace and thank him for sparing you from your own sinful flesh, which is inclined toward all evil.

Second, love God's law and grieve over the sins of homosexuality and abortion in the world by letting "rivers of waters run down" your eyes because so many keep not God's law (Ps. 119:136).

Third, speak against these sins as God gives you opportunity. Show the seriousness of the sin, how God hates homosexuality as a vile sin against nature and how he hates abortion as murder. Show the way of liberty and restoration in Christ. In the case of abortion where irreversible damage has been done in the murder of a human being, be sure to encourage the penitent that Jesus was numbered with the transgressors and died for murderers. Moreover, in your fight against these sins you have the liberty in Christ to stand, for example, in front of an abortion clinic and to speak the truth in love to those who emerge from that den of iniquity. You are not obligated to do that, nor are others, but if your conscience feels compelled to do so, then do so.

Fourth, we must fight against this sin in the world by carefully teaching our children something about it and praying that God will spare them from it.

Fifth, make sure you attend a church that preaches against homosexuality and abortion from the pulpit, and in that pulpit Christ will wage war with the world.

9. In our fight for the truth are there not times we have to leave off fighting with the sword and just pray because we are getting nowhere with gainsayers who will not bow to the truth?

In personal interaction with a gainsayer there may come a time when pressing the matter of the truth in a disagreement is giving that which is holy unto a dog (Matt. 7:6) by exciting the gainsayer to greater expressions of contempt for God and his truth. God's glory is not being advanced by our continued interaction. The way of wisdom is, as you say, "to leave off fighting with the sword."

But in the matter of gainsayers at large, the church may never put up the sword. In her testimony before the world and the false church and over against all the false doctrines, heresies, vain philosophies, wicked attitudes, and carnal mentalities that abound, the true church must continue to wield the double-edged sword of God's word on every issue until Christ returns. Even if she sees not one sinner hearing and repenting, the church must continue wielding the sword. Like Noah, the church must continue preaching righteousness until the judgment of the world of the ungodly is brought in.

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