

Lecture: Of God, Through God, To God

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Thank you and thank you for the opportunity to deliver this lecture tonight. We will have to be good children of the Reformation this Friday evening and settle in for a good amount of doctrine. I have an outline. I hope it's been distributed so that anyone who wants one can have one. I don't know that you'll be able to take notes or anything on it. It's not that big and conducive to that but it's a map to show you where we're at and where we are going.

I want to begin this evening by explaining the title of my lecture. First of all, when I refer to our covenant doctrine as Protestant Reformed churches for the title of the lecture is "Of God, Through God, and To God," our covenant doctrine as Protestant Reformed churches, I do not mean that this doctrine I present tonight is the exclusive possession of the Protestant Reformed churches such as to mean, then, that no one else anywhere confesses this or may confess it because it is ours, but I mean this is God's doctrine, the doctrine we have historically confessed as Protestant Reformed churches because God in his grace has given this doctrine to us through our study of the Scripture and Confessions. It's his doctrine and would to God that all men everywhere would join us in our Confession.

Furthermore, when I speak of our doctrine as Protestant Reformed churches, I do not mean that we have a binding document like a Creed that explicitly and authoritatively and comprehensively sets forth the whole of our covenant doctrine. We have the Declaration of Principles from the 1950s which demonstrates that an unconditional covenant of grace with the elect alone is the binding covenant doctrine of the Reformed Confessions, however, we do not have a fourth form of unity, we do not have a confession of the covenant, we do not have some synodically approved, officially adopted treatise that comprehensively sets forth our covenant doctrine from A to Z. When I speak of our covenant doctrine as Protestant Reformed churches tonight, I'm referring to that doctrine that we have always confessed from our origin, that doctrine that has been passed down through the generations as a heritage, that doctrine that was challenged and tested and refined especially during the controversy and the schism of the 1950s, that doctrine that is set forth in all of our writings in the Standard Bearer going all the way back to the very beginning and in our theological books and works, the doctrine that has been delivered from the pulpits and the Catechism lecterns, the doctrine I have been taught my whole life and in the theological seminary, the doctrine I taught in my ministry, and the doctrine that I am by the grace of God resolved to teach in our theological seminary, the doctrine I

pray that our children will come to learn and know and love. I am speaking of the covenant doctrine that was articulated by our founding fathers, particularly Herman Hoeksema, who has been called the Doctor of the Covenant. Hoeksema's main contribution to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ was his development of a distinctively Reformed covenant doctrine. Hoeksema consciously developed his understanding of the doctrine of the covenant in the framework of the Reformed Confessions to which he was happily bound, and he rigorously and rightly applied the Reformed doctrines of sovereign grace to the covenant. However, he did not bind himself to the Reformed tradition as it was carried along by the Reformed theologians, so at various points he departed from the tradition in order to adhere to the Scripture and the Confessions.

If you want to know what our doctrine of the covenant is, then really all you have to do is read, read, and read Hoeksema especially. Hoeksema wrote, "If you ask me what is the most peculiar treasure of the Protestant Reformed churches, I answer without any hesitation their peculiar view of the covenant. And what is their peculiar conception? Briefly stated it teaches that God realizes his eternal covenant of friendship in Christ, the firstborn of every creature and the first-begotten of the dead organically and antithetically along the lines of election and reprobation and in connection with the organic development of all things." March 15, 1950.

Read Hoeksema and that's not to slight Danhof and especially his brilliant article on the idea of the covenant, and Uphoff and any others who have come after Hoeksema, but read especially Hoeksema. And you do not have to be Protestant Reformed in order to know what our doctrine of the covenant is, all you have to do is read and even the most hostile enemies of our doctrine of the covenant know exactly what our doctrine of the covenant is. Even if they do not necessarily faithfully present it in their attacks against it, they know exactly what it is. In fact, some enemies of our covenant doctrine know it better than some Protestant Reformed members, and that's not good. Read, and we who preach and teach must preach and teach.

In preparing for this lecture, I consulted an article from a theological journal written by the Dutch theologian Peter Roendahl(ph) in the year 2001 entitled, "Herman Hoeksema"... which is in the English, "Herman Hoeksema: Life and views of a controversial theologian." Roendahl was writing only 19 years ago at the dawn of the 21st century to the Dutch Reformed churches in the Netherlands and he acknowledged that almost no one in the Netherlands knows of the Protestant Reformed churches and of Herman Hoeksema. So he was presenting the distinctive doctrines of the PRC and Hoeksema, including especially Hoeksema's doctrine of the covenant, and Roendahl's presentation is fair and accurate and much of what is contained in his journal article is contained in my lecture tonight.

In his conclusion, Roendahl writes, "Whether men now welcome the theology of Hoeksema with agreement or reject it with disgust, no one can deny that he thoroughly knew the view of his opponent, that he substantiated his criticism with well-founded arguments and that he managed to give a coherent and consistent alternative." Indeed, coherent and consistent and confessional is the doctrine of the covenant articulated by

Hoeksema and by us as Protestant Reformed churches. So when I speak of our covenant doctrine tonight, I'm simply referring to that doctrine that we have always confessed, it is in the teachings.

Now concerning the first and the main part of the title of my speech "Of God, Through God, and To God." This is, as you immediately recognize, taken from the glorious doxology of Romans 11:36, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." If all things are of God and through God and to God, then certainly the covenant is of, through and to God. The single most important truth of our doctrine of the covenant is our simple confession that it is God's covenant. It is not the covenant of man. It is not the covenant of God and man. It is the covenant of God with man.

Concerning this covenant, God himself repeatedly says in the Scriptures as he did, for example, to Abraham, "My covenant. I will establish my covenant. I will establish my covenant for an everlasting covenant," so that this covenant never becomes the covenant of man, it never becomes the covenant of God and man, but it is now and into all eternity God's covenant with man. The covenant of which we speak tonight is the covenant of grace, that relationship of intimate communion between God and all of his elect people, including their spiritual seed, in Jesus Christ. This covenant is conceived, ordained, established, maintained, preserved and perfected by God alone so that the covenant is of God, it is through God, and it is to God.

Finally by way of introduction, I want to say something about my purpose with this lecture. I am well-aware of the fact that we as Protestant Reformed churches have been navigating our way through some fairly turbulent times and my purpose tonight is simply to ask you to stop for just a moment, stop and put everything else away, unclutter the whole of your mind, stop and listen. What do we believe as Protestant Reformed churches, what do we believe about the covenant? What do we love and what do we want to maintain and maintain for our children and children's children, and therefore what do we not believe? What do we hate? And what do we oppose as long as we have breath? What is our covenant doctrine?

In the first part of the speech, I want to lay out the main lines, the broad lines of our covenant doctrine, and then in part 2, I want to zero in on the doctrinal issue of the last few years in our churches, and then as friends, and that's what the covenant is all about, friendship, as friends. Wherever I go in our churches, I view those in whose presence I am as friends, as friends in the covenant. Let us go forth together, strong in God's service, strong in God's might to conquer all evil and to stand for the right doctrine of the covenant.

So let's begin. First, the covenant is of God. God is the source. I call your attention to two respects in which this is true. First, the covenant is of God's being. As to its essence, now its essence, the covenant is a relationship of intimate communion between God and his elect people in Jesus Christ. The covenant is not a promise, it is certainly not a conditional promise. The covenant is not a temporary way or means that is put in place to

get people to heaven. The covenant is not a contract, a cold contract with conditions and stipulations and certainly not one that's been patterned after the contracts of the ancient near eastern neighbors of Old Testament Israel as some theologians teach. The covenant is essentially a warm relationship and it is this because it has its origin in God's being and it is patterned after God's own life.

The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is eternally and essentially in himself a covenant God who enjoys perfect loving fellowship in himself. The Father has a tender bosom and in that bosom, in the warmth of that bosom eternally dwells the Son, John 1:18, so that the Father and the Son are forever toward one another, face-to-face, and in the Spirit they breathe after, they pant after one another in love, they delight in each other. God lives a covenant life in himself so when God says to his people, "I will establish my covenant with thee," he is promising to be the friend Sovereign who will take his people as friend servants into the everlasting enjoyment of his own covenant life, creatures taken into his covenant life. The Dutchman Roendahl rightly noted that the only covenant Hoeksema will recognize is the eternal communion of the Trinity. Rich, so very rich.

The covenant is of God's being and, secondly, the covenant is of God's counsel. All that the covenant is and forever shall be must be traced back to God's eternal sovereignly free counsel. In his counsel God determined to glorify himself by revealing his own covenant life outside of himself by making creatures and by making creatures partakers of his covenant life, not ultimately through Adam, the first man who is of this earth and earthly, but ultimately in the last Adam who is the Lord from heaven in whom the human and the divine come together, in whom the creature and the Creator are united in one person. God will take his people and he will lift them up into the highest heights of the new heavens and the new earth to live with him eternally in Jesus Christ. Now that Adam had no conception. Hoeksema always maintained that for the realization of this glorious purpose, God taking creatures into his covenant life, God eternally appointed the man Christ Jesus to be the head of the covenant. To use the language now of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1, to be the firstborn of every creature by whom all things would consist and in whom all the fullness of God would dwell.

And God eternally elected a people to be given to Christ and God ordained that the elect would be created in time and history, and then through that deep and antithetical way of sin and grace, all of the elect would be recreated in Jesus Christ and we'd be taken into God's covenant of friendship by Jesus Christ. And for the realization of his covenant in Christ, God eternally reprobated others as vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction in the way of their own sin. On this earth, the reprobate serve the covenant. The elect and the reprobate all live together as one organism of the human race, and the reprobate whether they are the reprobate of the ungodly world or whether they are the reprobate like Esau and Judas Iscariot right in the church visible, the reprobate not only oppose God's covenant but through their opposition they serve God's covenant. God does not will the salvation of the reprobate, God does not include them in his covenant, God does not make conditional promises to the reprobate, God sovereignly ordains that the reprobate shall by their own willful wickedness serve his elect, serve his covenant, and the greatest

demonstration of this truth occurred when the kings of the earth stood up and when the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ, for of a truth, against God's holy child Jesus whom God had anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together for to do whatsoever God's hand and God's counsel determined before to be done, Acts 4:26-28. Never did the enemies of the covenant so show their hatred for and opposition to the covenant as when they murdered its head Jesus Christ, and never was it so clearly manifested that the enemies of the covenant serve the covenant.

About this teaching of Hoeksema, Roendahl said, "His radical position especially in connection with God's dealings with the reprobate ensured that many detested his theology." But it is proven that detesting is easier than refuting, and in his eternal counsel God ordained all things that shall ever come to pass in heaven and on earth, so that for example, the outbreak of COVID-19 here in our own country or the upcoming national election or whatever your present suffering is, everything has been ordained by God as a means for the realization of his covenant. Everything serves God's covenant. God's eternal counsel determines everything and that includes membership in the covenant, and that includes every blessing in the covenant, so that as the Canons teach, election is the fountain of every saving good from which proceed faith, holiness and all other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself. Therefore nothing we ever possess in the covenant can be earned by our working but as the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans 11:7, "the election hath obtained it." Everything in us is to be traced back to election.

The covenant of God, it is of God, of his being and of his counsel. The covenant is also through God. This expression now refers to the execution of God's eternal counsel so that God has his eternal plan but now God also by his power works out that plan. I call your attention to three respects in which the covenant is through God: the promise, the establishment and the maintenance of the covenant.

First of all, the promise of the covenant. Here we could think of the revelation of God's covenant, it is of God and through God. The promise is God's solemn oath that he reveals in the Gospel his promise, "I will be your God and you shall be my people." That "I will," that's God's promise. "I will," that promise is fundamentally Christ, the revelation of Christ. "I will," that promise comes flowing out of God's eternal heart of love and it is first revealed in paradise in the mother promise of Gospel hope in Jesus Christ to fall in Adam and Eve. "I will," that promise runs throughout all of the old dispensation, of course then it is clothed in type and shadow, but that promise keeps moving through history and it is fulfilled in principle in Jesus Christ, in his Incarnation and death and resurrection and ascension, and especially in the pouring out of his Holy Spirit so that Immanuel, God with us, Jesus Christ by his Holy Spirit comes to live in and to dwell in us forever. God with us. But that promise keeps moving through the whole of the new dispensation until it is fully, fully realized in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when he will raise the dead and conduct the final judgment and take all of the elect and bring them into the highest heights of heaven to live before the face of Jehovah God, to dwell in his tabernacle forever and ever. "I will."

God's promise, "I will," it is promiscuously proclaimed everywhere. Prior to the coming of Jesus, of course, that promise was as to its proclamation limited for the most part to the nation of Israel, but now it is proclaimed in all the nations of the earth. The promiscuously proclaimed promise is particular so that it is only ever made by God to his elect and to their spiritual seed who are elect. God does not promise all men, "I will be your God." He certainly does not conditionally promise all, "I will be your God if you believe." God does not promise all professing Christians who go to church, God does not promise all of the infant children of believers who are brought to be baptized that he will be their God. The promise flows out of the decree of election and is made to the elect alone. The promise is of God and the promise is through God, and therefore the promise is steadfast and sure, it is yea and amen in Jesus Christ, and as that promise now runs throughout all of history through the proclamation of the Gospel, it is spoken to the elect, spoken to them in the heart, and it brings to them all that God has ordained for them in his counsel so that God realizes his covenant through his promise. His promise, and isn't that comforting? Feeble sinners, feeble sinners in a wicked changing world, this glorious and eternal plan of God, it is not dependent upon you and me but God realizes his covenant through his promise, his unbreakable promise.

Secondly, the establishment of the covenant is through God. The covenant that God decrees and that God promises he actually establishes by making unworthy, dead sinners, his covenant friends, he brings them into his fellowship as children. The covenant is not established by the will, worth, work, doing, or choice of any sinner. The covenant is sovereignly, unilaterally, unconditionally, which is to say graciously established by God. He makes us his friends. He does. And the ground for this divine wonder-work of God is the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ whereby he paid for all of our sins. He made the atonement and his victorious resurrection on the third day whereby he emerged from the dead with everlasting righteousness and heavenly life for us so that God can reconcile us unto himself on the basis of Jesus' work and unite us to Jesus Christ in an unbreakable bond. And that he does in grace. God comes to each elect sinner and he unites them to Christ in that bond that cannot be broken, so that when one is taken into the covenant, he is forever in God's covenant of friendship. To the dead sinner God brings a new life. To the sinner God issues his efficacious call, "Come unto me," and God draws the sinner to himself. God bestows the gift of faith, he breathes it into the sinner so that the sinner knows God and trusts in God. God justifies the sinner with the righteousness of Christ. He sanctifies the sinner by the Spirit of holiness. He preserves the sinner in the covenant. He glorifies the sinner so that he is conformed perfectly body and soul to the head Jesus Christ.

God does. Men might make their own covenants as David and Jonathan did, covenants established mutually through the will and work of both parties. But in God's covenant, man is no party over against God. God is always the everlasting fountain and man is always the creature that God made, the creature whom God makes to be a thirsty drinker and God draws that creature to himself and causes that creature to drink of him and to be satisfied in him and to say, "All my fountains are in God." God establishes his covenant.

The promise of the covenant is through God. The establishment of the covenant is through God. And now third, the maintenance and preservation of the covenant is of God and through God. Some say that the covenant is unilateral and it is unconditional in its origin, but it is bilateral and it is conditional in its operation, so that while God graciously initiates the covenant, initiates the relationship, man is at least partly responsible for preserving it. We reject that notion and we teach that the covenant of God is both established and maintained unilaterally and unconditionally. The friend Sovereign sees to it that all of the elect whom he draws into his covenant life live forever in that covenant and actually live the life of the covenant. Now think about the creation. The creation is of God, he created it, but it is also through God as now by his providence he upholds and he governs and he maintains it. The creation is so that we men and dogs and horses and fireflies and grasshoppers, we all live and we move and we have our being in God. Of him and through him. Now that's true of the creation, the earthly creation, how much more is that not true spiritually of God's covenant? God maintains the covenant.

This sovereign grace does not destroy or diminish our calling in the covenant as responsible, rational, moral creatures. The never-ending charge that is leveled against the unconditional covenant of sovereign particular grace is that we do not do justice to human responsibility. On the contrary, we whole-heartedly teach as an essential element of our covenant doctrine that we have a calling in the covenant of friendship. As the baptism form puts it, we have our part in the covenant of grace. We are called to believe on God and woe unto you if you do not believe in God. We are called to repent of our sins, to be sorry, to acknowledge them before God, and woe to any man who does not repent. We are called to live the Christian life in all good works, and woe to any man who walks in wickedness.

Fundamentally our calling in the covenant as adults and our children with us in the covenant is to stand for God as his friend servants. Stand for God. Antithetically over against all that is opposed to God, even right here in our own world-loving flesh. Stand for God in your church life. Stand for God in your work life, in your school life at the university, as a citizen of the United States of America. Stand for God. That's our calling. In your marriage, when you are out on a date before marriage, stand for God. When you live in your marriage, stand for God over against all of the wickedness that is promoted by the world and even by the church world, including remarriage after divorce. Stand for God in your marriage. Live in such a way that it's plain to everyone all around you that you are against the ungodly world, against false doctrine, against Satan, against immorality. Not because you're anti-this and because you're anti-that, so anti, but because in the covenant you are for God. And in your fiery trial when God the Father lays his hand upon you and he takes from you so that you lose something and you are hurting and all around you are calls to curse God and to murmur against God, stand for him. Our sacred calling as friend servants is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. All that we are we owe to God and to our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. Stand for him then no matter what suffering that may bring for what could be more blessed? What could be more blessed than to be the friend, the friend of God, serving God, worshiping God, and standing for your friend? That's what friends do, we stand for God.

But understand all that we are and all that we do, we are and we do by his grace. If all things are of God and all things are through God, then we can never expect and we can never expect any credit for any activity we perform or expect to earn something from God because of some activity we perform. We're utterly dependent upon God for everything, for the very breath we breathe and for our believing and repenting, our loving, our doing of good works, for everything. Why do we believe? Because the Spirit of Christ quickens in us a lively faith so that we cannot but believe. Why do we repent? Because the Spirit of Christ convicts us and causes our heart to break in godly sorrow. Why do we obey? Because the Spirit is in us, the Spirit of Immanuel, God with us, in order to will and to do of God's good pleasure so that we will and we do because the Spirit lives within us. Always our activity is the fruit of God's sovereign gracious activity.

After making offerings for the building of the temple, David thanked God for everything. Everything, even for the gift of a willing heart. And David said in 1 Chronicles 29:14, "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." What do we give to God that he has not first given to us? Never can anyone come and say to God, "I deserve something, some compensation for what I have done." The whole life of the covenant that we live is through God as he sovereignly maintains and preserves his covenant with us.

Finally, the covenant is to God and that means all the glory goes to God. That's where it begins in God's counsel, that's where it ends always, to God be the glory. Not to man, not to any angel, to God be the glory, and this must live in our consciousness so that we are jealous for the glory of God. We must repudiate any covenant doctrine that gives man a reason to boast, any doctrine that makes the covenant in any sense of man and through man and therefore to man. But we may never repudiate any erroneous covenant concept simply for the sake of repudiation but because we are jealous to maintain the glory of our friend Sovereign and his Christ who is our head. Everything about the covenant is of God and through God. Whether that be his salvation of us and our children, whether that be his deliverance of this present groaning creation and his refashioning of it as the new heavens and the new earth, whether that be his use of the devil and all of the ungodly to serve his purposes, everything, absolutely everything is of God and through God so that everything might redound to the glory of God now and eternally in Jesus Christ. Whether any man has as his goal and his purpose that God have the glory, it doesn't matter. It's God's purpose and God accomplishes his purpose. Read the book of Revelation especially. God will get all of the glory and is it not an astonishing display of his powerful grace that we glory-hungry sinners who love to have the preeminence, we are so transformed by his grace that his purpose becomes our purpose, and the sincere desire of our heart is, "Not unto us, O God, but unto thee be all of the glory in all things."

Now let us bow down in adoration before this great God tonight. Can you imagine if Solomon in all of his glory would go out of his palace and get down on his hands and knees in the dirt and with his pointer finger start digging around in the soil and find a

little little baby worm and say, "I love you. You are my friend and I will protect you and care for you forever." And then Solomon takes that little baby worm into his palace and he lavishes that little worm with all of his love and all of the luxuries of his palace. Infinitely greater is God's covenant. God comes to us as creatures of the dust and he takes us into his covenant life.

But you see, we are not only small and weak, we are sinful, more sinful than we even understand. Sinful. Even the good things that we do, we corrupt because we are so sinful, we are so unfaithful in this relationship it's shameful, and we can be so haughty and puffed up in our knowledge and so self-centered and so cold and careless toward our God and his doctrine, and so spiritually lethargic, and so worldly, so antagonistic toward others in our pride, so prone to hate each other by nature, so ungrateful for what Christ did in his infinite sacrifice, and God takes us into his perfect covenant fellowship, an everlasting tabernacle. I would never take us. Sorry. I would never take you and you would never take me but God, God is so gracious, purely gracious, God takes us into his covenant, us and our children and our grandchildren in the line of generations. He clothes us with the perfect righteousness of Christ and even gives us hatred for our sins and the holy desire that he be glorified. Bow down before this great God tonight and say, "To God be the glory now and forever through Jesus Christ. Of God, through God and to God is the covenant."

Let's take a break now and sing the aforementioned numbers. I believe they were 27 and 163. Feel free to stand up and stretch if you need to, use the restroom if you need to, and then after these two numbers we will resume with the second part of the speech.

27. God the Highest Good

"O God, preserve me, for in Thee
Alone my trust has stood;
My soul has said, Thou art my Lord,
My chief and only good.

I love Thy saints, who fear Thy Name
And walk as in Thy sight;
They are the excellent of earth,
In them is my delight.

The Lord is my inheritance,
The Lord alone remains
The fullness of my cup of bliss;
The Lord my lot maintains.

The lines are fallen unto me
In places large and fair;
A goodly heritage is mine,
Marked out with gracious care."

163. Satisfaction in God

"O Lord, my God, most earnestly
My heart would seek Thy face,
Within Thy holy house once more
To see Thy glorious grace.
Apart from Thee I long and thirst,
And nought can satisfy;
I wander in a desert land
Where all the streams are dry.

The lovingkindness of my God
Is more than life to me;
So I will bless Thee while I live
And lift my prayer to Thee.
In Thee my soul is satisfied,
My darkness turns to light,
And joyful meditations fill
The watches of the night.

My Saviour, 'neath Thy sheltering wings
My soul delights to dwell;
Still closer to Thy side I press,
For near Thee all is well.
My soul shall conquer every foe,
Upholden by Thy hand;
Thy people shall rejoice in God,
Thy saints in glory stand."

That was very beautiful. 163, I had asked if we could sing 163 because Gertrude Hoeksema tells us that it was one of the favorites of Herman Hoeksema. He sang it often in his home and sang it lustily and it was beautiful to hear this evening.

We have been here one hour. I thank you for your attention thus far. Now we move to the second part of the speech. It will not be as long as the first part but it is important. I want to move now from the broad lines of our covenant doctrine and address specifically the doctrinal issue that has drawn the attention of our churches and which came to a head at Synod 2018, and I do this to help anyone who may still be confused, and because I do not want to go backwards as a denomination, and I don't want to spin but to move forward, to make progress, to go forth in God's service and strong in God's might to conquer all evil and to stand for what is right.

The doctrinal issue concerns the relation of our conscious experience of fellowship with God in his covenant and our good works of obedience. I will speak to three things as you can tell from the outline, what we have taught, what we have always taught, the error that

appeared and what we must learn. What we have always taught. The Protestant Reformed churches have always taught that we experience, we enjoy covenant fellowship with God in the way of obedience. Now about this truth I want to say three things. First, I want to speak about fellowship; secondly, I want to explain how we enter into that fellowship; and thirdly, I want to explain the manner in which we live in and enjoy that fellowship.

First, fellowship. The conscious experience of fellowship with God, that's the heart of the covenant, to know God, to taste the goodness of God, to enjoy God, to enjoy the nearness of God and the love of God in the Gospel and in the sacraments, to dwell with God under one roof, to eat with God and drink with God. That's life. That fellowship is life. We have always said that to live apart from God is death, but to commune with God, that is life. We sing that, Psalter 203.

Fellowship with God. Fellowship with God, how do we get into that fellowship? Three words: way, that is the way unto, coming and drawing. The way unto and into God's fellowship is Jesus. He says so, John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Jesus is the way because Jesus is the truth and because Jesus is the life. Jesus is the only one who has ever lived a perfect life before God. Jesus is the only one who has perfect righteousness, the righteousness that is necessary to have fellowship with God in his covenant. Jesus has perfect righteousness. He is the way unto and into God's fellowship.

Coming. Coming is the activity of faith as Jesus teaches it in John 6:35, "he that cometh to me shall never hunger," here's the parable, "and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." In the doctrine of Jesus, coming and believing are equivalent. Jesus says in John 14:6, "no man cometh unto the Father but by me." We come to the Father and his fellowship by believing in Jesus. Jesus is the way unto and we come on that way by faith.

Now because the covenant is of God and through God, Jesus teaches drawing. Why do you believe? How do you believe? The Father's drawing is the explanation for coming by faith on the way Jesus. Jesus says in John 6:44, "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Fellowship. Now how do you get into that fellowship to enjoy that fellowship? God with cords of everlasting love, God draws you into his fellowship. He does that through his efficacious call in the Gospel, "Come," and by his efficacious call he draws us to himself. He graciously draws us into his fellowship in such a way that you believe in Jesus who is the way unto so that you enter the conscious experience of fellowship with God by faith in Jesus. This has always been our covenant doctrine. All you have to do is read. The way unto, coming, drawing.

Now the manner in which we live in and enjoy that fellowship is in the way of obedience. The means, the means by which we enjoy, by which we continue to enjoy that fellowship is always faith. That's the instrument that keeps us in communion with Christ, faith. But the manner in which we live in that fellowship and enjoy that fellowship is obedience. I want to use an illustration here. It has its limitations as illustrations do, but we will use it.

Imagine that this entire church building represents conscious fellowship with God so that if you are here in this building, you are enjoying communion with God. This building is called fellowship. Now running all throughout this building are all these carpeted paths, the narthex, into the fellowship hall, into the consistory room, into the library, into the Catechism rooms, into the kitchen, all throughout the sanctuary here, all of these carpeted paths, these paths are called obedience, obedience to the law of God, so that when you live here in this building called fellowship, you are walking on the paths called obedience because as you live in this house and you enjoy fellowship with God by faith in Christ, your faith is always responding, it cannot but respond with good works of obedience. So when you walk with God here in the light, you walk not in the darkness of disobedience but you walk in the light of loving and grateful obedience, giving yourself to God and to the neighbor in love. The driveway from the road to the building and the front door is called the way of access. The way of access is the way unto fellowship, the way to get into, the way to enter into this building called fellowship. How do you get in the building? The way unto is Christ and Christ alone as he says in John 14:6, "I am the way; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." So we say that we enjoy fellowship with God in the way of obedience and that way of obedience is not referring to the way of access unto, that way of obedience is referring to the way of grateful conduct in fellowship. The paths of obedience in this house of fellowship, fellowship with God by faith and faith always responding with good works of grateful obedience.

Now admittedly the illustration has weaknesses for various reasons and one of them is that it doesn't capture the reality that our life of obedience isn't simply moving around in circles in some confined area, but it's a path, a path that has direction. It's aimed at heaven, the straight and narrow path, and there's progression on the path. That's not captured in the illustration but for all of the weaknesses with that and other elements, it will serve our purposes for a mental image. We have always confessed that we enjoy fellowship with God in the way of obedience.

The error that appeared in our churches and was officially condemned as error and corrected at Synod 2018 is this and I will put it in the simplest terms: our good works of obedience were taken off the path of grateful conduct in fellowship and they were relocated to the way of access unto fellowship. That is, good works were taken out of the church building of fellowship and they were made part of the driveway and part of the door, part of the way unto and into fellowship so that good works were given a place and function that is out of harmony with the Reformed Confessions.

The error was first detected as error in a sermon on John 14:6 which the sermon taught that our good works of obedience are part of the way unto the Father while Jesus explicitly teaches that he alone is the way. The error took good works from off the path of grateful obedience in the experience of fellowship and moved those good works to the way of access unto and into fellowship. However the error was not limited to one sermon but it appeared in many sermons and I will quote only from the first two cited by Synod though the error was broader and even went beyond sermons, and I don't quote to hurt but to help, help, help. One sermon said, "We do good works so that we can receive God's grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness." Grace in our consciousness, that's the

building, and good works are put on the driveway unto the building so that we do good works in order to get God's grace. Another sermon said, "What do the Creeds say about the relationship between obedience and fellowship? That there are requirements. That there is obedience required in order that we may have that fellowship, prayerful fellowship with God. The Catechism says come to God that way, meeting those requirements, meeting those demands of God for proper prayer and you can be assured that you will enjoy the fellowship of God and later approach unto the Father, come to the Father meeting the requirements that he has set out for you. Come to him in that way to receive of him his grace and his Holy Spirit. Amen." Fellowship with God is the church building and now our good works are the driveway and the door of requirements that we have to meet in order to enjoy fellowship.

These erroneous statements were defended and it was argued that these statements are teaching the necessary way of the covenant. It was argued that we have always taught that we experience fellowship with God in the way of obedience, and that's true, but it was argued that the sermons were teaching that truth, however, many objectionable statements were not teaching that truth, the statements were not teaching that our good works of obedience are the way of grateful conduct in the experience of fellowship but were teaching that our good works of obedience are part of the way unto fellowship which way is Christ alone and his life of perfect works. Synod 2018 declared this teaching to be erroneous. I'm not saying anything about intent. I'm not suggesting there was intent to be erroneous, to teach error. I'm simply saying there was error. Synod said there was error and said that our good works are not the way of access or even part of the way of access unto covenant fellowship but they are the way of grateful conduct in covenant fellowship.

Then in addition to actions taken like the requirement of a formula of subscription exam which was sustained, the Synod made a statement indicating the seriousness of the error. "The doctrinal error of the sermons then compromises the Gospel of Jesus Christ for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced." And I'm going to stop right there though the Synod continued that sentence. I hope you've read and carefully read the 2018 Acts of Synod. Now some might say the Synod was too heavy-handed or some might say the Synod was too lenient, but in the providence of God what the Synod decided stands. It still stands today and it stands as truth, and I hope you carefully read it and meditated and prayed and lingered long at that statement, "the perfect work of Christ is displaced." If you linger there, then your heart will quiver and then you look up to God our friend and you speak to him fitting words, and if you haven't done that it's not too late.

What must we learn? What have we learned? What are we learning? What must we yet learn? I conclude tonight with three things. First of all, all of salvation is of grace. We know that but we have to keep learning that. All of salvation is of grace. Salvation is all of God, through God, and to God, and that includes the experience of salvation. The experience of covenant fellowship is salvation. It's salvation in its most delightful dimension. It's possible to be in the covenant, to be united to Jesus Christ but not conscious of that. As one is, let's say, a regenerated infant or, and I'll come back to this,

it's possible to be in the covenant and to be in union with Jesus Christ but not enjoying the delightful experiences of that relationship, the sweet fellowship, because one is stubbornly walking in sin and only conscious of the bitter and painful experiences of God's loving chastisement, his loving displeasure. But to be in the covenant, to be united to Christ and to experience all of that delightful communion with God, to drink of Jesus Christ the living waters and to feel that refreshment, to eat of the bread of life, Jesus Christ, and to feel spiritually strengthened, to know God in his love and his secrets in the Gospel, to look all around you and see all of the blessings that God has given to us and to our children and children's children, and to feel a sense of awe and joy that this great God is our God now and forevermore, that experience is unsurpassable and it is salvation and salvation is by grace, through faith, not of works lest any man should boast. Covenant salvation is of God, through God, and to God, the God of all grace.

Second, we must learn that salvation is by faith in Christ and faith is not working. We know that but we have to keep learning that. Faith is a bond whereby we are united to Jesus Christ, but faith is also an activity and no Reformed man would deny that. Jesus teaches the activity of faith as coming, but the activity of faith and the activity of doing good works are two totally distinct, totally different activities. In the activity of believing, we are always trusting God, trusting what God has done, always receiving from God, but in the activity of doing good works of obedience, we are always giving. The law commands of us a thankful life of obedience, it commands obedience, and when we obey the law, we are giving what it commands, we are giving obedience with heart, mind, soul and strength, we are giving our life as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Faith, the activity of faith, and doing good works, the activity of doing good works, those are two distinct and different activities.

Now when we teach that our good works are not the way of access unto but Christ is and we come to God by faith in Christ, we are not teaching that in the end when it's all said and done faith is just another work that we perform in order to experience fellowship with God. Faith is not doing good works of obedience even when we explain what exactly is that activity of coming. What is exactly is involved in coming? Hoeksema very carefully explained what is the activity of coming and Hoeksema said it includes four elements. 1. Contrition. Sorrow over and hatred for my sins. Contrition. 2. Recognition. True spiritual knowledge of Christ as the revelation of the God of my salvation. Recognition. 3. Aspiration. A true longing, a hungering and a thirsting after the benefits of Christ and Christ himself. Aspiration. And 4. Appropriation. The sure knowledge that Christ is mine. He died for me. Even when we explain what that coming is, what that activity of faith involves, as Hoeksema explained it with contrition, recognition, aspiration and appropriation, that activity is not doing good works of obedience according to the law. When we do good works, we are always giving to God. The conscious enjoyment of covenant salvation is by faith in Christ and faith is not working but reliance upon the God who works. Covenant salvation is of God, through God and to God.

And third and finally, we must learn to defend and promote the truth that we experience covenant fellowship with God in the way of obedience, what I will call in the way of, for

short, our heritage. Synod 2018 and 2019 were very careful to maintain this important truth. Our assemblies have quoted from Herman Hoeksema, volume 26 of the Standard Bearer, "Let me suggest that instead of using that Pelagian term 'condition,' we use the term 'in the way of.' This term is capable of maintaining both the absolute sovereignty of God in the work of salvation and the responsibility of man. We are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith and therefore we are saved through the instrument of faith and in the way of obedience. That and that only is Reformed language." "In the way of" is important because as Hoeksema explained, it maintains, on the one hand, the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation. It clearly indicates that we do not experience fellowship with God because of our obedience or even by means of our obedience. We experience communion with God by means of faith and because of what Christ has done, that it all might be of God and to God's glory as the God of sovereign grace.

Well, on the other hand, "in the way of" is important because it maintains our calling in the covenant, that those who live with God, who walk with God as friends in the covenant, they serve God, and it makes plain that covenant members who walk in the ways of sin and rebellion, if we could bring back that figure a moment, still on the property but now walking out in the darkness of the parking lot and the lawn, covenant members who walk in the way of rebellion do not experience fellowship, sweet fellowship with God. God lovingly chastens them so that they experience his displeasure. He's a holy God who cannot and will not walk in communion with sinners who walk in rebellion. We can lose our assurance and we can lose the experience of sweet fellowship with God when we walk in disobedience and what a horrible horrible thing that is, but though we lost it by our works, our evil works of disobedience, we do not gain it back by our good works of obedience. We are restored by grace when God sovereignly draws us back into the conscious enjoyment of sweet sweet fellowship and God draws us by kindling within us a lively faith so that we come to God bewailing our wickedness with godly sorrow, pleading for forgiveness and trusting that God is merciful to forgive us and restore us for Jesus' sake. And restored to that blessed experience of sweet fellowship with God, how can we not but show our love for God and gratitude by obedience so that we say we experience covenant fellowship with God in the way of obedience.

This doctrinal truth and the expression of it as "in the way of" is our heritage. It is a distinctive element of authentic Protestant Reformed covenant theology. We have always taught this and a schoolboy who's old enough to read could prove that. It's not very difficult, just read. But "in the way of" is more than a statement that's found here and there in all these different works and sermons, it's our heritage. Hoeksema didn't begin teaching this concept in 1950 to combat conditional theology, this was his doctrine all the way back in the 1920s when he was developing his understanding of covenant theology in his work, "Believers and Their Seed," for Hoeksema rejected the traditional conception of the covenant of works with Adam with its idea that Adam could merit eternal life with God by his obedience. Hoeksema said that's false. Adam never could earn life and favor from God by his good works. So Hoeksema taught that Adam had this wonderful covenant life with God in paradise in the covenant of creation and what was the relationship between Adam's enjoyment of that covenant life with God and Adam's

obedience? Hoeksema said repeatedly Adam would keep the life he possessed and enjoy the favor of God in the way of obedience.

In their covenant doctrine, the Protestant Reformed churches have always expressed the relationship between fellowship with God and obedience with the phrase "in the way of." That's part of our heritage over against works theology, conditional theology, fellowship with God by our obedience, and over against Antinomian theology, fellowship with God without our obedience. We experience covenant fellowship with God in the way of obedience. Is the covenant of God, through God, and to God? If the covenant is to God, then everything about it serves his glory and the God who is light will have obedient friend servants who walk with him in the light, who taste his communion by faith and respond by showing forth all of his praises in love for him and in love for the neighbor.

Friends, this is our covenant doctrine. Let us go forth in God's service strong in God's might to conquer all evil and to stand for and develop our understanding of the right doctrine of the covenant which is of God, through God, and to God, to whom be glory forever. Thank you for coming tonight and for your attention.

Let us close in prayer.

God of truth, we thank thee that thou hast revealed thyself to us in Jesus Christ and in the name of Christ and for the sake of Christ we earnestly beseech thee, be gracious to us and preserve among us thy truth, the knowledge of thy truth and the confession of thy truth. Wherever any form of the lie appears, there will be because of thy judgment as a God who hates the lie, there will be division and enmity. Lord God, give us the truth and preserve the truth among us for Jesus' sake. And we pray not only for theological truth but for truth, factual truth, so that all of us in all of our dealings whether we speak or write, whether we speak publicly or privately, whatever we do, we pray that we may speak truth about each other, about ministers, about consistories, about our churches, about the whole creation around us which thou hast made, because if we lie, if we slander, if we bring false accusations, then in thy judgment as a God who hates lies which are only the proper works of the devil, there will be division and enmity. And Lord God, we are in our flesh so wicked and so prone to do anything but love and speak the truth, overcome that wickedness in us, cause us to love the truth, to know the truth, theological truth, factual truth, and to speak it in love for thee, our covenant friend, and for each other as friends in thy covenant.

And Father in heaven, we hold before thee tonight the needs of the Marcus family, maybe not all of us know but some of us do, today we were informed that Reverend Marcus' son has an inoperable tumor on his brain and may not have very long to live. Our hearts go out to that poor boy and to his parents and siblings. Lord God, friend in the covenant, draw them unto thyself, underneath thy wings, Almighty God, there is peace and refuge. Draw them close to thyself with cords of love. And this we know, there are many things we don't know, but this we know, thou doest all things well. To thee be the glory.

Lord, if we have said or thought anything sinful tonight, forgive us and send us home with thy blessing and with greater love for thee, our God. In the name, the precious, wonderful, strong and saving name of Jesus who is the Christ and who is the Lord now and forever do we pray. Amen.