



**A Power of God
Unto Salvation,
or
Grace
Not An Offer**

Herman Hoeksema

A POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION OR GRACE NOT AN OFFER

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Preface to Translation

With this publication the Seminary offers to the public an important book in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It was first published in Dutch in 1932 and, therefore, has been unavailable to most people for the last four or five decades.

Prof. Homer Hoeksema began a translation of the book in the April, 1987 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. He was unable to complete the work because the Lord took him to glory. And so the work remained undone until the present. Recently, my father, Rev. Cornelius Hanko, emeritus minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches, completed the work of translation begun by Prof. Hoeksema. And so, at last, a translation is available to the public.

In a certain sense, the material is dated because the book was originally a series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer* in which Rev. Herman Hoeksema defended his denial of the well-meant offer of the gospel over against the criticisms of a certain Rev. H. Keegstra who was at the time editor of the Dutch weekly *De Wachter*. It must be remembered that the question of the well-meant offer of the gospel was an issue in 1924 when Rev. Hoeksema was thrown out of the Christian Reformed Church. The CRC had made the well-meant offer of the gospel official dogma by its decisions on common grace at the Synod of Kalamazoo. Rev. Hoeksema was expelled for refusing to subscribe to the doctrines of common grace in general and the doctrine of the well-meant offer in particular. In his editorials in *De Wachter*, Rev. Keegstra attacked Hoeksema's position. Hoeksema defended his position in editorials in the paper of which he was editor, the *Standard Bearer*. The Reformed Free Publishing Association, which also published the *Standard Bearer*, brought these editorials together in a brochure and published them under the name given to this book.

It did not take long for the first printing to be sold out, and a second printing was prepared. While no substantial changes were made in the second printing, a significant section was added. The brochure had come to the attention of leading figures in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands who reviewed the brochure in various church papers in that country. These reviews, along with Rev. Hoeksema's comments on them, were included in the second printing. It is this printing which has been translated and is found in this book. Our readers will be especially interested in the fact that one of the reviews was prepared by Dr. A. Kuyper, Jr., the son of the well-known Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr.

Although the entire book forms a part of the controversy waged in the '30s over the well-meant offer and is, therefore, somewhat dated, the issue of the well-meant offer remains a live issue in the church and debate over it is high on the church's agenda. That is the value of the book. I can find no clearer statement anywhere of the position of Rev. Herman Hoeksema (and the Protestant Reformed Churches) than in this book. And, let me add, it is difficult to find anywhere a clearer statement of why the well-meant offer is contrary to both Scripture and the Reformed confessions.

The book is an important document in the literature of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

May God bless this effort to make more widely accessible to those who no longer know the Dutch language but who are interested in the crucial issues of doctrine which the church of Christ faces in today's world.

Protestant Reformed Seminary
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Prof. Herman Hanko

Preface to the Second Edition

I could hardly have expected when I began to write a series of articles on the subject of *A Power of God unto Salvation*, in the *Standard Bearer*, this would not only appear in book form, but that a second edition would be required.

Yet this has become a reality and that gives me reason to rejoice.

The main contents of this second edition is the same as the first. Only the opinions expressed by some of the theologians of the Netherlands concerning my views are included in this edition with my answer appended.

It is but proper to express a word of appreciation to the Reformed Free Publishing Association which made this publication financially possible, and especially to the Board of that Society which not only decided to publish this second edition, but also devoted their time and efforts to it.

May the Lord use our meagre efforts to open the eyes of many of our Reformed people for the Arminian error which is always a threatening danger to the church, and certainly no less in our time!

H.H.

Chapter 1

The Real Point Not Addressed

For some weeks the Reverend H. Keegstra editor-in-chief of *De Wachter*, (*The Watchman*) the Dutch-language organ of the Christian Reformed Church, has been instructing his readers about correct and pure preaching, the kind of preaching which ought to be heard from Reformed pulpits. Our attention was drawn especially to the fact that in various articles he ventured an attempt to make it clear that the presentation of a well-meant offer of grace and salvation truly has a place in Reformed circles, that it is a plant growing from Reformed soil, and that it is an indispensable element in all true preaching. The doctrine that the offer of grace, well-meant on God's part, comes to all those who hear the Gospel must, according to the conviction of the editor-in-chief, be maintained, if we are not to lose our pure Reformed character.

We venture to suggest that in writing these articles he has more than once had our Protestant Reformed Churches in mind.

And perhaps it is also not too bold to suggest that the Rev. Keegstra even expected that we would respond to the content of his articles.

In any event, this was indeed our intention from the very beginning of his series of articles.

And we are of the opinion that, although the Rev. Keegstra has not yet completed his series, we can make a beginning (taking into consideration what the Rev. Keegstra has produced) by proposing some thoughts concerning this important subject.

Let it be said from the outset that although we could appreciate much that the Rev. Keegstra wrote about *Practical Preaching*, and agree with it, we nevertheless emphatically differ with him when he proposes that a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation has a place in Reformed preaching. Precisely the fact that we consider this doctrine to be unbiblical and unreformed constitutes one of the reasons why we are impelled to cross swords with the Rev. Keegstra.

We consider this entire presentation dangerous.

The presentation of a general and well-meant offer of grace not only cannot be harmonized with the Reformed doctrine of election and reprobation, as its defenders readily admit; but it also militates against the entire line of Reformed thinking, belief, and confession. It is a denial of the Reformed confession of God's grace at virtually every point.

What, if we do not play with words, is the idea of an offer? What are the various elements implied in that term?

In the first place, there is certainly implied the earnest and sincere desire, on the part of him who offers, to bestow something upon a certain person or persons. If there is an offer of grace on God's part to all men, then this implies, if it means anything at all, that there is in God the earnest will and desire to bestow grace on all men. If this is not the case, if the defenders of this doctrine deny this, then the offer is simply not sincere and honourable. But the defenders of this theory even emphasize this point when they add that this offer is *well-meant*. Also the Rev. Keegstra is committed to this position, as appears from the article "The Offer of the Gospel Sincere" in *De Wachter*, April 16, 1930.

In the second place, the concept *offer* also includes, if it is to mean anything, that he who makes the offer actually possesses that which he offers, that it is available, so that in case the offer is accepted, it can also be granted. Anyone who offers something which he does not possess is branded a dishonourable bluff among men. If therefore the general offer of grace and salvation is to mean anything, if one does not play with words when he uses that term, then there must be grace and salvation for all men.

In the third place, there is implied in an offer the idea that that which is offered is recommended to another. He who offers manifests his earnest desire that that which is offered shall be accepted; and for that reason he

highly commends it. With a view to our subject, this implies that God manifests the earnest desire that all men shall be saved—everyone, head for head and soul for soul. For in the presentation of such a general offer it is precisely emphasized that this well-meant offer exactly does not pertain only to the elect, but to all men who come under the preaching of the Gospel. And note carefully, the doctrine is not that the Gospel must be preached to all men *by the preacher*, but that *God Himself* offers His grace to all men and thereby manifests the earnest desire that it shall be accepted by all.

In the fourth place, the idea of such a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation implies that the one who offers either makes the offer *unconditionally* or upon a condition *of which he knows that those to whom the offer comes are able to fulfil it*. If I set a delicious meal before someone who is bound hand and foot, offer that meal to him and express my earnest desire that he may do justice to that meal, then I mock him. Applied to our subject, the well-meant offer of grace and salvation implies that God knows that all men can accept it. Unless you are playing with words, you shall have to concede this.

Everyone will have to concede that all these elements are implied in the idea of an offer.

Do not say now that we again want to comprehend things, that we are putting reason on the foreground. For such bogey-men have no effect on us. We are not engaged in trying to harmonise one thing with another before our rational understanding. We are simply discussing the ordinary meaning of the words which are used by those who speak of a general offer of grace. When we use words, then those words have meaning. We cannot simply inject into them a meaning as it pleases us or as it may best suit us. And without any danger of contradiction we can indeed establish that all that we have written above is indeed included in the notion of an offer. None of the four elements mentioned can be eliminated. If you nevertheless exclude one of them, you have no offer left. We say this the more freely because the entire term “well-meant and general offer of grace” *never occurs in Holy Scripture*. It is a term of human invention. And in the paragraphs above we have done nothing else than to analyze the term in order to understand what we are discussing.

Now thus understood, the entire notion of a general, well-meant offer of grace militates at every point against the biblical, Reformed conception of God’s grace.

For as far as the first point is concerned, the Reformed doctrine is not that there is with God the earnest will and desire to bestow grace upon all men; but grace is particular according to God’s decree and intention. God does not will in any single sense of the word that all men, head for head and soul for soul, shall be saved. He wills to bestow grace upon the elect, and upon none other. This is the clear scriptural, Reformed doctrine. And not only has He determined to bestow grace only upon some; He has also determined *to bestow no grace on others*. There is therefore also a determinate will in God to bestow no grace upon some men. And with this, the first essential element of a general offer is already ruled out and simply made impossible. You cannot be Reformed and speak of a general offer of grace on God’s part.

With respect to the second point, namely, that he who makes an offer must possess that which he offers, the Reformed doctrine is that Christ has not made satisfaction for all men, that the satisfaction of Christ is particular, pertains only to the elect, that grace for all men was never merited by Christ, and that therefore it simply does not exist. With this, according to Reformed standards, the second essential element of such a general offer of grace and salvation falls away. Everyone shall have to concede that I cannot offer what I do not possess. Every Reformed person will concede that there is in Christ no grace for all men. And every rational person will also grant that either the Reformed position or that of a general offer of grace and salvation must fall.

As far as the third point is concerned, namely, that he who offers must clearly manifest that what he offers is sincerely intended for all to whom it is offered, it is the Reformed doctrine that this is precisely not the case. No Reformed preacher may ever say that God has intended grace for everyone. Also the Rev. Keegstra, who now and then admittedly struggles to remain Reformed with his defense of this foreign idea, conceded this. But herewith the third essential element also falls away. God simply does not offer grace to all, i.e., He Himself teaches us most clearly that He wills to bestow grace only on the elect. Also in this respect the one view literally militates against the other.

Finally, it is the Reformed doctrine, in contrast with the fourth point which we mentioned as an essential element of every offer, that no natural man can accept grace in Christ, *that grace is precisely not a matter of offer and acceptance whatsoever, but of the irresistible operation of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Hence, if one presents things as though grace in Christ is an *unconditional* offer on God's part to sinful man, then this conflicts with the Reformed position: for there is no man who would by nature be willing to accept God's grace. And if you propose that salvation in Christ is an earnest offer of grace on *condition of faith*, then this is equally not in harmony with the Reformed position: for no one is in a position to fulfil that condition. In one word, it is Reformed to say that there is no one among men who even possesses in himself the very least of that whereby he would be able to accept an offered salvation. But with this position also the possibility of an offer falls away absolutely. For what sense does it have to speak of an offer of something to men of whom one is certain that they cannot accept that which is offered?

It is plain, therefore, that at every point the idea of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation militates against the Reformed truth. The one is simply a denial of the other.

The two exclude one another.

For that reason we said that we consider the idea dangerous.

It is misleading. Therefore it is even more dangerous than plain and simple Arminianism.

For they want to hold to the view of a general, well-meant offer of grace, but also be called Reformed.

And in order to do this they have to accomplish the juggling act of maintaining two mutually exclusive ideas and forcing these upon faith. And if then one points out that this cannot be, that you can never demand this of a reasonable faith, then they tell you that this belongs to the mysteries and that you may not try to penetrate further into this. As if we make ourselves guilty of spiritual intrusion when we ask that they make plain to us how it can be true that God offers something which He does not want to bestow, that He wills that which He does not will ("will" taken here in the same sense both times), that black is white, that yes is no, or, according to the presentation of the "double-track" philosophy of Van Baalen,¹ how can a train run at the same time on two sets of rails in two opposite directions?

But it finally comes down to this, that men consider Reformed what is purely Remonstrant, and delude the congregation into thinking that they are proclaiming the Reformed truth while they nevertheless do nothing else than proclaim and strongly defend Arminianism.

Now that is the chief reason why we want to investigate the articles of the Rev. Keegstra and subject them to the test of Scripture and the *Confessions*.

We entitled this chapter: "The Real Point Not Addressed."

The articles of the Rev. Keegstra could leave the impression on some who are not knowledgeable concerning the case, who know something about it but do not discern the real issue, that the esteemed editor of *De Wachter* has furnished a defense in these articles of the first of the *Three Points* adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924.

Do not misunderstand us. It is not our intention to assert that it was the intention of the Rev. Keegstra to write a defense of the First Point. Much less would we impute to him that it lay in his intention to leave the impression that he wanted to defend and has also defended Point I of 1924.

We even want to believe that a man like the Rev. Keegstra understands very well that Point I cannot be defended.

But although all this may be true, the fact remains that his series of articles could nevertheless leave that impression.

After all, men have gradually tried to present matters as though our difference with the Christian Reformed Church really officially concerned the question whether there is a well-meant offer of grace in the preaching, without anything more; that the Christian Reformed Church has declared in Point I that there is such an offer; that this is the content of Point I; and that we have denied this.

Besides, the Rev. Keegstra sometimes leaves the impression in his articles that he had our churches in mind when he wrote.

Therefore we think that it is not superfluous to warn the reading public and to declare here with emphasis: *The Editor-in-Chief of De Wachter has not touched, has not addressed, the real point of the First Point.*

He has not touched it with so much as a letter.

What after all is the content of the First Point?

It reads as follows:

Relative to the first point, which concerns the favourable attitude of God towards humanity in general and not only towards the elect, synod declares it to be established according to Scripture and the *Confession* that, apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the scriptural passages quoted and from the *Canons of Dordrecht*, II, 5 and III/IV, 8 and 9, which deal with the general offer of the Gospel, while it also appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology that our Reformed writers from the past favoured this view.

What is the real point of this first point?

Merely that the offer of the Gospel is general?

No, but that this offer of the Gospel is *general grace*.

The preaching of the Gospel, thus the Synod of 1924 taught, is grace of God not only for the elect but also for the reprobate, not only for those who are saved by it but equally for those who go lost under it.

This is the point.

The preaching of the Gospel is *grace for all*.

And this point was not touched by the Rev. Keegstra. Let it be said once again: This certainly was not in his intention; it is of great importance that we see this clearly.

We hold, over against the First Point of 1924, that the preaching of the Gospel is grace *only* for the elect, that for the reprobate it never is and never can be anything else than judgment and a savor of death unto death. Therein lies our disagreement with the Christian Reformed Church as far as Point I is concerned. As we do not hesitate to declare bluntly that the standpoint of 1924 is Arminian. The preaching of the Gospel is general grace—that is the Arminian position.

Let the Rev. Keegstra, or any of the leaders in the Christian Reformed Church, simply furnish an answer to the question we have so often posed: what grace do the reprobate receive from God in the preaching of the Gospel? And you will see how Arminian such an answer would be.

But no one has ever ventured an answer to that question. Neither does the Rev. Keegstra attempt one.

The real point of the First Point was not touched by him.

We must point to one more matter before we conclude this introductory chapter.

The Rev. Keegstra sometimes leaves the impression that we or others, who reject the position of a well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part to all men, would take the stand that we must preach only for the elect

Also here we will gladly accept that it did not lie in the intention of the esteemed editor to leave that impression. But, in the first place, one must not forget that we have been pictured that way by others upon occasion. I think here especially of Prof. L. Berkhof. And in the second place, one could nevertheless gain that impression from some passages of the Rev. Keegstra's articles. Thus he writes, for example in *De Wachter* of April 9, 1930:

We need not timidly hesitate at this and anxiously ask whether all those hearers are indeed elect, of, if one would rather express it that way, whether Christ with his atoning death has indeed made satisfaction for all those people head for head. Never and nowhere in Scripture is the preacher charged to investigate that first, before he sends forth to his hearers the Gospel entrusted to him. For that matter he cannot even do this. What mere human is in a position to sift his fellow men and to separate the sheep from the goats? Indeed the elect, after their regeneration, make themselves known in part by their works. But even from that we still do not have absolute certainty because there are hypocrites. And the reprobate can certainly not be known before their death.

Now we do not say that we would subscribe to all that the esteemed writer has stated here. Especially is not all of this true concerning congregational preaching. The tree is indeed known by its fruits, also for us. And the preaching of the Word in the congregation must indeed be sifting and separating discipline. Besides, the congregation sifts and separates also in ecclesiastical discipline. A few generalities do not by any means suffice here. But for the rest we can readily concede to the writer that a preacher need not first timidly and anxiously inquire whether all in the congregation are elect, or, in case he labors as a missionary, whether all in his audience are elect. I could safely go a step farther and say that he knows beforehand that this is not the case. Scripture teaches him that plainly. For Holy Scripture does not only teach that Christ has not atoned for all men, nor merely in general that there are elect and reprobate, but also that the reprobate as well as elect belong to the visible manifestation of the congregation; that reprobate as well as elect are brought under the preaching of the Gospel by the Lord Himself. In other words, he knows that it is the will of the Lord that the Gospel shall be brought not only to the elect but also to the reprobate. All anxious inquiry whether all are indeed elect, therefore, is summarily excluded here. A preacher who would want to speak only for the elect does not understand the will of his Sender, cannot possibly accomplish his task.

But there was also no definite reason for the Rev. Keegstra to write these words.

As far as I know, there have never been such preachers who anxiously make this inquiry, preachers who want to preach the Word only to the elect.

Hence, it was not necessary to write about this.

The Rev. Keegstra himself states that it would be impossible to separate his audience in that manner, and thus first to investigate whether all are indeed elect. But if it is impossible, then certainly no one will ever first accomplish or try to accomplish the impossible, before he proclaims the Gospel.

Yet much writing can indeed leave the impression that we think that way. The more so, because as was already remarked, that impression has been given by others.

Therefore we must first make this declaration from the heart.

If we are to speak with one another about the truth, where there is difference of views, then the precise point of difference must first be clearly grasped. This is a prime requisite. Neither must we blur this point and becloud the discussion by dragging into the discussion all kinds of incorrect and untrue presentations.

Our difference, therefore, is not at all about the question whether the Gospel, according to the will of God, must also be proclaimed to all who come among our audience, reprobate as well as elect.

This is established on both sides.

But our difference indeed concerns the question what the real character of that preaching is, what its content must be, and what God's purpose is with this preaching with respect to both elect and reprobate.

And then our difference with Keegstra lies here, that he maintains that we deny that the preaching of the Gospel is a well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part to all men.

And our difference with the official declaration of the Christian Reformed Church lies here, that it teaches and we deny that that preaching of the Gospel is *grace* for all men.

About these things we hope to write more, in connection with the articles from the pen of the Rev. Keegstra.

Chapter 2

Up Against A Stone Wall

It is not an easy task to follow the reasoning of the Rev. Keegstra, to find a clear line in his reasoning and to give a correct presentation of the actual view which the esteemed writer holds with respect to the so-called general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part in the preaching.

I have seriously attempted to find such a line.

For when one wants to subject someone's view to criticism, then the very first requisite is surely that he understands clearly the view to be criticized. Therefore I have read Keegstra's articles very carefully, and even re-read them several times. But I have not succeeded in becoming sure what Keegstra really means. Neither have I been able to discover any unity or any single line in what he has written about this subject. When he writes about other subjects, the Editor of *De Wachter* is usually clear and easy to follow. But in these articles the usual clarity is completely lacking. Time after time I had to ask: what does Keegstra mean now? Only this one thing finally became very clear: the esteemed writer wants to cling to a general, well-meant offer of grace on God's part to all men.

When I faced the question: why is it so difficult to follow Keegstra's reasoning when otherwise he can usually express his thoughts very clearly? I soon found an answer. The esteemed Editor of *De Wachter* has attempted to rework two mutually exclusive propositions into one whole, or at least to join them in such a way that his readers would not stumble too much over the flagrant contradiction. His intention was to show that a well-meant and general offer of grace and salvation properly is at home in pure Reformed preaching. And that is in the nature of the case impossible.

With such a position one runs against a stone wall.

One feels this at once upon reading it.

One cannot even escape the impression (I do not believe that this is my imagination) that the author himself felt this.

Black is not white. Square is not round. General is not particular. Reformed is not Arminian. All of this was evidently clear to the author all along. But when one is committed to the position that black is white, square is round, general is particular, and Reformed is Arminian, and wants to defend it and make it clear, then he certainly has to argue very carefully.

This is what Keegstra does.

I finally discovered the following in his reasoning process:

First, the esteemed writer is Reformed. Of general atonement he wants nothing. Christ did not die for all men. Election must be maintained and taught also in the preaching.

Second, Keegstra becomes ambiguous. He begins to write in such a way that one repeatedly rubs his eyes and asks: where are we now? Where does the Editor want to lead us? It is not completely clear that he does not mean the same thing with a general offer of grace as a general demand of conversion and faith. If one is not on guard, he is swept along; but he who is on guard begins to hesitate at this point to travel farther with Keegstra.

Finally, Keegstra again expressed himself clearly, and now he speaks frankly of a general, well-meant offer of grace on the part of God to all men.

Reformed.

Reformed-Arminian.

Arminian.

Thus the line runs in the reasoning of the Rev. Keegstra. It is well that we pay close attention to this. For indeed, the argumentation and presentation of the Rev. Keegstra are very dangerous for those who value keeping their feet on Reformed shores and not sailing away with the travel companions of Arminius. We shall therefore demonstrate that the method described above is actually that employed by the Rev. Keegstra. Notice that first he writes:

What is preaching?

Wherein does the Gospel consist, the message of salvation which we have to bring to men in general?

In answers given to these questions differences come to the fore.

The Remonstrant preaches to all men without distinction: "Jesus has satisfied for you all with His suffering and death, your debt is paid, your sins are atoned; now accept that Jesus by faith, and you are saved in beginning, and if you persevere in the faith, then you will be completely saved."

Of course, the Remonstrant has much more to say than that; but if you want to reduce his preaching to a few words in which he brings his message to all men, then it comes down to that.

Now one would expect that the Rev. Keegstra would subscribe to this presentation of the Arminians wholeheartedly in order to be able to hold fast to and have a valid basis for his general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part. We would think that one cannot do with less if he wants such a general offer. If grace is to be offered by God to all men, then that grace must actually be there. That is an indispensable requisite. Then Christ must die for all, for otherwise that salvation is not there cannot be offered. And this is precisely what the Remonstrants say. That a general offer of grace is in any event thoroughly at home in the preaching of the Remonstrants and fits very well—this Keegstra makes very clear.

But he who would think that Keegstra is committed to this Arminianism is evidently mistaken. He wants to be Reformed. Therefore he writes further:

Such a message we do not have for our hearers. To say in the name of God to all who hear, without distinction, that Christ has died for them—that we cannot do. Scripture does not give us the right to do this.

This becomes even stronger when Keegstra writes:

Certainly, we must say and do much more in our preaching. For we must proclaim the full counsel of God. In that full counsel there appears as a very definite and necessary element this, that we set forth the plan of salvation as it is revealed to us in Scripture; and therefore it belongs to the preacher's mandate to declare clearly and unambiguously that according to God's eternal purpose only the elect, for whom Christ died and who were given Him of the Father, shall be saved.

This is the first state in the reasoning of the esteemed Editor of *De Wachter*.

And it is clear that here he is soundly Reformed. He rejects the presentation of the Remonstrants. He cannot say to *all* his hearers that Christ died for them. He even emphasizes that the opposite must be preached and that the preacher must say unambiguously that salvation in Christ is not for all.

However, we would surely want to conclude that by this he cuts off absolutely all possibility of presenting the Gospel as a general offer of grace and salvation, coming to all men as well-meant on God's part. Notice, the issue is not whether the Gospel must be proclaimed by the preacher to all men without distinction who sit in his audience. Every Reformed man believes this. No, the issue is whether the preacher may say to his audience: God well-meaningly offers salvation to you all, head for head and soul for soul. That is the question. Neither can Keegstra very well explain *well-meaningly* as meaning anything but: *with the intention to save you*. Gladly would I accept from him another explanation if he knows of one. Thus, the general offer comes

down to this, that the preacher says to his audience: God offers grace to you all head for head and soul for soul, with the intention of saving every one of you. Now this we would say, Keegstra can no more teach after the first stage of his reasoning. For I must declare unambiguously: God does not will to save all; only the elect. How, then, could I add to this in one breath: "He indeed wills to save all of you: therefore He now offers you salvation"?

No, in the first stage of his argument the esteemed writer is Reformed.

Here he says: White is white and black is black. Reformed is Reformed, and Arminian is Arminian.

But now comes the second stage.

Does the Rev. Keegstra simply follow up, without beating about the bush, by saying: But the offer of grace and salvation is on God's part general and well-meaning?

Does he suddenly say: white is black? Reformed is Arminian?

No; apparently he could not get that out of his pen. Here the struggle begins. One can feel that the esteemed writer begins at this point to feel the difficulty of his problem. Therefore he tries to find a gradual transition to his general offer. And in that gradual transition the Rev. Keegstra is ambiguous. It is not entirely clear what he means. One can explain him in a favourable way. He could also have intended it wrongly. Things become blurred. The presentation is no more clear. White begins to become grey. The reasoning becomes cloudy.

Thus he writes:

We may and must indeed bring the message in Christ's stead to all the hearers: "Repent and believe the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." We do not have to add to this the reservation, either in words or in our thoughts: "This pertains only to those for whom Christ has made satisfaction; for those others cannot repent, they cannot believe, for them Christ has not died." Nowhere does God's Word point us in that direction for our preaching.

At this point you rub your eyes and then read it once again.

And here you must pay careful attention. Here you have the beginning of the transition to a general offer.

You simply do not understand this at once. It leaves the impression on you that it is still correct, but also that there is nevertheless something wrong. And if you once again read the words of the esteemed writer carefully, with the question in mind how you get such a double impression, then you come to the discovery that they are capable of a double interpretation.

For when Keegstra writes that the message must go forth to all the hearers, "Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," then he writes nothing new. No one would get it in his head to contradict him here, to say that he here departs from the Reformed line. For, in the first place, he here quotes Scripture almost literally; and that is sufficient for us. And besides, this is almost literally the presentation of our Reformed confession. We read in *Canons II, 5*:

Moreover the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.

About this, therefore, there is no dispute. To this article of the confession we also subscribe.

But in the first place, it appears that the Rev. Keegstra wants to leave the impression here that this is now the general offer of grace and salvation. He gives that impression through the context in which these words occur; but also by the fact that he writes this under the title: "Offer of the Gospel General."

And yet this is not the case.

The words, “Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved” contain no general offer. In fact they contain no offer whatsoever. What they indeed contain is:

1. A general *demand* of faith and conversion. And to this we also have no objection. About this there is no dispute. And about this the Rev. Keegstra did not write. That the demand of repentance and faith concerns all, even though only almighty grace can put one in a position to satisfy it, we readily grant.

2. A limited promise: he who believes shall be saved. This promise, therefore, is not general, but particular. And since the Lord God alone bestows faith, and since He bestows this faith only upon His elect, such preaching is absolutely not in conflict with the doctrine of particular grace.

If, therefore, it was the intention of the esteemed Editor to leave the impression here that he is writing about a general offer, then it will not be plain that that impression is not deceitful.

And, in the second place, the Rev. Keegstra becomes even more ambiguous when he adds to this:

To this we do not have to add the reservation, neither in our words nor in our thoughts: “This pertains only to those for whom Christ has made satisfaction; for those others cannot repent, they cannot believe, for those Christ has not died.” Nowhere does God’s Word point us in that direction for our preaching.

Also these words are capable of a double interpretation.

If Keegstra means by this that the *demand* of faith and repentance must be proclaimed without reservation in word or thought, then there is no wrong lurking in those words. But then he also says nothing. Then he is also saying not a single word about his subject: “Offer of the Gospel General.”

If, however, he wants to leave the impression that he is indeed referring to the offer of grace, and if these latter words mean: to everyone salvation must be offered, and in this the preacher must not think: only on the elect will it be bestowed, then he is slipping from firm Reformed ground into Arminian waters. A Reformed man can indeed proclaim without reservation *the demand* of faith and repentance. But no Reformed man can speak of grace in Christ without reservation in word or thought.

What the Rev. Keegstra means here cannot be stated with certainty. It would have been better that he explained himself more precisely.

As I said: the presentation is no longer clear here. No longer are you dealing with pure white or black. It becomes grey.

I fear, however, that he indeed intended already here to leave the impression that he was writing about a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation. For in this way this offer is almost incidentally inserted here when the esteemed writer further expresses himself as follows:

That proposed salvation the preacher must recommend to all his hearers, must invite them to it, and *in the name of the Lord must offer it to them* with the equally necessary exhortation, as a command of the Most High, to repent and believe.

The reader should note that here matters become worse. We are gradually being prepared by the writer for the general, well-meant offer of salvation on God’s part. He has not yet reached that point completely. These words are indeed very disguised. The white of the Reformed confession here becomes very grey. If one wants to, he can read in these words that God offers grace in Christ, but that it depends on man whether now he will further repent and believe in the Lord Jesus.

Also the little word “offer” is peeking around the corner here.

But the writer has nevertheless not yet arrived where he wants to be and where he wants to lead his readers.

He can still rescue himself by saying that he is not writing here about what God does, but about the work of the preacher. The preacher must recommend to all his hearers grace in Christ (although it is a question whether Keegstra intends this by the expression “offer in the name of the Lord”) He could also say that he would emphatically add: “with the equally necessary exhortation, as a command of the Most High, to repent and believe.”

But here, too, we must let the writer himself explain what he meant. The words are not clear. They are capable of more than one explanation. It is becoming greyer.

As I wrote, however, this belongs to the second stage of the Rev. Keegstra’s presentation. It is a medium of transition. (See: *De Wachter*, April 9.)

He says here approximately: White is black-white-black.

But he does not stop here.

For, after the esteemed writer has so very carefully prepared you, and has carefully guarded against telling you plainly what he understands by a general offer of grace, he at last plops into Remonstrant waters and is picked up in the boat of Arminius, when he boldly writes:

Even if it were true that the preacher cannot very well harmonize this *offer of salvation* with the truth of particular atonement, that does not excuse him from the obligation to preach both.

Here the writer suddenly refers to an offer of salvation which cannot be harmonized with the doctrine of particular atonement. As it were, he plucks this thought out of thin air, for he has not previously discussed this.

And then he writes further:

And now the second question: *the well-meaningness of God in the offering of salvation* even to those *of whom God knows* that Christ has not atoned for them and whom he did not choose unto salvation. Is God sincere and well-meaning in this?

Yes, now it is clear!

Keegstra hesitated long to express himself clearly. He even had difficulty with it apparently. As long as he still spoke of a general *demand* of faith and repentance, we could go along with him, even though it was necessary that we pointed out the dangerous and ambiguous way in which he expressed himself.

But now it is completely clear where Keegstra wants to go. He began with white, and now it has become completely black.

And we do him no injustice when we interpret his view briefly as follows: The Rev. Keegstra believes that the preaching of the Gospel is an offer of grace, well-meaning on God’s part, to all who hear the Gospel, head for head and soul for soul. (See: *De Wachter*, April 16).

But now he runs up against a stone wall. For if we omit Keegstra’s transitions for the moment, then the presentation of the Editor comes down to this: The Lord God well-meaningly offers (that is: with the purpose to save) salvation in Christ also to those whom He does not will to save.

Is it a wonder that the writer already beforehand feared that some would raise the objection against him that this after all runs stuck, runs up against a stone wall? For he writes:

But, thus the question is raised sometimes, and thus the question was put to us at the occasion of our articles in *De Wachter* about general atonement, with such a view does not one run against a stone wall in the preaching?

How can you, preacher, who firmly believes the truth of election and of particular atonement, how can you now simply offer to your hearers in general, without distinction, the salvation of the Gospel and invite them to it? What becomes of your honour? Do you not transgress your power as ambassador of the Lord? God can after all not well-meaningly and sincerely offer salvation in Christ to those for whom Christ has not atoned can He? And how can you as His messenger presume to do this? Do you simply do that on your own authority? There you have the question plain and simple.

We want to furnish a simple and honourable answer to that question.

I have sought in vain for this simple and honourable answer. The Rev. Keegstra does not so much as touch the answer to these questions.

Nor is he able to do so. The doctrine of particular atonement and that of a general well-meant offer on God's part simply exclude one another. The one swears at the other. For white never becomes black, no matter how long you talk.

But in our subsequent discussion we shall set all philosophizing aside and proceed from the thought that the Rev. Keegstra believes that the preaching of the Gospel really is an offer of God, well-meant, to all.

If this means anything, then it includes the following, as we wrote already in our first chapter: (1) That God wills that all the hearers shall receive salvation in Christ (general grace). (2) That the offered salvation actually exists for all men (general atonement). (3) That Scripture presents salvation as intended for everyone, head for head (general offer). (4) That man can accept the offered salvation (free will).

If the Rev. Keegstra thinks that we present him incorrectly when we say that these four elements are included in his doctrine, then I challenge him to demonstrate that *one* of these elements can be omitted, and that we nevertheless retain the possibility of a general offer on God's part.

Let him not jump to another line that he might also want to draw. Let him not answer us that he has written clearly enough that he nevertheless also believes in election and in particular atonement. Nor let him accuse us of wanting to understand mysteries.

But let him explain the general offer of salvation in such a way that he does justice to that term and nevertheless remains Reformed.

As matters stand now, Keegstra ran up against a stone wall.

Chapter 3

Keegstra's Citation of Calvin

Although the Rev. Keegstra makes no attempt in his articles about the well-meant offer of grace in the preaching to answer the questions which he himself has posed, and especially does not enter into the question how a messenger can presume to make general what God has made particular, he nevertheless does make an attempt to make plain that his view is in harmony with Scripture and the *Confession*.

He appeals first of all, as was almost to be expected, to the well-known and so frequently quoted words of the Saviour in Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Instead, however, of giving an explanation of these words himself, the Editor appeals to the explanation of Calvin.

Now we also value it when we can appeal to a man like Calvin. Although no one would get it in his head to quote a passage from Calvin's *Commentaries* with the purpose of considering this the last word, we nevertheless value it highly that we can appeal to Calvin in support of our view. It was partly because of this that we recently published a brochure in which we tried to draw a comparison between the views of Calvin, Berkhof, and Kuiper on the issue of a well-meant, general offer of grace.

Partly because of this we are immediately on our guard when we see Calvin being quoted by others. His name is frequently misused. If we review what in our day passes for Calvinism, especially with the so-called Neo Calvinism in the Netherlands, then it would be no wonder if the Reformer of Geneva would turn over in his grave.

Nor are we the only ones, not even the first ones, to call attention to this evil.

Already twenty years ago (we were still in school when the book was republished) Dr. C. B. Hylkema wrote in *Oud en Nieuw Calvinisme* (Old and New Calvinism):

Indeed it cannot be denied that the expression "common grace," with which present day Reformed men designate one of the most central doctrines of their position, appears in Calvin. But that with this he at all thought of a common grace in the broad sense which today is ascribed to the word, that "Calvinism," as Kuyper says, should have stood for "the doctrine of common grace," can, with an appeal to history, be safely denied. (p. 207).

And later he writes:

The more closely one looks, the clearer it becomes that to speak of "Calvinism" and "common grace" can actually produce nothing but confusion. That with that "common grace" as the Neo-Calvinist understands it even an entirely new doctrine is introduced is now indeed clear.

Now, Dr. Hylkema is not a Reformed man, and I would not readily want to subscribe to all that he writes. But that does not take away the fact that time after time he clearly demonstrates that in our day an appeal to Calvin is often made for a position which the Reformer would despise and reject with all that was in him.

Partly also for that reason we have taught that not everything that men offer us in the name of Calvin is simply to be swallowed, but that first we should investigate whether they really quote the great reformer correctly, both as to form and as to sense.

One can twist someone's words in various ways. One can quote incorrectly. Or he can quote in a wrong context. Or one can quote only partially, in the sense that one omits essential parts.

The Rev. Keegstra quotes in the last mentioned way.

He quotes a very long passage from Calvin's *Commentary* on the text referred to. But although he makes such a long quotation, he nevertheless does not cite all that Calvin has to say about this text. At the beginning and at the end he omits some sentences.

This would not be so striking if the esteemed writer had only taken over a few short sentences. Sometimes this is sufficient. One does not expect, of course, that someone always quotes an author fully. But now the case is different. The Rev. Keegstra quotes *almost all* that Calvin has to say about this passage of Scripture. He leaves out only a few brief sentences.

This is even more striking for anyone who consults Calvin on this passage and notices that the Rev. Keegstra begins to quote *in the middle of a paragraph*. If he had begun quoting at the beginning of a paragraph and had also stopped quoting at the end of a paragraph, there could be an explanation for this partial quotation. But now it is different.

And in the third place, this becomes still more striking because the parts that are omitted are necessary in order to learn Calvin's thinking about the text in question.

We shall therefore take the trouble to quote the omitted portions for our readers. At the beginning Keegstra omitted the following sentences:

“How often would I have gathered together thy children.” *This is expressive of indignation rather than of compassion* (italics added). The city itself, indeed, over which he had lately wept (Luke 19:41), is still an object of his compassion; but towards the scribes, who were the authors of its destruction, he uses harshness and severity, as they deserved. And yet he does not spare the rest, who were all guilty of approving and partaking of the same crime, but, including all in the same condemnation, he *inveighs chiefly against* the leaders themselves, who were the cause of all the evils. We must now observe the *vehemence* of the discourse... (emphasis added).

And at the end the Rev. Keegstra omitted the following:

... And I am astonished at the obstinacy of some people, who, when in many [other] passages of Scripture they meet with that figure of speech (anthropopathy) which attributes to God human feelings, take no offence, but in this case alone refuse to admit it. But as I have elsewhere treated this subject fully, that I may not be unnecessarily tedious, I only state briefly that, whenever the doctrine, which is the standard of union, is brought forward, God *wills* to *gather* all, that all who do not come may be inexcusable.

This is said in connection with a possible objection that there would be two wills in God. We have, says Calvin, a figure in the text. He calls it *anthropopathy*. And what he means by this becomes plain when we read in a note: *Anthropopathy*; that is, when God ascribes to himself feelings similar to those of men, as when he says (Gen. 6:6) that *he repented of having made man*; and similar passages.”

And then Calvin writes in addition the following about the words, “And you would not”:

This may be supposed to refer to the whole nation, as well as to the *scribes*; but I rather interpret it in reference to the latter, by whom the *gathering together* was chiefly prevented. For it was against them that Christ inveighed throughout the whole of the passage; and now, after having addressed *Jerusalem* in the singular number, it appears not without reason that he immediately used the plural number. There is an emphatic contrast between God's *willing* and their *not willing*; for it expresses the diabolical rage of men, who do not hesitate to

contradict God. (Quotations are from Calvin's *Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Vol. III, in loco.*)

The reader will surely agree that what I here quoted is not something incidental, but indeed basically necessary to understand what is Calvin's interpretation of the text. And we also obtain another view of the explanation furnished us by the Rev. Keegstra in his partial quotation.

According to Keegstra, Calvin's explanation must serve to show that the Reformer believed in a general and well-meant offer of grace. But from the passages cited by us the following is evident:

1) That Calvin does not want these words viewed as an expression of sympathy and mercy, but of indignation and heavy accusation against ungodly Jerusalem, namely, against its leaders.

2) That in so far as the text would leave the impression that the Lord God would want to gather everyone, head for head, and that this was made impossible by the scribes, we have to do here with an example of anthropopathy. When we read that it repented God that He had made man, we know very well that we are dealing with figurative language. Human feelings are then ascribed to God, which are nevertheless not found in Him, since He is unchangeable. Thus it is also here, according to fashion. By this there is ascribed to Him a will which He nevertheless does not have.

3) That for the rest this will of God must be understood in connection with its execution. For thus Calvin wrote literally in the quotation made by Keegstra. According to that execution not all the children of Jerusalem, head for head and soul for soul, are gathered. Only the elect children. This was therefore God's will, according to Calvin. Often God wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem together, that is, the elect children, as appears from the outcome.

4) Finally, that, according to Calvin, the words, "And ye would not," must not be understood as addressed to Jerusalem, but as referring to the leaders of Jerusalem. Thus there is no contrast between the will of God to gather all and the unwillingness of many through which they are not gathered. But the contrast is, always according to Calvin: *I* wanted to gather together Jerusalem's children, but *ye*, wicked scribes, did not will to gather them together.

In any event, this is something altogether different from what Keegstra writes as the interpretation of Calvin's meaning:

It is true that there are those who do not agree entirely with Calvin and who want to say that Jesus spoke these words only according to his human nature. But even though that interpretation were correct, and even though Calvin might be mistaken in that respect, that would make no difference with respect to what we have in view here. One may judge for himself whether Jesus, be it then according to His human nature, would so many times have tried, against the will of God, to gather those people together and to draw them to Himself. That is inconceivable! The Saviour's efforts were nevertheless undoubtedly serious and well-meant, and the words issuing from the mouth of that prophet were nevertheless certainly the expression of God's outward calling.

When we read this, we shudder!

For here Keegstra speaks of an *attempt* of the Saviour which is the equivalent, according to him, of an attempt of God *to draw men to Himself!* And that attempt of the Saviour failed! Indeed, here it is Keegstra's view that the ungodly men of Jerusalem were mightier than the Lord Himself! He wanted to draw them, but they would not! And they were victorious!

Thus it goes from bad to worse.

First the Editor began by assuring us that he wanted to preach particular atonement and election.

Then he began to write ambiguously about the general demand of conversion and faith, as though this was a general offer of grace.

And now he has come so far that he speaks of an *attempt* of the Saviour and an *attempt* of God to draw men to Himself, an attempt which fails because men are unwilling! God must give up over against the wicked will of man!

In a word, I find this to be dreadful. For to me it is nothing less than a direct denial of the almighty grace of the Saviour, of the sovereign grace of God; the will of man is put on the throne.

And this is now an explanation of the text in Matthew 23 and Luke 13?

Would the Lord, would Jesus actually have attempted to gather together *all* children of Jerusalem in this way? Would the Saviour speak of such a failed attempt toward the end of His sojourn in Palestine—He who had once so triumphantly declared, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”? He, who had so emphatically proclaimed, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him”? He would now speak of failed attempts?

But how could this be harmonized with reality? Was it actually a fact that the Lord had attempted to draw to Himself *all* the children of Jerusalem? How would this be in harmony with the calling of Isaiah as it is described for us in the sixth chapter of his prophecy, where we are clearly taught that Isaiah’s labors must serve precisely to blind their eyes and harden their hearts, so that they would not be converted, while the remnant would be saved through those same labors? Or how would this fit with the words of the Saviour Himself when He declares to His disciples that He speaks in parables in order that seeing they should see and not perceive, and hearing they should hear and not understand?

And that would be Reformed?

If that were the case, a Synod of Dordrecht would never have been necessary. There is no Remonstrant who would stumble over such language.

And Calvin taught that?

With not so much as a word does Calvin speak of a general, well-meant offer of grace in this connection. One may agree with his explanation or not, but here he teaches something entirely different. The Lord speaks here, according to him, in indignation and He inveighs against the leaders of Jerusalem, who were not willing to gather Jerusalem’s children. And as far as the form of the text is concerned, we have to do here, according to his interpretation, with an anthropopathy, a human presentation of God. But it is far from Calvin’s thoughts to speak of an *attempt* of God or of the Saviour to gather together all Jerusalem’s children; an attempt which miscarried because insignificant man did not will it!

I do not know, of course, whether the Rev. Keegstra did not understand Calvin’s interpretation, or whether he did not read it entirely.

Nor do I know what moved him in such a lengthy quotation to begin in the middle of one paragraph and to end in the middle of another paragraph.

It certainly does not strengthen a man’s argument to quote in this fashion. For his neighbour comes and examines him, and then the truth comes to light.

The Synod of 1924 did the same thing upon the advice of its learned committee. They quoted the *Canons of Dordrecht*, III/IV, 4 in order to prove that the *Confession* teaches that the natural man can do good in things civil. They quoted half of the article. They stopped quoting in the middle. The striking thing of that instance is that the part which they did not quote teaches precisely the opposite of what they wanted the article to teach. For there it is stated in so many words that the natural man renders that light of nature wholly polluted even in things natural and civil, and holds it in unrighteousness.

One weakens his own case by such a manner of quotation.

One leaves the impression that he is concerned about something altogether different from the truth.

It simply will not do to presuppose of such quoters, who are after all learned men, that they did this in their ignorance, that they only read half of the article in question and then went no farther. No, they read it all right, but the rest of the article did not suit their purpose. Their position would exactly be given the lie by further quotation. And at all costs, that might not be.

Did it go that way with Keegstra too? Is his long but partial quotation from Calvin's *Commentary* to be explained from this? Did he know now way out with Calvin's explanation of the text as an example of anthropopathy? Did he not want to accept the explanation of "and ye would not" as referring only to the leaders of the people? And did he prefer not to quote Calvin, that God's will to save was proclaimed to all, in order that those who did not believe would be left without excuse?

Who shall say?

Let him answer for himself.

But this is not the main thing—if only the error is now corrected, and we have gotten a fuller and better insight into Calvin's explanation of the text.

But if you want to know that Calvin must have nothing of such miscarried attempts of God and of the Saviour of which the Rev. Keegstra writes, then read what he writes about the same text in *Calvin's Calvinism*:

... What Augustine advanced in reply to them in many parts of his works I think it unnecessary to bring forward on the present occasion. I will only adduce one passage, which clearly and briefly proves how unconcernedly he despised their objection now in question. "When our Lord complains (says he) that though he wished to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathereth her chickens under wings, but she would not, are we to consider that the will of God was overpowered by a number of weak men, so that he Who was Almighty God could not do what He wished or willed to do? If so, what is to become of that omnipotence by which He did 'whatsoever pleased Him in heaven and in earth'? Moreover, who will be found so profanely mad as to say that God cannot convert the evil wills of men, *which* He pleases, to good? Now, when He does this, He does it *in mercy*; and when He doeth it not, *in judgment* He doeth it not" (pp. 104, 105).

This is clear language.

It leaves no doubt about the question whether Calvin would concur with the position of Keegstra that the Saviour would have made all kinds of efforts to draw to Himself all the children of Jerusalem, but ended up disappointed. He would cast such a view far from him and never assume responsibility for it.

Nevertheless the Rev. Keegstra meant to ascribe that view to Calvin.

Thus it goes when one does not fully quote what ought to be quoted.

We shall allow Calvin to speak more. We are happy that the Rev. Keegstra has furnished us occasion to do so. For Calvin actually has much to say about this.

If only it has become plain now that the reformer of Geneva, in his explanation of Matthew 23:37, teaches no general well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part.

It was necessary that we correct the Rev. Keegstra on this point.

And we would in all seriousness say to him: do not speak any more of a powerless Jesus, who *attempts* to draw men to Himself, but who ends up disappointed because of the evil will of men!

Chapter 4

More from Calvin

We already remarked that we were happy when we noticed that in his articles the Rev. Keegstra appealed to Calvin in support of his proposition that the preaching of the Gospel is a general, well-meant offer of grace on God's part which comes to all men who come under the Gospel and under the sound of the preaching. For not only did we then have opportunity to correct the quotation from Calvin by the Rev. Keegstra and to complete it, but we were also unexpectedly furnished an opportunity to demonstrate still further that such a presentation indeed does not come from the great reformer of Geneva. In this chapter, therefore, we furnish the reader with more of Calvin's thoughts on this subject.

We quote from *Calvin's Calvinism*, a work of Calvin which we value highly, because Calvin wrote it during a later period of his life than his *Institutes*. It is to be expected that then he had more light concerning various questions than when he wrote his *Institutes*.² We understand very well that this is not always true. It can very well be that a writer or leader is more orthodox in an earlier period of his life than in a later period. But in such a case there is change and departure in such a writer. And this there never was in Calvin. Principally he had no change of convictions after he, already at a very youthful age, had embraced and learned to love the cause of the Reformation. Indeed, he received more light concerning various difficult questions according as he searched the Scriptures and studied things. When he wrote his *Institutes*, he was still very young. When he wrote what now have been published in *Calvin's Calvinism*, he was much older. Besides, the latter work was written by him precisely as a defense of the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God over against the opponents of that fundamental truth. Therefore we attach much value to this work.

We have quoted from this work on an earlier occasion, when we drew a comparison between the doctrine of Calvin, on the one hand, and that of Berkhof and H.J. Kuiper on the other hand.³ But this little work was written in the English language. And many of our people who like to investigate the truth of God and learn to understand it do not read English. We were all the more happy, therefore, that the Rev. Keegstra unexpectedly furnished us the opportunity to point also in Dutch to what Calvin has to say on this subject.

Calvin writes, p. 98ff.:

All this Pighius (one of the deniers of predestination and a proponent of the doctrine of free will, who was opposed by Calvin, HH) loudly denies, adducing that passage of the apostle (I Tim. 2:4): "Who will have all men to be saved;" and, referring also to Ezek. 18:23, he argues thus, "That God willeth not the death of a sinner," may be taken upon His own oath, where He says by that prophet, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the wicked that dieth; but rather that he should return from his ways and live." Now we reply, that as the language of the prophet here is an exhortation to repentance, it is not at all marvellous in him to declare that God willeth all men to be saved. For the mutual relation between threats and promises shows that such forms of speaking are *conditional*. In this same manner God declared to the Ninevites and to the kings of Gerar and Egypt, that He would do that which, in reality, He did not intend to do, for their repentance averted the punishment which He had threatened to inflict upon them. Whence it is evident that the punishment was denounced on condition of their remaining obstinate and impenitent. And yet, the denunciation of the punishment was positive, as if it had been an irrevocable decree. But after God had terrified them with the apprehension of His wrath, and had duly humbled them as not being utterly desperate, He encourages them with the hope of pardon, that they might feel that there was yet left open a space for remedy. Just so it is with respect to the *conditional promises* of God, which invite all men to salvation. They do not positively prove that which God has decreed in His secret counsel, but *declare only* what God is *ready to do* to all those who are brought to faith and repentance.

But men untaught of God, not understanding these things, allege that we hereby attribute to God a twofold or double will. Whereas God is so far from being variable, that no shadow of such variableness appertains to Him, even in the most remote degree. Hence Pighius, ignorant of the Divine nature of these deep things, thus argues: “What else is this but making God a mocker of men, if God is represented as really not willing that which He professes to will, and as not having pleasure in that in which He in reality has pleasure?” But if these two members of the sentence be read *in conjunction*, as they ever ought to be—“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;” and, “But that the wicked turn from his way and live”—read these two propositions *in connection* with each other, and the calumny is washed off at once. God requires of us this conversion, or “turning away from our iniquity,” and in whomsoever He finds it He disappoints not such an one of the promised reward of eternal life. Wherefore, God is as much said to have pleasure in, and to will, this eternal life, as to have pleasure in the repentance; and He has pleasure in the latter, because He invites all men to it by His Word. Now all this is in perfect harmony with His secret and eternal counsel, by which He decreed to convert none but His own elect. None but God’s elect, therefore, ever do turn from their wickedness. And yet, the adorable God is not, on these accounts, to be considered variable or capable of change, because, as a Law-giver, He enlightens all men with the external doctrine of *conditional* life. In this primary manner He calls, or invites *all men* unto eternal life. But, in the latter case, He brings unto eternal life those whom He willed according to His eternal purpose, *regenerating* by His Spirit, as an eternal Father, *His own children only*.

Now the reader must understand that the importance of this quotation consists precisely in this: that it contains an explanation of a text which is usually quoted as a proof for the proposition of a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation to all men on God’s part. The Synod of 1924 did this, as is well-known, in support of the first of the famed Three Points. Keegstra also does this in *De Wachter*.

Oh, thus men reason, it is so plainly stated that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, is it not? Who can do violence to this? It does not say that God has no pleasure in the death of the “elect” sinner, but it speaks altogether in the general of *the sinner*. How can one drag election in here? No, here you have a clear proof of the calling of the minister to proceed from the position of a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation. No one can contradict that, He who nevertheless does contradict it does not want to accept Scripture, but wants to drag into the Scriptures his own presentation. And men do not at all understand that if this is the meaning of the text in Ezekiel, we must not only draw the conclusion that there is a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation, but we must concede the correctness of the entire doctrine of Arminius.

This ought to be plain in any event.

Ezekiel 18:23 does not speak of a general offer; the text simply speaks of what God wills. The text does not say that God offers something to the sinner—it merely says what God wants. It indicates simply wherein God delights. He has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. Now do not read this in its context. Do not read it in the context of the whole of Scripture. Do not limit it in a single respect. Read here that God has no delight in the death of *any* sinner, that He wills to save *all without distinction*. And what do you have then? A general offer of salvation? Not at all! Then you simply have the doctrine of Arminius: that God wills that all men shall be saved. For God does not say here that He offers something; He says simply what He wills.

But does Calvin explain this text as those who want a general offer of grace and salvation?

Absolutely not.

No, he says, there is no conflict here with God’s eternal and unchangeable counsel of election.

You must also pay attention to the last clause of the text. And then you must take both clauses together and understand them in connection with one another.

And if you do that, so writes Calvin, then you have no general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part; then God does not say here to all men that He wants to save them. But then you have here the general proclamation of a particular Gospel. The second clause in the text, thus Calvin says, limits the promise of life to those who turn from their wicked way. God does not simply say in general that He has delight in the life of all the wicked, but in the *conversion* and life of the sinner. Life and conversion belong together, can never be separated. But that conversion is not the work of man. On the contrary, it is the work of God alone; and He works it only in His elect. Hence, the entire text is also particular in its entire content. God has pleasure in the life of *those wicked who turn*. But He does not bestow that conversion on all, but only on His elect children. The conclusion is plain: He lays upon the prophet the obligation to proclaim to all a particular, a conditional Gospel.

Such is the explanation of Calvin.

If he had anywhere spoken of a general, well-meant offer of grace, he would have done it in connection with this text.

He could have answered Pighius, as in our day it has become a common occurrence: this is a mystery, Pighius, these are the two tracks. You must not try to comprehend things. You must simply accept the fact that there is, on the one hand, a well-meant offer of salvation which on God's part comes to all men, and, on the other hand, that God nevertheless does not will that all shall be saved. This is what men do today. But Calvin did not do this. He must have nothing of such a double will in God. Therefore he furnishes an altogether different interpretation of Ezekiel 18:23 from that which is given today.

What Calvin's interpretation of this aspect of the truth becomes still clearer from the following, pp. 100ff.:

It is quite certain that men do not "turn from their evil ways" to the Lord of their own accord, nor by any instinct of nature. Equally certain is it that the gift of conversion is not common to all men; because this is that one of the two covenants which God promises that He will not make with any but with His own elect people, concerning whom He has recorded His promise that "He will *write His law in their hearts*" (Jer. 31:33). *Now, a man must be utterly beside himself to assert that this promise is made to all men generally and indiscriminately.* (Italics added).

This is surely something other than a general offer of grace and salvation to all men. This promise of the Gospel, that God will write His law in our hearts, says Calvin, is not for all men. No, anyone must be beside himself to assert this.

It is important that we pause to point this out.

What do they mean who so readily speak of a general offer of salvation to all men, well-meant on God's part? What do they really mean with the Gospel? What do they proclaim?

In general, they mean by this that the Lord Jesus came, died for sinners, shed His blood for a ransom for sinners, is risen, and that now there is forgiveness and salvation in His blood. And now He is offered by God, in the preaching of the Gospel, to all who hear. Come to Jesus, such is the call.

Thus, then, the Gospel is proclaimed.

But is that really the Gospel? Is that really the full proclamation of the salvation which is in Jesus Christ?

No! The bare proclamation of that which the Saviour has done *for* us, when He suffered and died and arose from the dead, is only half of the truth. Even conceived of apart from the fact that someone always proclaims only a half-truth if he preaches that Jesus has died for sinners, without adding that He has merited reconciliation only for the elect, such a proclamation of the Gospel is also very defective because to the full proclamation of the Gospel belongs not only what Jesus has done *for* us, but no less what He does *in* us. I have in view regeneration, the effectual calling, the change from darkness to His marvelous light, the gift of faith, of justification, of sanctification, of preservation, and of final glorification. God also promises to His people that through His Spirit He will bestow on them regeneration, will call, will bestow faith, justify and

sanctify, and preserve to the end. And the proclamation of this also belongs to the Gospel, no less than the preaching of the salvation which the Saviour has accomplished for His people in the objective sense of the word.

But how will men proclaim all this under the motto: a general offer of grace and salvation to all men, well-meant on God's part?

Would anyone have the courage to say: God now offers all of you regeneration?

Would a preacher presume to preach to all his hearers this Gospel: God is willing to bestow on all of you faith?

However, if everyone feels that this would be not only thoroughly unscriptural and unreformed, but also nonsensical, how then can he nevertheless make of the preaching of the Gospel a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation?

Calvin refers to this in the quotation which we made above from *Calvin's Calvinism*. The entire subjective, internal work of salvation is in fact indicated by that *writing of God's law in the hearts*. He does not offer it. This is no offer. Not only is it not a general offer, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit, the irresistible work of God Himself. However, this almighty work of God's grace indeed occurs in Holy Scripture as a promise which God gives to His people. No offer, but indeed a promise. And the difference between an offer and a promise is clear. An offer presupposes that the person to whom something is offered can accept it; a promise is fulfilled by him who makes the promise. Grace is indeed a promise. God promises salvation. He also promises that He will actually bestow all the blessings in Christ Jesus upon His people. And it is to one of these promises that Calvin points. God promises that He will write His law in our hearts. But, says Calvin, anyone must be beside himself to assert that this promise pertains to all men without distinction. The reason for this declaration of Calvin is plain. That which God promises He also surely fulfils, for He is the faithful and true God. If He promises His salvation to all men without distinction, then He will also certainly bestow it upon all without distinction. The promise is, therefore, truly particular. And of a particular promise of God no one can and may make a general offer.

We will cite one more passage from the same work of Calvin, pp. 81ff.:

Now let us listen to the Evangelist John. He will be no ambiguous interpreter of this same passage of the prophet Isaiah. "But though (says John) Jesus had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him, that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart," etc. Now, most certainly John does not here give us to understand that the Jews were prevented from believing by their own sinfulness. For though this be quite true in one sense, yet *the cause* of their not believing must be traced to a far higher source. The secret and eternal purpose and counsel of God must be viewed as the original cause of their blindness and unbelief. It perplexed, in no small degree, the ignorant and the weak, when they heard that there was no place for Christ among the people of God (for the Jews were such). John explains the reason by showing that none believe save those to whom it is given, and that there are few to whom God reveals His arm. This other prophecy concerning "the arm of the Lord," the Evangelist weaves into his argument to prove the same great truth. And his words have a momentous weight. He says, "*Therefore, they could not believe.*" Wherefore, let men torture themselves as long as they will with reasoning, the cause of the difference made—why God does not reveal His arm equally to *all*—lies hidden in His own eternal decree. The whole of the Evangelist's argument amounts evidently to this: that faith is a special gift, and that the wisdom of Christ is too high and too deep to come within the compass of man's understanding. The unbelief of the world, therefore, ought not to astonish us, if even the wisest and most acute of men fail to believe. Hence, unless we would elude the plain and confessed meaning of the Evangelist, that few receive the Gospel, we must fully conclude that *the cause is the will of God*; and that the

outward sound of that Gospel strikes the ear in vain until God is pleased to touch by it the heart within.

It is clear that also in this quotation the subject is the preaching of the Gospel. Isaiah had proclaimed the Word of the Lord, but only a few had believed, so that Isaiah even complains: who hath believed our report? The Saviour preached to the multitudes, did signs and wonders, and yet they believed not in Him. Such was the situation. And thus it is still today. The preacher can engage in all kinds of contortions, such as, for example, Billy Sunday and those who ape him. He may glory in thousands of converts. It is and remains a fact that only a few believe his preaching.

But the question which Calvin confronts is: where is the deep cause of the fact that so many do not believe?

Whence comes the difference among men as far as their attitude toward the Gospel of Christ is concerned?

Does Calvin say that the Gospel is a general and well-meant offer of grace, and that it is simply up to man?

On the contrary, he teaches here that the cause also of the unbelief of the Jews must be sought in the *will* of the Lord. This could not very well be otherwise, because Holy Scripture itself does this. They could not believe, for the Lord revealed His arm, the Gospel, not to all; He blinded and hardened many.

But what is left then of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation in Calvin?

If it does not please the Lord to reveal His arm to all, also not when the Gospel is brought to them; if under and through that preaching He hardens many and wills to reveal His arm only to the elect; where then is the general offer?

It simply is not there.

Calvin never taught that the preaching of the Gospel is an offer of grace to all men, well-meant on God's part. Surely, he taught that through the ministry of the Gospel by men many are called in the outward sense; called to faith and repentance; called to the salvation in Christ; that many come under the promise: he who believeth hath everlasting life. But this is something altogether different from asserting that God well-meaningly offers His salvation in Christ to all who hear the Word. To assert this, says Calvin, one must be utterly beside himself.

And in place of teaching this, he declared unambiguously, as Scripture also does, that the Lord Himself causes the Gospel and its proclamation to be two-fold: a savor of life unto life, and a savor of death unto death.

If only few believe, while nevertheless the same Gospel is proclaimed to all without distinction, then this is because God works in a twofold manner. He touches the heart unto salvation in the few; He blinds and hardens in the many. Thus Calvin teaches. Thus Scripture teaches.

The preacher, therefore, must be well aware of this. He may not be wiser than God. Neither may he present himself as being more merciful than God. Surely, he must preach, preach to all. But he must be prepared in that preaching to be a savor of life unto life, but also a savor of death unto death.

And he must be willing to be that.

Chapter 5

Not According to Scripture

When the Rev. Keegstra wants to prove further from Scripture that there is in the Gospel a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part to all men, he confuses and obscures the issue at stake in a couple of introductory remarks. He writes as follows (cf. *De Wachter*, April 23, 1930):

A couple of introductory remarks.

One should not look for texts in God's Word in which it is said to the reprobate expressly and in so many words in the external calling: "this means you too." God does not incriminate Himself and therefore does not repeatedly defend His sincerity by assuring us: "Now I mean what I say." He indeed comes to man in his unbelief to help him, and out of pure goodness gives us the assurance of His veracity and unchangeable faithfulness. But that is something different.

God does not contradict Himself when He sincerely and well-meaningly offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, although He has not elected them all to salvation, nor accomplished atonement for them all through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. For in the presentation of the Gospel He does not say what He Himself will do. He reveals therein only what He wills that we shall do: that is, humble ourselves before His face, confess our sins, and seek our salvation in Christ.

To these observations of the Rev. Keegstra we wish to add a few of our own.

In the first place, why should we not look for texts in God's Word in which God also says to the reprobate in so many words that God also means them, loves them, seeks their good, wills their salvation and well-meaningly offers that salvation? The answer to this question must certainly not be sought in what the Rev. Keegstra says: "God does not repeatedly defend His sincerity by assuring us: now I mean what I say." For God the Lord does precisely that in various ways for His elect. He assures them of His unchangeable faithfulness and eternal love, of His covenant which knows no wavering. He even swears by Himself. Why, if He indeed well-meaningly offers salvation to all men, also to the reprobate, should He not also be willing to give them the assurance of His faithful love? The answer is simple enough: that faithful love toward the reprobate simply does not exist. And as little as that faithful love of God toward the reprobate exists, so little does God set it forth in the presentation of the Gospel as though it does indeed exist. And therefore you must not search Scripture for such passages which indeed proclaim such a faithful love of God toward the reprobate. I do not hesitate to write here that also the Rev. Keegstra cannot get it over his lips that God loves and desires to save all men in a given audience. He dares not accept the consequence of his own general offer of salvation.

In the second place: why does the Rev. Keegstra write now that he is going to prove that Scripture teaches a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part to all men, that in that offer of the Gospel the question is not what God the Lord Himself will do? Pray, was it not precisely the question what God wills and does in the preaching of the Gospel? If I say to someone—say, my servant—what I want him to do, do I then offer him something? And if in Holy Scripture God comes to all who are under the preaching with the demand that they shall humble themselves and seek their salvation in Christ, does He then offer them something or does He demand something of them? You say, of course: that is no offer, but a demand. Good. But perhaps you go on to say: Yes, but God then also promises to all who humble themselves and seek their salvation in Christ the forgiveness of sins, and everlasting life. And then we agree heartily, but we add to this: then again the Gospel is not general, but particular, for only those to whom God imparts grace to do this humble themselves, and God gives that grace only to His elect. But it is very plain that the Rev. Keegstra now wants to go toward the presentation of a general demand of faith and conversion. And that he may not do. He must not prove that God the Lord comes to all without distinction *with a demand*, but *with an offer*. And in an offer the question is not what we must do, what God demands of us, but very really what God wills and promises to do. In judging the passages which the Rev. Keegstra quotes, we shall proceed then from the question whether the esteemed writer actually proves from Scripture that God well-meaningly offers

salvation to all men without distinction. Let us keep this point clearly in view. Neither is the question whether God wills that the Gospel be preached to all to whom He sends it according to His good pleasure without distinction. No, the question is purely: is that Gospel according to its content a well-meant and general offer on God's part?

But in the third place: if the Gospel according to its content is actually as the Rev. Keegstra here presents it, what an impoverished Gospel that would be! It would only proclaim what *we* must do, not what God Himself will do. How poor! No, we proclaim to all the hearers a far richer Gospel! Surely, we also proclaim to *all* what God wills that we shall do. But along with that we also proclaim to *all* what God the Lord says that He does. We want to have *the complete Gospel* proclaimed to *all*. But that general proclamation is precisely not a general offer of salvation, for God exactly does not will that all men head for head shall be saved, and a preacher may never present it thus. I would almost say that also the Rev. Keegstra will have to let go of a general offer of salvation as soon as he seriously places himself before the task of proclaiming the *entire* Gospel (also including what God says that He will do) to all men.

And now we will discuss the passages which the Rev. Keegstra quotes.

First, however, I must make one more observation from the heart.

It is this. The Rev. Keegstra merely quotes texts which, according to his presentation, must prove a general and well-meant offer of salvation on God's part. He gives no explanation. He furnishes not a single word of explanation. That is not Reformed. The Synod of 1924 did this too. For this reason it went in the wrong direction with its texts. It is very easy to quote a few texts at random, but this method is not Reformed, or else the texts must be incontestable and incapable of a twofold explanation. And this is not the case with the texts which the Rev. Keegstra cites. In itself it does not prove much for a Reformed man that someone can cite seven passages for a certain view. The question always remains: do those texts actually prove that which they are supposed to prove? Therefore we would also rather see that the Rev. Keegstra would expound the texts which he quoted and would make it clear that they teach a general, well-meant offer of grace on God's part.

But the Rev. Keegstra quotes texts, and we shall make it clear that they do not prove what he thinks that they prove: a general offer of salvation.

At the head of the list stands a text which was also cited by the Synod of 1924, Psalm 81:11-13:

But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

Now, in connection with this text, we may take note of the fact, first of all, that surely no one can find in it what the Rev. Keegstra claims to find, namely, a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation. In the first place, the text is after all not general; and secondly, it contains no offer. The text is not general: for it speaks of "My people" and of "Israel." And now you may turn and twist as you will, but in that expression "My people" there is always the idea of election. The term always indicates that God's people are His peculiar possession, chosen by Him as His inheritance and by Him delivered and formed, in order that they should show forth His praises and tell His wonders. The subject here therefore is not all men, but God's people. And in that there is precisely nothing general. And there is no mention of an offer. Not at all. Indeed there follow upon this text various promises of God, altogether conditional and dependent upon these verses. The Lord would have subdued their enemies, would have fed them with honey out of the rock and with the finest of the wheat. But of an offer you do not read so much as a word. How the esteemed Editor of *De Wachter* can read a general and well-meant offer of grace into this passage is simply a riddle to me. Read the text in connection with the verses which follow it, and then the following is simply stated here:

1. That God's people would not obey the voice of the Lord and would none of Him.
2. That He therefore gave them over unto their own hearts' lust and let them walk in their own counsels.
3. That this would have been altogether different if God's people had walked in His ways and had hearkened to His voice. Then God would have subdued their enemies before them and fed them with the finest of the wheat and with honey from the rock.

This last you can also state as follows: God promises His salvation to those who walk in His ways and obey His voice. And the latter are never any others than the elect. What you have, therefore, in these verses is nothing else than a pronouncement of curse upon those who do not walk in His ways and a particular promise for those who do walk in His ways. I kindly ask the Rev. Keegstra to draw from these verses anything else than a sure promise of God for God's obedient people.

Now we could rest our case with this, for we actually need do no more than demonstrate that the texts do not teach what the Rev. Keegstra claims that they teach. And that we have done for everyone who is able to judge and is willing to judge without prejudice. The esteemed Editor of *De Wachter* does not furnish an explanation, and therefore we would not have to do so either. Nevertheless, we wish to do so in this instance. There are in the text two difficulties which exist not only for me but also for the Rev. Keegstra. The first problem is expressed in the question: but how can *God's people* be apostate, so that the Lord gives them up unto their own heart's lust? That is what the text states. And the second problem lies in that complaint of God about their apostasy. The Lord appears to bemoan the fact that His people would none of Him. But how can that be, seeing that He alone is the one who inclines the hearts and is able to draw to Himself with cords of irresistible grace and love that people whom He has given over to their own counsels? Once more I stress that these difficulties exist for Keegstra as well as for me, and that they neither add to nor detract from the fact that a general offer of grace and salvation can never be discovered in this passage. Nevertheless we wish to furnish a solution to these difficulties if such a solution is possible.

Now, in order to find such a solution, we must, in the first place, maintain what we have already said: that "My people" always points to God's gracious election and redemption of His own, whereby they are His peculiar possession. In the second place, we must understand that this elect people is in the old dispensation, from the viewpoint of the psalm, Israel as a nation. God had chosen Israel. The holy line ran through Israel. Israel was His people in the unique sense of the word. He loved Israel with an eternal love. He had delivered Israel out of the bondage of Egypt with a mighty arm. Such is the viewpoint of the psalm. It points to that history of a wonderful deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. In the third place, we must keep in view the fact that you will never reach a solution and will never be able to understand the words of this psalm, unless you also keep in mind that the term "My people," also with respect to Israel, did not apply to every Israelite head for head and soul for soul. Not all were Israel who were of Israel. No, the children of the promise were counted for the seed. There was a reprobate shell in Israel as well as an elect kernel. And that reprobate shell was sometimes very great. That wicked, carnal Israel often held the upper hand and dominated. Nevertheless Israel remains *God's people*. The Lord calls the people as a whole, in the organic sense of the word, His people, according to the remnant of the election of grace. And this remnant was always present and also always constituted the essential element in Israel. Through this it comes about that at some points in Israel's history, it departs from the Lord, does not obey Him, wickedly rises up against Him. Here, therefore, you have the answer to the question how the psalm can say that "My people" would none of me. But also then the Lord still loves that people for the elect's sake. When, however, the reprobate dominated, then the entire nation was chastised and punished. When disobedient Israel rises up in rebellion against the Lord in the wilderness, then not only are many thousands cut down in the wilderness, but then also the elect element suffers, then the whole nation wanders in the wilderness for forty years, then the enemies rule over them, then they suffer hunger and thirst and presently go into captivity. Also the elect suffer. Therefore the Lord can call out complainingly in this psalm: "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries," etc. It is the love to His own that speaks here, nothing else.

If the Rev. Keegstra has objections to this explanation, or if he knows of a better one, let him write. We will gladly take note of it and will also gladly exchange our interpretation for a better one. But let him not say again that here proof is found for a general and well-meant offer of salvation. For that is not mentioned with so much as a word in this passage.

It is no different with the following two passages which are quoted by the Rev. Keegstra and which we can conveniently take together, seeing that they mean the same thing. Isaiah 65:2:

I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts.

And Jeremiah 7:25, 26:

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers.

Also here we observe that these verses are neither general in content nor speak of an offer of grace. We must keep in mind the following:

1. That the Lord also here speaks of Israel, of *His people*, which is elect according to its kernel, but reprobate according to its shell. Only if you keep this in mind can you understand these passages. This is also the basic thought of Romans 9-11. Therefore the apostle can maintain that God has not cast away His people when Israel as a nation is rejected, but that the elect have obtained it, while the rest were hardened. That this organic presentation of Israel, as the people of God with its elect kernel and reprobate shell, is correct as the point of departure in the explanation of Isaiah 65:2 is clear also from the subsequent context. Read verses 8 and 9:

Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it; so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.

2. That the Lord spread out His hands to that people, something which, of course, means the same as the sending of the prophets of which the prophet Jeremiah speaks in the passage which was also quoted by the Rev. Keegstra. In that word of the prophets, sent by the Lord, He spread forth His hands to them, with the divine purpose, of course, of saving the elect. It was never God's purpose to change the reprobate shell into the elect kernel. The elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened.

3. That the content of the message of the prophets, figuratively presented as the spreading forth of hands, never was a general, well-meant offer of grace to all without distinction, but a calling to walk in the ways of the Lord and, paired with that, a sure promise of salvation and eternal life. Never did the Lord thus spread forth His hands to Israel that He offered grace to all without distinction. On the contrary, He called them to the fear of the Lord, to the keeping of His covenant, to walking in His ways, to conversion, all through their history. And under this spreading forth of His hands to Israel as a nation, there was a twofold effect, as always under the preaching of the Word; the elect received of the Lord grace to do what He demanded; He did not offer them grace, but bestowed it upon them; the rest received no grace, were hardened through the operation of God's wrath, and showed more and more that they were wicked and rebellious. Through this the elect finally entered the kingdom of heaven, received the sure promises of God, came to the wedding-feast, while the rest were cast out. This explanation is supported by the entire prophecy of Isaiah, which has as its main content this: that it is God's purpose to save the remnant according to the election of grace, but to harden the rest, also through the means of the prophetic word.

Thus we have in this spreading forth of the hands a calling to conversion which comes to the entire people of God, with a particular bestowal of grace (no offer) to the elect, to heed that call, paired with a manifestation of wickedness and rebellion on the part of the reprobate shell, which brings them to destruction. And let the Rev. Keegstra say what he has against this explanation, and let him give one that is more scriptural and Reformed.

In this same connection it is probably best that we discuss the parable of the wedding feast, to which the Rev. Keegstra also calls attention. The esteemed Editor of *De Wachter* finds here, too, a general, well-meant offer of grace on God's part. He quotes the following words from this passage:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways.... Then saith he to his servants, The

wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.... For many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:1-14).

About this we remark:

1. That already this last word, "For many are called, but few are chosen," should have been enough for the Rev. Keegstra, to make him see clearly that in this parable there is no reference to a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part. There can be no doubt but that the Saviour wants us to understand the entire parable precisely in the light of these words. They are an explanation of the parable. If now the main thought of the parable had been that the Lord offers His grace to all without distinction, with the sincere purpose to save them all, then there should have been stated at the end: for grace is offered to many, but few accept it. But precisely that is not stated. What is stated—even somewhat unexpectedly, upon a superficial reading of the parable—is that many are called, but few are chosen. This immediately lets us know that God the Lord does not purpose to save all who live under the preaching of the Gospel, but that He gives grace only to the elect to follow up and obey the call to the wedding. You have therefore also in this parable a *call* to come to the wedding-feast which goes forth to all who are bidden, but a particular *bestowal* of grace (no offer) upon the elect alone.

2. That the wedding here is the kingdom of heaven, as that is prepared for the Son by the Father, was foreshadowed in the old dispensation in Israel, was realized with the coming, the suffering, and the exaltation of the Saviour, and presently shall attain its full realization in the day of Christ.

3. That those who are bidden and who will not come are the Jews. That call of the servants of the King is the call of the prophets, which was discussed already in our treatment of Isaiah 65:2 and Jeremiah 7:25, 26. However, they paid no heed to that call of the prophets, but resisted their word, mistreated them, and killed them, and thereby showed that they were not worthy to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore the King in righteous wrath burned their city. Israel as a nation was rejected. Jerusalem was destroyed.

4. That this call of the prophets was never a general offer of grace. The invitation to come to the wedding was no offer of grace, but a call to repentance, to keep God's covenant, and to walk in His ways. However, seeing that, according to the explanation of the parable by the Saviour Himself, not all who were called were elect, they did not all receive grace to heed the call. Israel as a nation manifested itself as completely unworthy to enter into the kingdom of heaven when that kingdom was revealed in Christ Jesus. Therefore Israel was rejected.

5. That the servants then, upon the commandment of the king, turned away from Israel in order to go out into the highways and byways, to call Jew and Gentile, good and evil, to the kingdom of heaven. But also in the new dispensation this calling goes forth always according to the rule that many are called, but few are chosen, and that therefore we must not expect that all who are outwardly called shall also come. The entire parable teaches precisely the opposite of what the Rev. Keegstra wants to draw from it, namely, that grace is precisely not an offer, but a power of God unto salvation, and that where that power of God to salvation does not operate in the calling, hardening sets in, and rejection follows. But the elect receive that power of God unto salvation, and they enter into the wedding of the Kingdom of heaven.

The Rev. Keegstra has two more texts, so that he knows only of six isolated passages to quote in favor of his assertion that the Gospel is a well-meant offer of grace on God's part to all men. For Romans 10:21 is a quotation of Isaiah 65:2, which we need not enter again. And about the two remaining passages we can be brief.

The first is Ezekiel 18:23:

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways and life?

About this we wrote already in our previous chapter in connection with a quotation of Calvin. The great Reformer pointed out that both parts of this text must be read and understood in connection with one another. And nothing general remains in it. Of an offer of grace there is no mention whatsoever. But besides, if we read the text in its entirety, then it simply teaches that the Lord has pleasure in the life of the sinner who

repents. He has pleasure in the life of the sinner even as He has pleasure in his conversion. And since only he who is equipped unto this by almighty grace repents and turns to the Lord, and only the elect receive that grace, also this Scripture passage does not speak of any general grace, nor of any general offer of grace. And it means absolutely nothing for the Rev. Keegstra's assertion.

And the second passage is Acts 13:46:

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Now it is difficult to see how even the Rev. Keegstra can read in these words a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation. Certain it is that it is mentioned with not so much as a letter, and that there is nothing in the text that points to it. Paul and Barnabas had preached God's Word, and that, too, first of all to the Jews. Now it appeared that some of the Jews contradicted and despised that Word of God. And to them Paul and Barnabas are speaking here. They say to them that it has appeared that they judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life. Where is the general offer of grace here? Only in this: that the Word of God was proclaimed also to those who went lost. But the question is not whether the Gospel must also be preached to all who come under it; but the question is whether that Gospel is a well-meant and general offer of salvation. The question is therefore: did Paul and Barnabas preach the Word of God in such a way that it could be called an offer, a general offer of salvation? And to this we can find the answer in the same chapter. What they preached the previous Sabbath is described in verses 16-41. And in brief the content of this preaching is Christ who died and was raised again, and forgiveness of sins through Him. And then you read in verse 39:

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses.

There is no offer here, therefore, but a *proclamation* of the forgiveness of sins. And there is nothing general here, but a limitation of justification to everyone who believes. And since only the elect ever believe, therefore you have also here the sure promise of God only for the elect, and not a general and well-meant offer of grace. And the outcome was also entirely in accord with this preaching. For some of the Jews and proselytes believed and followed Paul; but others were filled with envy and contradicted those things which were spoken by Paul and Barnabas, verses 43, 45.

Hence, there is nothing left of the scriptural proofs of the Rev. Keegstra.

He has not proved that the Gospel is ever a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part to all men.

And he is not able to prove it.

He seems to have felt this himself. This appears not only from his introductory remarks, to which we have already called attention, but also from his concluding comment, in which we read the following:

The rationalism of the Arminian may judge that both are impossible: the Reformed man is no rationalist, but as an obedient servant he subjects his thinking and speech to the revealed will of God, and therefore preaches the glad tidings of salvation in Christ to all his hearers...

As if that were the issue!

As if Keegstra had proposed to prove that the glad tidings of salvation must be proclaimed to all the hearers without distinction!

The reader should not be misled by such remarks.

Repeatedly the Rev. Keegstra departs from his subject. He leaves the impression that there are also men who believe that the Gospel must not be preached to all the hearers, but only to the elect. And as often as he does this, he is shooting at a straw man.

But let him prove from Scripture that the Gospel which must be preached to all the hearers is, according to its content, a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation. That he has not done.

And once more: that he cannot do!

Chapter 6

Another Six Texts

It is only proper that after we have examined the texts which Rev. Keegstra submits to us, we also submit to him six texts as proof that the Scriptures teach the very opposite of what Rev. Keegstra proposes.

We are convinced that we can maintain without exaggeration that we have clearly proved to anyone who understands and loves the truth that the texts cited by Rev. Keegstra do not teach a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation. But the conclusion we reached is still only negative. We have only shown clearly what those Scripture passages do not prove.

That is not enough.

Rev. Keegstra may well present six other texts. Or if he would not care to do this, someone else may submit such passages from Scripture which he regards as teaching a general and well-meant offer of grace. That gets us nowhere. That never settles the matter.

Therefore we should now proceed to show from the Holy Scriptures that the entire presentation of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation is at variance with the witness of God's Word. We intend to do this, even as Rev. Keegstra did, by citing six texts. Yet we will not be content with merely quoting these texts; we will also expound them. In doing so we shall cite only those passages of Scripture that show beyond a shadow of doubt what they teach and how they prove the issue at hand.

First of all, we call to the attention of the reader Isaiah 6:9-11. There we read:

And he said, go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, that they see not with their eyes, and hear not with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.

We note:

1. That this passage is a part of the scriptural account of the calling of Isaiah to be a prophet in Israel. As a prophet he must proclaim to the people the Word of the Lord. Naturally the intent of this passage is not that Isaiah shall literally say to the people: Hear ye indeed, but understand not; see ye indeed, but perceive not. On the contrary, as is evident from the entire prophecy, as a watchman on the walls of Zion, he must faithfully proclaim all that the Lord will say to him. By means of that Word of God he preaches repentance towards the Lord and eternal mercy, yet also destruction and misery for the wicked. In no uncertain terms, readily understood by all who hear them, he proclaims God's Word to Israel. This passage deals with the preaching of the prophet Isaiah.

2. That also the divine purpose of this preaching is revealed to the prophet. On the one hand, those who hear this Word must, from a natural point of view, clearly understand its content. This is expressed most emphatically. Hear ye indeed: that is, they must emphatically and clearly hear. See ye indeed: that is, they must clearly see that which the prophet declares to them. That is what God wills. Afterward they must not be able to say that the prophet spoke so ambiguously to them, proclaimed such deep and mysterious words that they could not grasp anything of what he was saying. It was beyond their comprehension. But on the other hand, God's will and purpose with the preaching of Isaiah was that in the spiritual sense the people would not understand nor perceive. On the contrary, according to the purpose of God the word and preaching of Isaiah must serve to make the hearts of the people fat, their ears heavy, in order that they should not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts and that they should not repent and the Lord should not heal them. That is God's purpose with the preaching of Isaiah to this particular people spoken of here.

3. That this must continue until God's judgment is carried out in Israel. For upon the anxious question of the prophet, "Lord, how long?" he received the answer: "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate." For the Lord will remove this people far away, and there will be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. Only a tenth shall remain, but that also shall be devastated. Yet this remnant will not be completely destroyed for the holy seed will be its real substance. The remnant according to election of grace shall be saved.

We conclude that this portion of Scripture plainly teaches that, according to the divine purpose, Isaiah's preaching was no general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation. But even while it must serve to save the remnant, the Lord still mainly intended that the others should thereby be hardened. God willed that this preaching would be a savor of death unto death as well as a savor of life unto life, while the emphasis is laid on the former. He even uses the preaching of Isaiah to harden the wicked. Here Scripture most explicitly denies that the preaching is a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God. Here it teaches us that the very opposite is true. Let Rev. Keegstra give a different interpretation.

The opposite of Rev. Keegstra's presentation is no less emphatically taught in Mark 4:11, 12:

And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them which are without these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing, they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

Notice:

1. That this is an answer to the question of the disciples why the Savior speaks in parables. He gives them the reason for this particular type of preaching. When the Savior preaches He very consciously has this purpose in mind.
2. That, in the second place, the Savior states that these things *happen* in parables. The Savior does not merely speak in parables, but they happen. Our natural experiences and the earthly creation are the stage on which the Lord God Himself performs the drama which portrays the heavenly and the spiritual. When a sower goes out to sow and some seed falls here and some falls there, then a parable *happens*. That is true of all parables. They happen before every one's eyes.
3. However, the Lord refers to this in order that those who are within and to whom it is given may understand the things of the kingdom of heaven and know its mysteries; but at the same time, that those who are without may clearly hear and see (they shall hear indeed and see indeed means also in this case that emphatically they shall hear and see), yet they will not perceive, nor understand, repent, and receive the forgiveness of their sins.

Again we come to exactly the same conclusion. Only now in connection with the preaching of the Savior Himself, namely, that the Scriptures most emphatically contradict the presentation given by Rev. Keegstra, as if the preaching should be a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation. Once more we request Rev. Keegstra to give another interpretation, if he can.

Further we focus our attention on another teaching of the Savior that can be found in Matthew 11:25, 26:

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.

We note in this connection the following:

1. That the Savior is speaking here of the fruit which He saw at that time upon His preaching and the performance of His miracles in Israel, indeed we read emphatically: "*At that time,*" Referring to the context to know what time is meant, we find that it was a time when a generation had arisen that refused to enter into the kingdom of heaven. They were like the children in the markets. When John came they played the flute

and wanted him to dance. When John refused to dance they made the excuse that he had a devil, because he would not eat nor drink. When Jesus came they sang lamentations and wanted Him to weep along with them. Jesus refused to weep, but came eating and drinking, so they again made the excuse that He was a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. At the same time, it made absolutely no difference who preached the kingdom of heaven to them, they did not enter. That was the case with the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida, cities in which Jesus had performed most mighty works; that was also the case with Capernaum, which had been exalted to the heavens and in which Jesus had labored so often and so extensively. But there was also another generation, the generation of the spiritually powerful and mighty who, in Jesus' time, stormed into the kingdom of heaven in the days of John the Baptist. That then was the result, the actual fruit of Jesus' preaching. The ones who, according to the standard of this world are the wise and prudent did not receive Him, but rejected His preaching. The little children received the kingdom.

2. In the second place, you must not fail to see that the Savior ascribes this two-fold fruit to the work of the Father. Not only that the children of the kingdom entered and understood its mysteries, but likewise the Savior ascribes directly to the Father that the wise and prudent did not understand and remained outside. The Lord had accompanied the labors and preaching of Jesus and the apostles with a revealing power, so that they received eyes to see and ears to hear, for who would be able to understand the mysteries of the kingdom except by God's grace? But no less, the Father, Who indeed is Lord of heaven and earth and is the exalted sovereign over all, Who has mercy upon whom He will, causes a hidden power to work upon the wise and prudent. The Savior acknowledges this and in this His soul finds peace. And since it is exactly the wise and the prudent for whom the things of the kingdom were hidden, and exactly the children to whom they were revealed, the Savior thanks the Father for that, for exactly therein the Father is most highly glorified.

3. That in all the foregoing the Savior refers back to the counsel of the Lord when He says: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." It was eternally God's good pleasure to bring some to eternal life and to make the others vessels of wrath. And indeed all is well when the Father now also carries out His counsel in time, for the good pleasure of the Father must be realized in those who are saved and in those who are lost.

We conclude once more that the Holy Scriptures emphatically contradict the presentation of Rev. Keegstra, and maintain that according to the Word of God the preaching can never be a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation.

We also want to mention John 12:39, 40:

Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

These words bear weight, for would Rev. Keegstra dare to maintain that the Lord blinds the eyes and hardens the hearts of those to whom He offers His well-meant grace? I dare to assert that Rev. Keegstra does not have the courage to do this. Some are very bold. They dare to gloss over many things with the perfect squelch that we are dealing with a mystery and that we must resign ourselves in faith to all sorts of contradictions that are found in the Word of God. Yet I still think too highly of Rev. Keegstra to think that he would dare to maintain that the Lord God offers well-meaningly His grace and salvation to the same person whom He at the same time hardens and blinds in order that he can never be saved.

Yet notice:

1. That the apostle John give an explanation here of a certain fact that was observed at that time. That fact was that the Savior had preached, had performed many miracles, and that yet, in spite of all this, many did not believe in Him. When taken as such and from a human viewpoint, that was a deplorable fact that could readily fill one with discouragement and despair.

2. That the evangelist explains this first in this manner, that this was the Lord's doing, and therefore there was no reason to be concerned about it, for that these people were so very blind and unbelieving was exactly the fulfilling of the Scriptures. They could not believe, John says, for firstly, the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, as spoken by the mouth of Esaias: "Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And that Scripture is, after all, the proclamation of God's own good pleasure. This good pleasure must be realized. Therefore it was impossible for them to believe.

3. That John adds to this in order to emphasize how impossible it was for them to believe, and he ascribes this to the work of God. The Lord Himself had blinded their eyes. God Himself had hardened their hearts. He did this with the very purpose that they should not believe, should not understand, should not repent, and He should not heal them. This is such clear language that it allows for no twofold interpretation. And it explicitly eliminates every possibility that the preaching of the Gospel would be a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation for all those who come in contact with the Gospel. Again, we say: Let Rev. Keegstra try to give a different interpretation.

We still want to refer to two texts taken from the epistles of Paul.

We refer first to Romans 11:7-10:

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always.

Also in these words we have the same idea namely, that through the preaching of the Word God works a blinding process upon the wicked and the reprobate. Note:

1. There can be no doubt about it that these verses also deal with the effect of the preaching brought about by God upon the reprobate. This becomes evident when we refer to Isaiah 29, which is quoted in part in Romans 11. There we read: "For the Lord hath poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and rulers, the elders hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver unto one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed. And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee, and he saith, I am not learned." It is obvious that this passage, and therefore also the quotation from Romans 11, refers again to the preaching of the Word by mouth of the prophet Isaiah.

2. In the second place, it is relevant that here also is taught that there was an operation of God's wrath upon the hearers referred to, whereby they received a spirit of deep sleep, eyes that could not see, and ears that could not hear. Thus David's prayer was answered which he prays against the enemies of God in Psalm 69.

3. In the light of these passages of Scripture, how can one still maintain that the preaching of the Gospel is a well-meant offer of grace and salvation proceeding from God; that is, that it is God's purpose that all who hear shall indeed hear, believe, and be saved? The "well-meant" in God's offer must certainly mean that God sincerely wills that all shall hear, all shall understand, shall be converted and saved. But if this is God's purpose in the preaching of the Gospel, how can He at the same time give them ears that *cannot hear*, and eyes that *cannot see*, and a spirit of deep sleep? Now do not object that this is a mystery, for that it is not. The whole issue is so simple that a child can understand that the preaching of the Word is no general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation from God's aspect. It is a savor of life unto life, and a savor of death unto death, and that according to the expressed purpose of God.

That this is indeed the case is taught us finally in so many words in the last reference we intend to make from the Holy Scriptures. This is the well-known passage taken from II Corinthians 2:14, 15:

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

Also this passage is perfectly clear with regard to the issue at hand. The apostle is speaking of himself and of his co-workers as ministers of the Gospel of Christ. By this ministry of the Gospel, the apostle writes, they are a savor of Christ. And they are always a sweet savor of Christ unto God; that is, a savor that is pleasing to God both in those who perish and in those who are saved. The ministers are still a sweet savor of Christ also

when some perish through the preaching of the Word, for this is according to His good pleasure and hereby God is glorified and justified in those who perish.

That is how it is.

A preacher may, from a human aspect, want to save and take along to heaven all who hear his word. He certainly will not desire, nor can he or may he desire to be a savor of death unto death. It is his calling to be a sweet savor of Christ and faithfully to preach the Word. When he does that he has done his duty, and he leaves the outcome to the Lord. However, let him beware that he does not present God as a beggar, who stands and knocks helplessly at the heart of the hardened sinner, waiting if per chance the sinner might be pleased to open the door for Him. Let him beware of the contention that grace and salvation are an offer of God that the sinner can accept or reject. That is no Gospel. But let him preach the full glory of God in Christ Jesus, the completely helpless and dead sinner, and the almighty and efficacious grace of God, whereby He saves His chosen people. And let him prepare himself, that he may be willing to be a savor of death unto death as well as a savor of life unto life. For that is according to God's will. And only thereby is he always the victor.

If anyone is not willing to serve that divine purpose, if he thinks he must set his goal upon saving the whole world, then he cannot be a minister of the Gospel simply because he does not desire which God has determined according to the clear revelation of God's Word.

Then one of two things happens.

Either he becomes discouraged and gives up because as he continues to preach there are so many who do not embrace the Gospel.

Or, and this happens very often in our day, the preacher goes through all sorts of antics, makes the Gospel the cheapest article on sale in the public market, corrupts God's truth, maintains that he has converted many souls, and deceives many who have never experienced the efficacious grace of God in their hearts.

Woe to those preachers!

They drag the name of the Most High God and of His Christ through the mud when on the public market they bring it up for grabs.

And they deceive thousands for eternity. But in any case it must be evident that from God's viewpoint the preaching of the Gospel is no general offer of grace and salvation to all who hear it; but that also by the preaching God always shows mercy to whom He will show mercy, and hardens whom He will.

For that reason we have quoted passages from the prophets of the old dispensation and shown clearly that even then that was God's purpose with the preaching of the Word. We have referred to the preaching of the Savior Himself, and discovered the same. We have referred to the presentation of the Gospel in the epistles of the apostles, showing their preaching and their motive. We always came to the same conclusion: the preaching is definitely no offer of grace.

Rev. Keegstra's texts completely failed to prove his contention.

The texts cited above completely deny that contention.

I do not doubt but that Rev. Keegstra himself sees that.

Chapter 7

Not Confessionally Reformed

After Rev. Keegstra has attempted to show that it is in harmony with the Holy Scripture to teach that God calls everyone to be saved with a well-meant calling, and offers to them the salvation in Christ, he focuses the attention of the readers of *De Wachter* upon a few quotations from the Reformed confessions to prove that his presentation is also confessionally Reformed.

Now we wish to review also this attempt of the esteemed writer.

However, before we do that, we must once more call to your attention the fact that in the introductory remarks which Rev. Keegstra makes at the beginning of the article (*De Wachter*, April 30, 1930) he obscures the issue and does not present the facts correctly. He writes:

Here and there in our circles it is questioned whether the Bible actually teaches that in the general preaching to sinners, including the reprobate, we may and must invite them to salvation. That is considered to be something new in the preaching, a departure from time-tried Reformed doctrine and practice. Sometimes they speak of Methodistic leanings. They even fear the danger of Remonstrantism and Pelagianism when the preacher in the Lord's Name invites all his hearers without distinction to the salvation described and promised.

In this paragraph the matter is once more not correctly presented.

Rev. Keegstra should have written in that last sentence: "Sometimes some speak of Methodistic leanings. They even fear for the threat of Remonstrantism and Pelagianism when the preacher teaches in the Name of the Lord that God Himself from His viewpoint offers the salvation in Christ well-meaningly to everyone; or, if you will, that the Gospel is a well-meant, general offer of grace according to God's intent."

That is the issue.

That is Rev. Keegstra's presentation.

The question we face is whether (1) Do the confessions teach that the Gospel according to God's intent is an *offer of salvation*? (2) That God presents this offer well-meant to all men; or, if you will, to all who hear without distinction?

To prove his point Rev. Keegstra quotes, first of all, from the *Canons of Dordt*, II, 5:

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.

This quotation is so completely devoid of any proof for that which Rev. Keegstra tries to prove that further commentary is virtually superfluous. We can content ourselves with a few brief remarks:

First of all, it must be evident that here the Gospel is not presented as an offer, but as a promise. The promise of the Gospel is, that whosoever believes in Christ crucified will not perish, but have everlasting life. That promise must be declared and published (*annunciari et proponi debet*, according to the original Latin) to every nation and all persons to whom God, according to His good pleasure, sends the Gospel. There is a marked difference between an offer and a promise, as we have noticed previously; a difference that consists mainly in this, that the fulfilment of the promise depends upon the one who makes the promise, while the realization of an offer depends upon the acceptance of the one to whom the offer is made. If the latter is true of the Gospel, then the Remonstrants are right. But our fathers speak here of the Gospel, not as an offer, but

as a promise. God does not offer something but He does promise something. And when He promises something He will also fulfil His promise.

In the second place, this article teaches that even the declaration and publication of the promise is not general, but limited, and that God the Lord Himself sets the limitation *according to His good pleasure*. Throughout the course of history the Gospel is preached to comparatively few people. By far the largest majority of nations and people die without having come in contact with the Gospel. And this is according to God's good pleasure. Through Christ God directs the course of the Gospel. Christ is also the missionary. He carries out His mission task through the church. Thus according to the will of God this preaching is not general. God does not want everyone to hear the Gospel. He Himself takes care that the Gospel is preached exactly where He wills.

In the third place, that according to its content the Gospel is not general, but most definitely particular. This article of the confession does teach that this promise must be promiscuously preached and presented to all who hear without distinction. Yet the promise that must be presented and preached is not general, but particular. It is the promise of eternal life to all *who believe in the crucified Christ*. Thus the Lord does not promise something to everyone, not to all who hear without distinction. If the Gospel were an offer it could very well be general according to its content, for an offer depends for its fulfilment upon the persons to whom it is offered. But since the Gospel is not an offer, but a promise, the certainty of the fulfilment depends upon God, who cannot lie. If He were to promise to every one eternal life, then He would also save all. But since He does not will to save everyone, He does not allow a general promise to be preached. But the promise is particular. It is limited to those who believe in the crucified Christ.

Therefore the question immediately arises: Who, according to this confession, are they? You find the answer to this in the same Head of Doctrine, II, articles 7 and 8:

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

For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all of the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation, that is, it was the will of God that Christ, by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father, that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death, should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot or blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever.

This is plain language that does not allow for a twofold interpretation, and answers the question: To whom does God promise eternal life in the preaching of His Word? The answer is:

1. To those who believe.
2. They are the ones to whom God, in His eternal grace, wills to grant faith, for one does not believe of himself.
3. They are the ones for whom, by His death, Christ merited faith as the saving gift of the Holy Spirit, for also that faith had to be merited by Christ. Of ourselves we have no right to it.
4. They are the elect. For it was the eternal and free counsel and will of God that Christ should die for them.

Now read once more the article of Rev. Keegstra, which we quoted, and the meaning becomes crystal clear. In the promise of the Gospel, namely, that whosoever believes in the crucified Christ has eternal life, God promises life and salvation *only to the elect*. For only they are endowed with that faith. Thus He fulfils His

promise. It can only fill one with amazement that a man like Rev. Keegstra can read a well-meant offer of grace and salvation in this beautiful article, enriched even by the context in which it appears!

Nor can any evidence of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation be discovered in the following article that Rev. Keegstra quotes from the same *Canons*:

And whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief, this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves (*Canons* II, 6).

Here at least we can somewhat understand that Rev. Keegstra ventures to quote this article as proof for a general offer of the Gospel of grace and salvation. It seems to me that he reasoned somewhere as follows:

1. There are those called by the Gospel who perish in their unbelief.
2. Hence not only the elect, but also the reprobate are called.
3. Consequently they also were offered, well-meant, the salvation in Christ.

However, the serious mistake that Rev. Keegstra makes here is that he makes himself guilty of *begging the question*. He assumes as an established fact the very thing that he must prove.

He had to prove that *the calling of the Gospel, as it comes to the reprobate*, (many are called few are chosen) is a *well-meant offer of grace and salvation*. But he tacitly assumes that which he had to prove.

Please, Rev. Keegstra, we do not differ at all on the fact that many who are called by the Gospel perish in their unbelief! Nor is there any question among us concerning the established fact that the blame for their unbelief does not lie in any lack in Christ, but in themselves! That is the entire content of your article.

No, no, but you proceeded from the *assumption* that the calling of the Gospel is an offer of grace, well-meant and general. And that was exactly what you had to prove. But you cannot prove that, for in the article immediately preceding this one the *Canons* have just described what must be understood by the calling. It is not a general offer, but a particular promise with a general demand to repent and believe. In the preaching of the Gospel God condemns the unbelief and wickedness and impenitence of the world. Therefore in the calling of the Gospel He *demand*s of everyone faith and repentance. If they fail to do this the blame is to be sought in them, in their depraved heart, not in Christ. If they do repent, the reason for that is to be sought in eternal, elective grace, not in the person, nor in any offer of the Gospel, but in efficacious, irresistible grace. To those who by eternal grace obey this call to faith and repentance God promises eternal life. He does not offer it, He promises it to them and will also surely bestow it upon them.

This is the truth in regard to the calling. The calling is also a command to believe and repent. This aspect of the calling was in the minds of the fathers when they wrote this article, even more than the particular promise, as is evident from the manner in which this calling is briefly described in this same article: "That many . . . do not repent, nor believe in Christ." The Gospel came with the demand to believe and repent. Many do not believe and repent. The fault lies with them.

Rev. Keegstra himself will now agree that this is the proper interpretation of this article of our *Canons*; as also that there cannot be found a semblance of evidence of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation in this article of our confession.

I think that also the rest that Rev. Keegstra quotes from the *Canons of Dort* will present no difficulty, if we but bear in mind in what sense the *Canons* speak of the calling of and by the Gospel. That calling is no general offer of grace and salvation (how could our Reformed fathers have spoken of that in a confession that wanted to oppose the Remonstrants?), *but the preaching of a particular promise, and of a general command to repent and believe*. Bearing this in mind we read that which Rev. Keegstra further quotes:

As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in his Word what will be acceptable to him; namely, that all who are called should comply with the invitation.

He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him and believe on him (*Canons III/IV, 8*).

We notice here:

1. That also in this article reference is made to the external calling through the Gospel, whereby everyone who comes in contact with the Gospel is called. It is confessed here that all who come in contact with the Gospel are most earnestly called. Let it be understood that, according to the very wording of the *Canons*, this only means that the particular or conditional⁴ promise and general command to repent and believe are seriously meant for all. When it is proclaimed to a thousand people that whosoever believes in the crucified Christ will be saved, this very seriously applies to all. And when God's call comes to all those thousand, this call also is very serious for every one of those thousand. Not one among them has the right before God to continue to live in unbelief and in impenitence. Up to this point there is obviously no general offer. You cannot and you may not carelessly read here, as Rev. Keegstra would like: "As many as are offered the grace in Christ are offered this grace by God seriously and well-meant." That is something quite different. In regard to the calling the confession means, according to its own interpretation, "the particular and conditional⁵ promise of the gospel is most seriously and truthfully preached, along with the command to repent and believe, to all who hear."

2. That in that same sense it is said here that it is pleasing to God, that those who are thus called should come to Him, that is, by way of repentance and faith. Unbelief and impenitence are not pleasing to God. He is furiously angry with the impenitence and unbelief of the disobedient. Again here we find no offer, not as much as a semblance of it.

In passing, we wish to remark that someone might well serve a gravamen against the English translation of this article of the confession, at least if, as it appears in our *Psalter*, it has tacitly been adopted by our *Protestant Reformed Churches*. If that is not done, the entire article should be re-examined and after approval should be adopted by us, since we do need an official English translation of the *Three Forms of Unity*.⁶ The translation that we have at present is of the *Reformed (Dutch) Church of America*. This article has been translated in such a way that the meaning is vague and has received an Arminian flavor. Indeed, the Dutch translation, ("That those called should come to Him") is translated as, "That all who are called should comply with the invitation." This is very poor, but also a deceptive translation that can give occasion for the thought that Rev. Keegstra's general offer is included in the calling. This translation not only fails to translate the Dutch, but it also fails to translate the Latin, in which the *Canons* were composed. There we read: *ut vocati ad se veniant* (that the called should come to Him).

3. Finally, not a general offer, but a particular promise is added to the explanation when the article concludes, as we might expect, "He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him and believe in him." Those who come to Him are the ones who repent and believe; they are the ones for whom Christ has merited faith; they are the ones who, out of eternal grace, have received that faith from God; they are therefore the elect. So again in this article you do not have a general offer of grace from God, but the same preaching of a particular promise, that is always in the mind of the authors of the *Canons of Dordt*.

I trust that also Rev. Keegstra will agree that I have given a correct interpretation of the articles of the *Canons of Dordt* which he cited.

If he does not agree, he should write again. But then he should include his own interpretation of these articles.

But now we come to the real issue.

For, finally, Rev. Keegstra quotes an article from the *Canons of Dordt* in which the very word *offer* is used. Here at last it appears as if our Reformed confessions do speak of a general offer. The *Canons* even refer to Christ being offered. We need but read:

It is not the fault of the gospel nor of Christ, offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel, and confers on them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted. The fault lies in themselves, some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the word of life; others though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting

impression on their heart; therefore, their joy arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the word by perplexing cares and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. This our Saviour teaches in the parable of the sower, Matthew 13 (*Canons III/IV, 9*).

We may surely remark, in the first place, that the subject of this article is not: a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation, but rather, that the fault of unbelief is not God's, but that of the disobedient and unbelievers.

Thus if here were taught a general offer (which is not the case!), then, this is not to be found in the main thought of the article as such, but in the mere expression: "*Christ offered therein.*"

Therefore the main and all-decisive question is: What did our fathers intend with this expression? What is the meaning of this: "*offered therein*"?

Was it the intention of the fathers to teach that Christ with all the riches of His spiritual and eternal salvation is simply preached to every one as something that must and can be accepted by every one? If that were the meaning, then this article, or rather this expression would violate all that is taught in the rest of the *Canons*. The fathers most emphatically teach that grace is not something to be offered and accepted, but is the free gift of the efficacious grace of God. The presently commonly accepted meaning, which the word has also in Keegstra's presentation, cannot have that meaning here.

That this cannot be the meaning is suggested already in the expression. No mention is made of an offer of grace, of salvation, or eternal life, but of *Christ being offered*.

What does this mean?

We turn, first of all, to the original Latin, in which this article was composed by the Synod of Dordt.

There we read:

Quod multi per ministerium Evangelii vocati, non veniunt et non convertuntur,
huius culpa non est in Evangelio, nec in Christo per Evangelium oblato.

Thus for our Dutch word "aangeboden," and in the English "offered," you have in the original the word *oblato*. *Oblato* or *oblatus* is a form (past participle) of *offere*. The literal meaning of this word is: to present. My dictionary states that the word means: *bring away, or carry, produce, to show, to make aware, to display, to present, to point out*. One must agree that all these various meanings are entirely different than the present day use of the word "offer." One must also agree that this meaning of the original word makes better sense than the word *offered*. The meaning then is, "*Christ presented, showed, displayed, pointed out by the gospel.*" Moreover, this is a thoroughly scriptural idea. For this is exactly what takes place through the preaching of the Gospel. Christ is never offered in the Gospel in the sense in which Rev. Keegstra desires, as if the individuals were given the ability to accept or to reject Him. However He is presented in the Gospel, pointed out in all the wealth of His rich significance, interpreted from every aspect, pictured before our eyes.

But if that is the meaning of the word *oblatus* as the fathers used it in the *Canons of Dordt*, how did it happen that the word *offer* or *offered* appeared in the article?

My answer is that in its earlier use this word came the closest to the Latin *oblatus*.

I found in the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* of M. DeVries and L.A. TeWinkel in this regard the following:

Formerly "offered" was also said of persons who were introduced by others, to give these persons opportunity to make acquaintance. Now the word "introduced" is used.

We still speak of "presenting" a child for baptism.

For all these reasons, (1) since the first meaning of the word used in the original is certainly: to present, point out, introduce; (2) since the word “offered” was formerly used in that sense; (3) since that meaning of the word fits exactly with the expression “Christ being presented in the gospel”; (4) since this is the thoroughly scriptural presentation of Christ crucified and risen; I am of the opinion that even Keegstra finds in this expression no support for his presentation of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation. “Christ being offered through the gospel” is something quite different than a well-meant, general offer of grace in the sense in which it is presently used.

We conclude that also in this quotation that Rev. Keegstra offers from the *Canons of Dordt* there can be found no semblance of proof for his presentation.

Chapter 8

Still More Proof?

It appears as if Rev. Keegstra was well aware that this harvest of proof, which he had gleaned from the fields of the confessions of our own churches for a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God, looked rather meagre.

At least he tries to enrich his proof from other sources, some of which may be called confessions, others not.

Thus he quotes from a translation of the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, from the *East-Friesian Confession*, from the *Second Swiss Confession*, from the *Bohemian Confession*, and even from the *Saxon Confession* composed by Melanchthon in 1551.

Now it is possible, that with the urge to find some sort of proof to support a certain contention, one will finally resort even to the heritage of those who opposed the Reformed truth. In that case it would not be difficult at all for Rev. Keegstra to find support for his contention from the Remonstrants, and to furnish material to his heart's desire for the teaching of a well-meant, general offer of grace on the part of God. But that kind of proof would naturally create suspicion. For it must also appear to be Reformed. And to cite from well-known Remonstrants to support a Reformed truth is a bit extreme.

Even though Rev. Keegstra does not quote from the writings of well-known Remonstrants, he virtually does that very thing when he quotes from the *Saxon Confession* composed by Philip Melanchthon in 1551.

It is most striking that in all of the quotations Rev. Keegstra furnishes us, not one is found that can honestly be said to teach a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation, except the quotation from the *Saxon Confession*. I agree wholeheartedly that in that one you have a clear-cut teaching of a well-meant offer of God to all mankind. But if found in this one, this is the only one. It is not found in any of the others.

How is this to be explained?

When Melanchthon composed that *Confession* he had already for some time given up the truth of absolute predestination, of man's incapability to do any good, and his inability to contribute anything toward his conversion.

Melanchthon had begun quite well.

He was a friend and follower of Luther also when Luther taught absolute predestination and strongly emphasized the natural depravity of mankind, leaving the person completely passive in his own conversion to God.

But that did not last. That truth was much too strong for Melanchthon, too sharp, too exclusive. The gentle Philip, as far as his nature was concerned, was too irenic; as far as his training and views were concerned he was far too much of a humanist; and as far as his inclinations and aspirations were concerned he was far too much a man of union and cooperation, who was always concerned about seeking peace, even at the cost of the whole truth. Thus it came about that Melanchthon soon changed his views, at least in regard to his ideas and doctrine. The spiritual process that he experienced shows most remarkable similarity with the process of development experienced by the modern, humanistic Reformed people. As to the doctrine of predestination, at first Melanchthon was sound, thereupon he began to emphasize that this doctrine is a deep mystery, so that we cannot make this a basis for our views and teaching, and he ignored it completely. Later he opposed the strong and absolute truth of predestination and preached that God desires that all mankind shall be saved. And as far as the doctrine of total depravity is concerned, also in that regard Melanchthon first took the position that Luther had taken, that the natural man is totally incapable of any good; but afterward he began to see much moral good in the deeds of the unregenerate, and finally allowed him some good, some cooperative ability to work out his own salvation.

Melanchthon became a synergist, and synergism is basically Pelagianism and Remonstrantism.

That is why we repeatedly made reference to the date, the year, in which the *Saxon Confession* was composed by Melanchthon, 1551. Oh, already then an appealing humanism had captured the heart of the gentle doctor. Already then he was no longer a defender of the doctrine of predestination and the complete inability of the individual to contribute anything to his salvation. Already then he had taught for some time that God earnestly desired the salvation of each and every one. And then already for a long time he had not been the only one in the Lutheran Church who had departed in this respect from pure doctrine, as may be evident from the signatures of the theologians who signed the *Saxon Confession*, some of whom later, when the *Formula Concordia* was composed, defended a very liberal position.

Rev. Keegstra was therefore right when he wrote under the quotation from the *Saxon Confession* as a sort of an excuse that: "It cannot be counted among the Reformed Confessions." He also could have written that it is no Confession at all, for it has long since been ignored. But, so Rev. Keegstra explains, he quotes it because Beza also quoted it, seemingly with approval.

Be that as it may, to substantiate his teaching that the Gospel is essentially a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part to every one, Rev. Keegstra finally is forced to quote from an essentially Remonstrant document.

And most striking is the fact that this is actually the only quotation that gives him any support.

This is indeed a proof that his presentation is not adapted to the Reformed, but rather to the Remonstrant churches and circles.

One can produce too many items of proof!

That is what Rev. Keegstra did.

For that matter, the contents of the article should have warned him that it had not been composed by a Reformed writer. We will copy it here once more:

It is most certain that the preaching of penitence should be directed to every one, and accuses every one. Thus the promise is general and offers to each the forgiveness of sins, according to the general statement (Matt. 11): "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Thus also John 3, "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish," and Romans 10, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." The same God is rich toward all that call upon Him. God has concluded them all under sin, in order that He should be gracious to all. Let each and every one include himself in this general promise, and yield not to distrust, but strive to agree with God's Word, obey God's Spirit, and pray to be helped, as He says in Luke 11, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

"All" in the article refers to every one, head for head, as must be evident. Here you have the Remonstrant presentation that God on His part wills that every one shall be saved. Therefore, He offers salvation to every individual. No, even more emphatic, the *promises* of God are for every one! Here you have the actual presentation of a well-meant, general offer of grace from God to every one.

But in full agreement with this the synergistic, semi-Pelagian view is expressed in the last part of this article of the *Saxon Confession*. Every individual must consider himself included in that promise. When God earnestly offers salvation to the sinner, the sinner can oppose it or cooperate; he can accept or reject, pray or cast it from him. As far as he is concerned, the realization of his salvation depends entirely upon that.

Yes, we agree that here Rev. Keegstra has found support for his presentation.

Only, it was not in a Reformed, but in the synergistic *Saxon Confession* composed by Melanchthon in 1551!

However, it becomes evident how little support Rev. Keegstra can find in the truly Reformed Confessions when we once more examine and evaluate his quotation from the *Second Swiss Confession*.

Examine, I say, for Rev. Keegstra's quotation is also here very faulty, and he omits the most important part, even to the extent that he does not copy a full sentence. Had he done so, the meaning would have been completely clear.

He presents the following:

For even as the Word of God that remains the true Word of God, whereby one does not only relate mere words when he preaches, but also offers us the things that are meant and proclaimed by those words, even though the ungodly and the unbelievers hear and understand the words, yet do not enjoy that which is made known, because they do not receive it in a true faith.

Even this faulty quotation should have been sufficient to prove that this article does not teach a general offer of salvation. Obviously the intent of this article is to teach that it does not subtract from nor add to the saving power of God's Word that the unbelieving and ungodly do hear the Word but do not understand. For God does indeed offer to His people the spiritual gifts which are proclaimed through the Word. The word 'offer' (*offere*) expresses as much as "to place spiritually before the eyes," so that the spiritual truths of God's Word are understood and embraced by His own, while the unbelieving only hear and understand mere words.

But this becomes even more evident when we quote the whole article.

I do not have the translation from which Rev. Keegstra quotes. The original reads as follows:

Interim sicut a dignitate vel indignitate ministrorum non asstimamus integritatem sacramentorum, ita neque a conditione sumentium. Agnoscimus enim sacramentorum integritatem ex fide vel veritate meraque bonitate Dei dependere. Sicut enim Verbum Dei manet verum Verbum Dei, quo non tantum verba muda recitantur, um praedicatur, sed simul a Deo offeruntur res verbis significatae, vel adnunciatae, tametsi impii vel increduli verba audient, et intelligent, rebus tamen significatis non perfruuntur; eo quod vera fide non recipient; ita sacramento verbo, signis et rebus significatis, tametsi increduli res oblatas non percipiant. Fit hoc non dantis aut offerantis Dei vitio, sed hominum sine fide illegetimeque accipientium culpa: Quorum incredulitas fidem Dei irritam non facit (Rom. 3:3). (*Conf. Helv. Posterior*, XIX:12).

We translate as follows:

In the meantime, even as we do not assess the integrity of the sacraments by the worthiness or unworthiness of the ministers, we judge them no less by the condition of those who partake of them. For we know that the power (integrity) of the sacrament depends upon faith and upon the veracity and pure goodness of God. For even as the Word of God remains the true Word of God by which in the preaching no mere words are recited, but also the content of the Word that is preached is offered (presented, set before our eyes, *offeruntur*) to us by God, even though the ungodly and unbelieving hear and understand the words, yet do not taste that which is signified by them, because they do not receive it in faith; so also the sacraments, which consist of words and signs and that which is signified, always remain true and proper sacraments, not merely because God Himself offers (presents, sets before us, *Deo offerente*) that which is signified, even though the unbelievers do not perceive the things which are offered. The fault is not in God, who gives or offers, but in the individuals who receive unworthily without faith. Their unbelief does not make the faith of God without effect (Rom. 3:3).

We notice here:

1. That it must be evident that the basic meaning of the word *offere* that is repeatedly used here is "to present." God *presents* in the Word and in the sacraments. But the reference here is to the spiritual content of the Word

and the sacraments which God presents to His people, yet is not even understood by the unbelievers, even though they hear the same words and receive the same signs.

2. That here a comparison is drawn between the working of the Word and the working of the sacraments. This is not evident in the partial quotation of Rev. Keegstra. He breaks off at the point where the article begins to treat the sacraments, and begins again where the article ends about the sacraments. This is naturally of great significance. For if it is true that in the section quoted by Rev. Keegstra the Word should be presented as a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part, then it is equally true that the sacraments are similarly explained. Then the Lord's Supper is not ordained only for the believers, but is an offer to all, well-meant on God's part. Then Rev. Keegstra would do well to introduce open communion, allowing all without distinction to partake.

3. That the comparison between the Word of God in the preaching and the Sacraments is drawn here from the aspect of God's veracity. The unbelief of mankind does not make God's faith of none effect. God is sincere in that which He promises in His Word and in that which He seals and grants in the Sacraments. He grants that which He promises, and to whom He promises. That is the point of comparison in the article. The Word remains the true Word of God, even though the unbelievers see nothing of its actual significance. The Sacraments remain true and upright, even though the unbelievers recognize nothing of that which God offers, grants, and seals therein. Why is that? Because neither the Word of God nor the Sacraments are ever a general and well-meant offer of grace, but the preaching, presenting, and sealing that which God has ordained for the believers, for His own, for the elect.

In as far as you can speak of offer (but then in the sense of promise, presenting with the assurance that it is for them) God never offers His salvation to any but to the believers, that is, to the elect.

That this is indeed the intent of the article quoted can be shown from Article XXIII of the *First Swiss Confession*, which was composed thirty years earlier than the Second and is closely related to this one. Bullinger, who wrote the Second, was also the main composer of the First. There we read:

Coenam vero mysticam, in qua Dominus corpus et sanguinem suum, id est, seipsum *suis* vere ad hoc offerat, ut magis magisque in illis vivat, et illi in ipso.

That is:

Concerning the Holy Supper we confess, that therein the Lord truly "offers" (*offerat*, gives) His body and blood, that is, Himself to *His own*, that He may live more and more in them, and they in Him.

In regard to the other quotations of Rev. Keegstra, we can be brief. In not one of them is taught a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation. The fact of the matter is simply this, that all those quotations do speak of an offer (in the sense of presenting, *offere*) of grace, but never of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God, in the sense that Rev. Keegstra regards it. The context in which the expression often appears shows this all too clearly. Thus in the quotation from the *Westminster Larger Catechism* the following is said:

All the elect and they alone are efficaciously called, even though others can be, yet, often are externally called through the ministry of the Word, and have some common working of the Spirit, which, because they deliberately neglect and despise the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, will never any more truly come to Jesus Christ.

Is there any reference here to a general, well-meant offer of grace in the sense that the Lord should declare to all that He desires their salvation? Of course not! Indeed, the elect alone are efficaciously called. But to others the grace of God in Christ Jesus is offered, presented, (*offere*) in the preaching of the Gospel, in the ministry of the Word. There is no one who denies this. Only the offer, the presenting of the grace of God in Christ is according to its content never general, but particular.

The same is true of the quotation from the *East Friesian Confession*.

Even as the elect cannot boast of their merit before God, even so the ungodly cannot complain, since God is entirely free to choose or to forsake whomever He wills, being obligated to no one outside of His promise to bestow His grace; and has power to deal with His own as He wills, showing no injustice to the ungodly, since they deliberately separate themselves from Him, sin against His command, misuse His gifts and despise the offered grace of the gospel.

It is always the same. Also here is plainly stated that there is no general, well-meant offer of the Gospel. Distinction is even made between promises and offer. God is obligated to no one *outside of His promises*. Thus His own promises do bind Him. The offer does not. And why not? Because the promises of God offered in the Gospel (in the grace which is presented) are particular. God promises in the Gospel, the presentation of which comes to the hearers without distinction, never anything but what is only for the believers, that is, for His elect people. It is true that by the presentation of God's grace, by the promise of eternal life with the command to repent and believe, the ungodly and unbelievers are condemned because exactly in the light of this offer their sin and unbelief are revealed. But God's people are powerfully drawn by this presentation out of darkness into His marvelous light, and they alone.

This is no less clear from the few paragraphs cited by Rev. Keegstra from the *Bohemian Confession*:

No one can obtain or become partakers of the saving and justifying faith by his own efforts or free will, or by the ability of flesh and blood, unless God implants His grace in the heart by the Holy Spirit and by the preaching of the gospel, in whom and whenever He wills, in such a way that one can receive all these benefits offered and assured unto salvation by the external preaching of the divine Word and by the sacraments instituted by Christ. Of which John the Baptist says: "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." Even as our Lord Christ Himself has said: "No one can come unto me, except my Father which hath sent me draw him."

But these keys belong to the special office and ministry, or an observing of the power of Christ and of His Holy Spirit, which is entrusted to the church of Christ and its officebearers, even unto the end of the world, not only (although this is of first importance) in order that they should proclaim the holy gospel through the preaching, that is, in order that they should preach this Word of true comfort and this glad and new tidings of peace in regard to the grace which God offers. But also in order that they should proclaim and point out to the believers and to the unbelievers, to the former the grace and to the latter the wrath of God in general, and publicly to each and every one in particular.

The first paragraph emphatically teaches that the benefits offered in the preaching of the Word and in the sacraments cannot be embraced except only by the grace of God. This surely already points out that also in this confession "offer" (*offere*) is used simply in the sense of presenting, setting forth, showing.

In the second paragraph the word has the same meaning, not in the idea of showing that one is willing to give something to everyone, so that the acceptance still depends upon the willingness of the person to whom it is offered, but in the sense of "presenting." The Gospel is glad new tidings in regard to the grace which God offers. But do not fail to notice, that even as He offers or presents He also grants; namely, to all who believe in the crucified Christ, which faith, however, He only can and must give, and which He only gives to His elect. It is exactly for that reason that the paragraph ends by making a distinction between the preaching to the believers and to the unbelievers, to the former God's grace and favor are proclaimed, to the latter His wrath and sore displeasure.

No matter how you may twist or turn it, you can discover no trace of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation in any of these Reformed confessions, as Rev. Keegstra imagines. That also explains why there is not a single reference in any of these articles to a mystery, to a deep matter, something that we cannot fathom. Keegstra does find it. Before his consciousness there is a conflict. On the one hand, God indeed offers salvation to every one with the sincere purpose and declaration that He wants every one to be saved; on the other hand, He does not will that every one shall be saved. That is the mystery before which Rev. Keegstra sees himself and others placed, and of that he would make an article of faith. But you read nothing of all this

in these articles. Such a conflict absolutely did not exist for those fathers who composed the Confessions. Why not? Simply because they did not allow the Lord God to say two contradictory and mutually exclusive things. That which God offers He grants; that which He presents in the Gospel He carries out; that which He promises He does. And when He, in the general preaching of the Gospel, presents His grace in Christ thus that every one who believes in the crucified Christ shall be saved, then the believers will experience that this is also realized; and the unbelieving and unrepentant will no less experience God's wrath.

The Conclusion of the matter is that Rev. Keegstra has not found that which he sought, has not proved that which he thought to have proved.

He found no support anywhere for the presentation of a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation, except by Melanchthon in 1551.

And at that time Melanchthon was a Remonstrant!

Poor proof!

Chapter 9

His Workmanship

Besides citations from Scripture and from Reformed and other confessions, Rev. Keegstra also offers us a long series of quotations from more or less Reformed writers.

We will not discuss these in detail.

In the first place, it would demand far too much space to analyze and to judge all these citations in order to discover in how far they actually speak of a general offer of grace and salvation. Rev. Keegstra quotes freely and at random without explanation or reference to any context. Naturally we would not be satisfied with that.

In the second place, we are finally not judged by a few quotations from various writers who are known to be Reformed. We are dealing with the Holy Scripture and with our Confessions. It is very well possible that there have been writers in the past who confessed the Reformed truth, yet who thought they should maintain a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God. Not only is this conceivable and possible, but we are well aware that this is true. Such writers are still among us. The articles of Rev. Keegstra are a tangible proof. In the future another writer will probably appeal to these articles of Rev. Keegstra for the same presentation. And if, as we have shown, such a presentation is actually not according to Scripture and the Confession, it will only go to show that a certain false presentation is perpetuated and branded as being Reformed, because others formerly taught this. As much then as we value the opinion of some of these men (by no means all of them) which are quoted by Rev. Keegstra, he will have to admit that they also could err and could find no solution for some problems, for which there nevertheless is a solution. At the last instance the Scriptures alone determine. Even the Confessions must be put to the test by the Scriptures. Blindly confessional we may not be. Much more should the quotations of various writers be judged in the light of the Scriptures!

In the third place, we could place over against the quotations of Rev. Keegstra, other references also of Reformed writers, who positively reject the entire idea of a general offer of grace and salvation in the sense in which Rev. Keegstra speaks of it. Books have even been written on the subject. The result of such interaction would naturally amount to nothing. We will not as much as try.

Finally, the writers cited by Rev. Keegstra often do not teach what the esteemed Editor maintains they teach.

It would take too long for me to show this in detail. But I must point to a few examples. I cannot, for example, possibly understand that for his presentation Rev. Keegstra can appeal to the following quotation from Calvin:

The saying of Christ, that “many are called, but *few* are chosen,” is often very erroneously understood and explained. There will be no doubt as to the meaning if we but maintain that which should be clear and obvious from the quotation cited above, namely, that there is a twofold calling, whereby God at one and the same time calls everyone without exception to Him by the external preaching of His Word, also *those before whom He places the calling as a savor of death unto death, and as a means toward and cause of their greater condemnation*” (*Institutes*, Book III, chapter XXIV, 8. Italics added.)

According to Rev. Keegstra’s presentation the latter should read: “To whom, as well as to others. He presents the calling, well-meant toward their salvation.” As it stands, the quotation of Calvin condemns the presentation of Rev. Keegstra. Calvin simply teaches that the Gospel must be preached by us without discrimination, but that it is God’s purpose to have it preached to some unto a heavier condemnation.

Where is the general offer to all?

Even more emphatically Rev. Keegstra is directly opposed by Calvin in the following quotation. (We quote only in part, giving the essence of it [*De Wachter*, May 7]):

If this is the character and nature of the same, let us now see if these two elements contradict each other, namely, that it is said of God that He ordained from eternity whom He would embrace with His love and against whom He would pour out His wrath and that without distinction he preaches and presents His salvation to all. I say that indeed they very well agree. For when He makes His promises in that manner He desires to show nothing else but that His mercy is open and ready for all those who but desire and request it. Which no others can do but those whom He enlightens. And He enlightens those whom he has ordained and appointed for salvation.

It is evident that this quotation has nothing in common with the presentation of Rev. Keegstra. Rev. Keegstra has an insoluble problem, as he himself assures us from time to time. How can election be harmonized with a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God? Calvin has no problem. He says of the preaching of the Word to all and of election: "I say, indeed they very well agree."

Whence this difference?

Rev. Keegstra is of the opinion that the preaching of the Word is a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation; Calvin teaches that the preaching according to its content can never be anything different than a preaching of salvation to the elect.

Calvin condemns Keegstra, and that with a quotation which the latter himself produced! Let the reader judge.

Rev. Keegstra takes a very short quotation from *Calvin's Calvinism*. And although the esteemed writer does not inform us as to where we can find this reference in this volume we had no difficulty finding it because just recently we read through the entire book. The quotation can be found on page 100. Only it is too bad that the quotation as Keegstra offers it does not accurately reproduce Calvin's thought, partially because it is torn out of its context, and partially because Rev. Keegstra did not translate quite accurately. The esteemed editor offers the following:

Wherefore God is said to take pleasure in and to will this eternal life, even as He takes pleasure in the conversion; and He has pleasure in the latter, because He invites every one thereto in His Word.

The following is what you find:

Wherefore God is said to take as much pleasure in and to will this eternal life, as to take pleasure in conversion: and He takes pleasure in the latter, because he invites every one thereto in His Word. Now all this is in complete harmony with His hidden and eternal counsel, in which He determined to convert no one but His own elect. Thus no one but an elect ever turns himself from his evil way.

Calvin gives this as an explanation of Ezekiel 18:23.

But this does change matters, does it not? You have here once again the same phenomenon: Rev. Keegstra has an insoluble problem: Calvin finds complete harmony between preaching and election. Keegstra has a general offer (and lets Calvin say: God has *as much* pleasure in the eternal life of all men as He has pleasure in their repentance). Calvin has no such general, well-meant offer, but reasons: a) God has *as much* pleasure in eternal life as He has in repentance; b) However He converts only the elect. c) Therefore; He has pleasure in the eternal life of only His elect!

Let the readers themselves look it up and check the entire context. They will agree that the quotation as Rev. Keegstra gives it is deceptive. The entire context opposes the presentation of Rev. Keegstra.

And thus we could point to much more in the citations of Rev. Keegstra from the various Reformed writers.

But enough.

Rather than to busy ourselves with that, we wish to conclude this last chapter by emphasizing once more the Reformed line of faith and confession in his regard.

We have briefly expressed this line in the very title: *Grace is no offer, but a power of God unto salvation.*

Salvation may be called an offer in the former sense of *offere*, presenting. For in the Gospel Christ is offered, presented, pictured before our eyes. But it may not be called an offer in the sense that through the preaching of the Word God earnestly intends and seeks the salvation of all who hear it, that He seriously promises salvation to all, to each and every one head for head. Such preaching is Arminian, not according to the Scriptures, not Reformed. No, there is still more. Salvation may not be called an offer in the accepted sense of the word, as if *God should merely offer salvation* in the expectation *that the individual will accept it*. He who preaches in that manner does not proclaim the truth, but the lie. In the accepted sense of the word, grace is no way an offer. It is a power of God unto salvation.

The line of Scripture, the only Reformed line runs as follows:

God has eternally chosen His own and reprobated the others. With electing love, sovereign and eternally independent, with a love that is not occasioned by the objects, nor by anything that He foresaw in these objects. With a love that has its cause in God Himself He has fore-ordained His own unto the eternal and the most glorious blessedness of His everlasting covenant. It is the love of His good pleasure. In the same manner with a sovereign hatred, with a hatred that is not caused by its objects, nor by anything in those objects, but a hatred that is divinely caused. He ordained the reprobate to eternal destruction. It is the hatred of God's good pleasure.⁷ I know, much more can be said about this. Election and reprobation are not arbitrarily independent from each other. Reprobation also serves election. But that does not change the fact that both election and reprobation are equally sovereign and eternal, unchangeable and irresistible. You may be inclined toward the supra presentation or to the infra, but you must maintain this if you wish to remain scripturally Reformed.

“(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:11-13).

In the second place, it must remain established, that atonement is absolutely particular. Christ died only for His own, not for the others. This is not only taught abundantly in the Holy Scripture and confessed in our Confessions, but this is so essential that you cannot make the atonement general without denying its very essence. Indeed, the atonement is based on satisfaction. If Christ has made satisfaction for everyone, then they are all justified. Justification does not depend upon our faith, but upon the satisfaction of Christ. If that were the case, everyone would certainly be saved. But everyone is not saved. That is the simple fact. Thus one of two things is true, either Christ has not brought atonement for everyone, but only for the elect; or He did intend to atone for all, but then that atonement was no satisfaction, that is, the very essence of the atonement is denied. Therefore it must be established that atonement is particular, only for the elect. That includes, as our *Canons of Dordt* plainly teach, that Christ has merited all the saving gifts of the Spirit, also faith, only for the elect, for no one else. Therefore there are no saving gifts for the reprobate. If there *are none*, how can God the Lord offer them?

In the third place, it must remain established that our becoming partakers of these saving gifts, does not depend upon us, nor upon any of our deeds, but *only* upon the almighty grace applied by the Holy Spirit. Grace is not an offer, but a power of God. For no one can come to Him except the Father draw him. We are by nature children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins. We lie in the midst of death, are enemies of God, devise nothing but enmity against God and His Christ, and are totally incapable of any good, and inclined to all evil. So that if then nothing more happens but that the grace is preached to us, with the demand to repent and to believe, that through the Gospel Christ is offered (presented) to us, then the only possible result can be that we oppose that Christ and all the riches of His salvation, rise up against Him with our whole being, and that thereby it becomes fully evident how completely lost and guilty we are, so that our just condemnation becomes the heavier. This exposure of their just condemnation is *God's purpose in the preaching to the reprobate*. But for the elect Christ has merited the saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, and to them He gives them. He does this through the Spirit, which He has poured into the church. He does this, not by offering or

advising, but by the power of almighty grace. And He does this by way of regeneration (or almighty calling), calling, faith and conversion, justification and sanctification, preservation, and finally glorification. In all this there is nothing of us. From regeneration to the final glorification the whole application of this salvation is a work of God. The elect sinner does believe and repent, but never in any other way than as fruit of the almighty operation of God's grace. The elect sinner does come to Christ, but always only as the result of the drawing of the Father.

This does take place through the means of the Word, which is brought through the preaching to the entire audience. But also that Word, as we have often seen more, is not a general offer of grace and salvation on the part of God to everyone, but the preaching of salvation to all those who believe and repent; once more, that is, to the elect. No, we heartily agree that no one has the right to preach only to the elect. Moreover this would naturally also be impossible. But that does not alter the fact that the Lord in the preaching of the Gospel promises absolutely nothing except to those who believe and repent. And since He Himself grants this faith and this conversion only to the elect, God the Lord is not made a liar when He seriously causes to be proclaimed for all to hear: "Whosoever believes in the Son shall not perish, but have eternal life." Just because the promises of God direct themselves to those *who believe and repent*, and not in the *abstract* to the elect, in other words, because the way of salvation is a spiritual-ethical way, the same preaching can also justly increase the judgment of the reprobate, since exactly in that way the reprobate are revealed as being ungodly, who devise only enmity against God and refuse to walk in the way of faith and repentance. God the Lord seals the preaching of the Word with an almighty operation of grace according to the love of His good pleasure, an operation whereby He gives that which He demands, and fulfills His promises to the elect. But the preaching is accompanied no less by a blinding and hardening operation of God's wrath, according to the hatred of His good pleasure over the reprobate, whereby it becomes evident that they cannot and will not do what God demands, and their condemnation becomes the heavier.

That is the line.

And that is, we confess before God and before all the world according to our innermost conviction, the doctrine of the Holy Scripture which deprives everyone of all boasting and lets God be God. That is the line of the Reformed truth.

Does Rev. Keegstra have the heart to deny this?

I know that he does not have the heart. As a Reformed minister he will be compelled to agree wholeheartedly with me.

But if this is an established truth among us, why cannot we embrace that truth wholeheartedly? Why must there always be a meddling with the pure Reformed truth? Why must another line be drawn alongside this scripturally Reformed line of truth that runs in exactly the opposite direction? Why must white again become black or black white?

Because Scripture does that? We have plainly shown that Scripture does nothing of the kind. Scripture has an aversion to all "double tracks."

Then why is that?

Surely neither does Rev. Keegstra believe that one more sinner is brought to God by his antics or by spreading out his hands with ever such a well-meant plea, or even by making the Gospel such an appealing general offer. God saves His elect, not one more and not one less. By our preaching the number is not increased nor decreased. Why then should there be such a meddling with the Gospel?

By this human meddling the Reformed truth is indeed always and again undermined. First one tells himself and others that the preaching is a general and well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God to everyone. When that is well drilled into people, these errorists go a step farther and declare that this preaching of the Gospel is grace for all who hear it. That is what the Synod did in 1924. And so they finally are back in the channel of the Remonstrants.

Then they have the audacity to cast out Reformed preachers who refuse to sail along in their Arminian ship.

That is the history.

Rev. Keegstra knows that this is the history. I hardly dare doubt but that Rev. Keegstra also realizes that Point I of 1924 is not Reformed. Otherwise he would for some time already have answered the question: What kind of grace do the reprobate receive from God in the preaching of the Gospel? He also knows that it is exactly for that reason that we were cast out of the church, because we refused to subscribe to the unreformed *Three Points*, nor would we promise to remain silent about them. Oh, I know very well that these men are beginning to be ashamed of this history. In an ever-increasing measure they begin to tell themselves that we left the church! Let it never be forgotten that this was not the case. We fought with might and main to prevent them from casting us out.

So be it.

But our protest against the treatment we received and against the violation of the truth will be heard as long as the Lord gives us strength.

Therefore these articles against the writings of Rev. Keegstra.

You may want to hear or may not want to hear, you may want to read these articles or with contempt throw them in the waste basket, but you are responsible, all of you who have the opportunity to read and to think into them.

The matter is serious.

It concerns the pure truth of the Lord our God, His cause and His honor.

Grace is no offer, but is the power of God unto salvation.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Chapter 10

Review in the *Gereformeerde Kerkbode* (*Reformed Church Messenger*)

Review in the *Gereformeerde Kerkbode (Reformed Church Messenger)* of Rotterdam by Dr. A. Kuyper, Jr., i.e., Review of *Een Kracht Gods Tot Zaligheid, (A Power of God unto Salvation)* by Rev. H. Hoeksema.

Under the heading “General Offer” in the *Gereformeerde Kerkbode* of Rotterdam, Netherlands, Dr. A. Kuyper gives a judgment of our brochure *Een Kracht Gods tot Zaligheid, (A Power of God unto Salvation)*.

We are very pleased that the esteemed and learned writer lends himself to give his opinion of our work and views. We have eagerly awaited the day when men of prominence and position in the Netherlands would let themselves be heard in regard to the issues that occupy our attention. The esteemed writer of the aforementioned review of our brochure will remember that already some time ago we invited him to defend his esteemed father in connection with the doctrine of common grace. To this very day we have received no answer. This gives us the more reason to be pleased that he now writes a review in the *Gereformeerde Kerkbode*. We are not afraid of criticism. We do not intend to introduce heresy. We love the Reformed truth and strive to maintain it with all our power. We are also willing to abandon our view, in case someone convinces us of error. Therefore we fear nothing worse than the miserable tactics of a silent treatment, which is common in this country. We express our sincere appreciation for the attempt being made by Dr. A. Kuyper in the *Gereformeerde Kerkbode* of Rotterdam to maintain over against us a certain view of a general offer.

We shall, according to our practice in the *Standard Bearer*, pass on completely the articles being written by Dr. A. Kuyper, Jr. on this subject. Then everyone can judge. We hasten to offer our readers the first article. We quote the entire article.

GENERAL OFFER (I)

In the churches in America a struggle is being carried on concerning the question whether there is a “general offer” of grace in the preaching. The one says that this is the requirement of scriptural gospel preaching, the other that this is in conflict with the Reformed Confessions.

The issue concentrates in two names. Rev. Keegstra in *De Wachter (The Watchman)* defends the sentiment of those who plead for the general offer. Rev. Hoeksema in the *Standard Bearer* sets himself up as an opponent to this idea. The latter has published his articles concerning this matter in the form of a brochure entitled: *A Power of God unto Salvation, or, Grace No Offer*. The articles broadened out to a document of 142 pages.

The trend of thought of Rev. Hoeksema comes briefly down to this, that the preacher may never present a general offer of salvation in the preaching.

1. Because there is an eternal election, and God has determined in His counsel to grant His salvation only and exclusively to the elect, and to no others. An offer is therefore, as he sees it, not upright and honest;
2. because if the preacher offers more than he actually has or can give, he is a ‘bluffer’;
3. because the preacher must speak in the name of his Sender, and because of the decree of election and reprobation God knows no well-meant offer of grace to all mankind; and
4. because nothing may be offered to one who is absolutely in no position to accept that which is offered.

It is very evident that Rev. Hoeksema absolutely maintains the position of election and reprobation, and reasoning from that aspect, wants no part of a

general offer of grace. There is no mandate from the Sender for such as offer. Such an offer is not well-meant, it is basically contrary to the truth. Therefore he does not hesitate now and then to say that any preaching in which a general offer of grace is presented is not Reformed but Pelagian, Remonstrant.

We cannot say that we find the reasoning of Rev. Hoeksema to be logical; it appears to us to be more *rationalistic*. He builds a rationalistic system upon a Reformed foundation. He writes on page 11,

Not only has He decided to grant salvation only to some. He has also decided to grant no salvation to others. Therefore there is in God a definite will to give no grace to some. Thereby the first essential element of a general offer is already excluded, and at once made impossible. You cannot be Reformed and speak of a general offer on the part of God.

And on page 13 Rev. Hoeksema writes:

In one word, it is Reformed to say, that there is no one among mankind, who possesses even the slightest ability in himself whereby he should be able to accept that which is offered. But by this presentation the possibility of an offer absolutely falls away. For what sense does it make to speak of an offer to those of whom we are sure that they cannot accept that which is offered?

We believe that hereby we have rendered sufficiently clearly the sentiment of Rev. Hoeksema. We add here for the sake of clarity that naturally Rev. Hoeksema most certainly desires *that the preaching of the gospel will be brought to all mankind*, and that they shall be placed before the command to repent and believe. But that still includes no offer of grace. We know that a twofold power proceeds from the faithful preaching, a power of life unto life, and a power of death unto death. It is for that reason that he chose as the title of his manuscript: *A Power of God unto Salvation, or, Grace No Offer*.

Seemingly this reasoning of Rev. Hoeksema is logical. But this is nothing more than sham. The Germans would call this *consequens-macherei*.

A general offer of grace is naturally something entirely different from an offer of general grace. One must clearly and sharply distinguish between the two. Not one Reformed person wants any part of a general grace for every individual. He has fought too hard against Pelagius, Arminius and Episcopius to want that. The doctrine of eternal and sovereign election is the very heart of the Reformed church, the characteristic element in the Reformed religion.

The preacher who presents the offer of *general grace* in his sermon would immediately be deposed by his consistory and classis.

But a *general offer* of grace that is particular is something quite different. This is obedience to the command of the Lord: Preach the gospel to *every* creature, go forth, teaching *all* nations, baptizing them. It is self-evident that this grace is not offered unconditionally, but conditionally, namely, upon the condition of faith and repentance.

To preach the general offer of grace in that manner upon condition or demand of faith and repentance complies with the demand of Lord's Day XXXI of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: "When according to the command of Christ, it is declared and testified to *all and every* believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits."

Undoubtedly there is an eternal election. But the preacher does not know who the elect are. That belongs to the hidden things that are for the Lord our God. Therefore the preacher must present the general offer of grace upon the condition of faith and repentance.

Thus far Dr. A. Kuyper in his first article.

Naturally we expect more and will therefore be brief with our remarks and limit ourselves strictly to that which the esteemed reviewer writes in this article.

First of all, then, we want to state that we heartily agree with much that Dr. Kuyper writes, especially in the last part of this article.

Thus, we are grateful for the statement: *Not one Reformed person wants to know of a general grace for every individual.*

We do not want to read too much into this statement, for we understand all too well that Dr. Kuyper does maintain the idea of a common grace in the sense of common favor. We want merely to apply this to our subject. Then the esteemed writer, who reviews our brochure, must certainly bear in mind that those in America in the Christian Reformed churches since 1924 have indeed taken the official stand that the so-called general offer of grace is indeed grace, not only for the elect, but also for humanity in general, for all who hear the Word, head for head and soul for soul.

This is already very evident from the first point of the three adopted and branded as Reformed by the Synod of 1924. Our esteemed reviewer on the other side of the ocean can find this point literally copied in my brochure, and thus can judge himself.

This is no less evident from the explanation which the Synod of 1926 has given in answer to the protests that had been brought against point 1. In the *Acts* of that Synod (see pp. 116, 117) you can repeatedly read that there is a certain grace of God in the preaching of the gospel which He shows to each and every individual who hears the merciful invitation of the gospel.

This is no less the teaching of Prof. Berkhof in his *De Drie Punten in alle Deelen Gereformeerd (The Three Points Reformed in Every Detail)*. (see page 21ff.)

The professor writes this with a view to those who “lend no ear whatever to that invitation”:

That God calls the wicked to repentance is presented in the Holy Scripture as proof for his pleasure in their salvation.

After the professor, as proof for this assertion, has pointed to the well-known texts in Ezekiel, which declare that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, he adds:

These passages tell us clearly as words are able, that God has no desire in the death of sinners (take note that he does not say: “of elect sinners,” but “of sinners,” entirely in general); and that tender call that we hear testifies of His great love for sinners and His pleasure in saving the wicked.

A little later the professor writes, with a view to those same persons who do not accept the invitation of the gospel, appealing again to Ezekiel 33:11:

Are those not words of tender mercy, in which a Father pleads with his wandering children to return to the paternal home and to father’s heart?

Be sure to notice that the professor desires emphatically that we understand that the wicked and reprobate, and not merely the elect, are included with these wandering children who in such great love are begged to return to Father’s heart.⁸

The professor teaches, as is reflected in his emphatic expressions, that he means that God is filled with a great love for all mankind as His wandering children, that He earnestly seeks the salvation, not only of the elect, but of all mankind in general. He contends that God's Word teaches that God is prompted by a great love for sinners, not only for the elect, but also for all mankind in general.

Let him deny, if he has the courage, that this is indeed his view.

It is of no advantage to him that in the first part of his aforementioned brochure he also offers a Reformed view of the preaching of the gospel, and there gives the impression that we actually intend to preach the gospel only to the elect. We are not opposing his Reformed introduction to this subject.

That which we quoted above also flowed from his pen, and that is all that he offers in the entire brochure in defense of the First Point.

Therefore Dr. Kuyper must thoroughly understand that the issue is not the general preaching of a particular gospel. We have no objection to Lord's Day XXXI. We do not object to proclaiming to an entire audience that whosoever believes in the crucified Christ will be saved.

In our controversy the issue is not whether the *preacher* must offer something. The issue is whether he may preach, *that God in His great love and passion for sinners seeks their salvation, not only of the elect, but of all mankind in general.*

The latter is the teaching of the First Point.

That is the obvious teaching of Prof. Berkhof, as anyone who can read the Dutch will have to agree.

And that is what is understood by the general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God. By this is understood that the preacher must proclaim that God causes the gospel to be preached well-meaningly, that is, with a passion for sinners, with the purpose to save them, not only the elect, but all who hear the Word.

That is also the intention of Rev. Keegstra. That is evident enough from the brochure.

I call that Arminian.

Anyone who preaches that departs from the Scriptures, from the Reformed confession; he bungles the truth.

This Arminian fire burns everywhere here in the so-called Reformed churches.

You see that it is for that reason that I am pleased with the statement of Dr. Kuyper that no Reformed person will speak of a common grace for everyone. I understand that he applies this to the preaching of the Word.

I am also pleased that the esteemed reviewer clearly presents the view that Reformed preaching consists of *the general proclamation of a particular gospel.*

I also desire that.

In this connection Kuyper and I may disagree on the meaning of the word *offer*. I may consider it a bit dangerous to speak of an offer *on condition* of faith. I maintain that grace is absolutely no offer and knows no conditions, but is given by God, including faith and repentance. But I now trust that Dr. Kuyper does not mean this in the Pelagian sense, I do not want to quarrel about words.

He wants a general proclamation of the particular grace of God in Christ Jesus.

But he does not want a proclamation in which the preacher declares that God is filled with passion for sinners, not only for the elect but for mankind in general.

Thereby Berkhof, Keegstra, Kuiper, and many others are condemned by Dr. A. Kuyper of the Netherlands.

It will also have become evident to the esteemed Reviewer that mistakenly he did not do justice to my presentation.

The question is not, whether a preacher may offer a particular gospel to an entire audience.

But the question is: *whether God on His part offers salvation to all mankind, and not only to the elect, well-meaningly, that is, with the intent to save them and because of His great passion for sinners.*

And whether a Reformed preacher may proclaim this.

One more remark.

The esteemed writer expresses as his opinion that my reasoning appears to be logical, but in reality is illogical.

This accusation as such does not disturb me very much, although naturally I readily agree that reasoning must remain logical.

But it does interest me that, if somewhere I have made myself guilty of an error in logic, I be straightened out in that regard, so that I can correct it. In other words, Dr. Kuyper should have brought the error in my logic out into the open. That he did not do. And therefore, let him take no offense: I do not accept it. I accept absolutely nothing from any persons purely upon their authority. Therefore Dr. Kuyper will be compelled to point out my error. Otherwise I maintain that my entire reasoning is completely logical and no *consequenze-macherei*.

The accusation of rationalism is more serious. Rationalism wants to exalt reason above the Scriptures. May the Lord protect me from that!

But again Dr. Kuyper offers no proof. He in no way shows how I in my brochure attack the Holy Scriptures or would want to exalt my human reasoning above its authority. It is probably not asking too much that I expect that Dr. Kuyper will still prove this, or at least withdraw this last accusation.

Under the following title, Dr. A. Kuyper continues to write as follows:

GENERAL OFFER (II)

Proceeding from the truth that there is election and reprobation, Rev. Hoeksema wants no general offer. He considers such preaching unbiblical and in conflict with the Reformed Confessions.

In this article we wish to put those two thoughts to a closer test. A Reformed man does not doubt for a moment the truth of election and reprobation which truth is for him an established fact. There is therefore no common grace; on the contrary, grace is particular. But this does not deny the fact that there is a general offer of grace.

In the *Canons of Dordt*, II, Article 5 we read:

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

Clear language is spoken here. A twofold fact is expressed: first that the promise of the gospel must be preached, and second, that this promise must be declared

and published *to all nations and to all persons without distinction*. Here you have the general offer, which is conditional, for there is not only an offer of the promise of the gospel but also a command to repent and to believe.

Rev. Hoeksema thinks that he is reasoning very logically by maintaining that Christ has made satisfaction, not for all mankind, but only for the elect, and that he therefore may not be offered to all mankind, that such an offer is not sincere, cannot be done honestly.

Article 6 of the same *Canons* declares:

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

We are of the opinion that this expression is very clear. It is not proper to say that Christ did not make satisfaction for all mankind, and therefore He may not and cannot be offered to all. Those who perish cannot complain about the insufficiency of Christ's sacrifice; it is their own fault.

It appears to us that the main error of Rev. Hoeksema is that he reasons too much out of the hidden counsel of God, and that it would be better if he would consider that the *revealed* things are for us. Certainly and beyond a doubt, there is an eternal election, but we do not know who the elect are; therefore we cast upon all waters, we preach the gospel to all creatures, offer to all grace unto salvation upon condition of faith and repentance.

In his hyper-logical reasoning Rev. Hoeksema says over and over that such an offer of grace is not honest, cannot be made in earnest, for grace applies only and exclusively to the elect. You may not offer it if according to the decree it is impossible to be given or received. Rev. Hoeksema may not say that it is in conflict with the Reformed teaching to make such an offer seriously. The Reformed churches have plainly declared that such a general offer is indeed sincere.

Again we refer to the *Canons of Dordt* III/IV, Article 8, where we read:

As many as are called by the gospel are *unfeignedly called*. For God *earnestly* and truly declared in his Word, what is acceptable to him, namely, that all who are called, should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.

Salvation is therefore not offered merely to the elect; it is offered *to all without distinction*, with the command to come to faith and repentance. If any one does not comply, he rejects the offered salvation, and it is his own fault that he is lost. But God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but rather, that he repents and lives. The offer of God is earnestly meant. The fault of unbelief lies with the person. The reasoning of Rev. Hoeksema leads to taking away the guilt of him who rejects the offer of the gospel. Here the danger of Antinomianism threatens.

Finally, Rev. Hoeksema calls that general offer of grace not only unreformed but also *unscriptural*. We would counsel him to read with close attention "Ho, *every one* that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." We ask, is that not a general offer?

And when our Savior says: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give thee rest,” then we repeat the question, Is this not a general offer? Yes, the offer is general, but the fulfillment is only to the advantage of those who come to buy wine and milk, those who come to the Savior with their weariness and burden.

Thus far Dr. Kuyper.

When I read this article I was deeply disappointed. In the meantime I already have the third article in my possession, that third article is the concluding article. Now that the conclusion of Kuyper’s discussion of my brochure has reached me and I have read all of it, I am even more disappointed.

Honestly, I am sorry that I began to place these articles in the *Standard Bearer* and to answer them. In one word, they are not worth it.

When I began I was pleased that finally we would actually discuss the issue. Therefore I immediately began to publish the articles of the learned writer from the other side of the ocean and to answer them.

I had a fairly high expectation of them. And I also had some good reasons for that. The writer is a doctor in theology, and it may therefore be expected of him that he has the ability to judge what is truth and to define it, and in case of error, to oppose it and to invalidate wrong reasoning.

That is also exactly what I had expected from Dr. Kuyper, maybe more so because I have respect, as far as power and ability is concerned, for the name of Kuyper.

I had desired nothing more than that Dr. Kuyper had actually worked himself into the contents of my brochure, had analyzed it, and wherever the reasoning was faulty would have pointed out the error, had placed proof over against proof, and if my reasoning is actually a departure from the truth, would clearly have pointed this out. Then Kuyper would have risen tremendously in my estimation.

But now we receive nothing of all that.

The argumentation of Dr. Kuyper is so poor that I honestly do not know what to do with it; I am undecided, not knowing whether I should answer him or not.

I asked myself, how is it possible that Dr. Kuyper writes in that manner?

At first I thought: he had not read my brochure, but had only hastily paged through it. But I soon put aside that thought. That would be dishonest. I do not want to be suspicious or accuse Dr. Kuyper of that.

Then the thought occurred to me that Dr. Kuyper surely thinks that America is a land full of overgrown children. Especially the last part of his second article leaves us with that impression when he advises us to read attentively a few texts! But also this though I brushed aside, for if I might assume, as I certainly may and also do, that Dr. Kuyper has read my brochure, then he can no longer actually think that the matter is settled with a few texts.

I have tried to think that Dr. Kuyper has seriously considered the matter, that he has not made light of it. But neither can I accept that, not from the aspect of Dr. Kuyper’s knowledge and position, nor when I consider the seriousness of the subject matter.

There remains but one possibility: the articles of Dr. Kuyper offer to us the very best that can be offered in defense of a so-called general offer of grace. At least they offer to us the best that Dr. Kuyper can give us.

Therefore they have strengthened me in the conviction that, not on the basis of the Reformed confessions, nor on the basis of Scripture, can any proof be found for a general offer of grace and salvation, well-meant on the part of God for all those who hear the gospel.

We still add the following observations.

First, in his articles Dr. Kuyper does not render correctly my presentation. Time and time again he leaves the impression that I oppose the idea of a general proclamation of a particular gospel. That is not honest of Dr. Kuyper. He has abundant reason to know better. In fact, we wrote in our brochure:

In other words, he (the preacher), knows that it is the will of the Lord that the gospel is not brought only to the elect, but also to the reprobate. All anxious questions whether all are elect is at once completely expelled. A minister who would want to preach only to the elect does not understand the will of his Sender, cannot possibly carry out his mission.

Again, we wrote:

By no means does our difference deal with the question whether, according to the will of God, the gospel must be preached to everyone in our audience, reprobate as well as elect. On this we both agree. But our difference deals with the question as to what the actual character of the preaching is, what must be its content, and what does God intend with this preaching both in regard to the elect and the reprobate. Our difference with Dr. Keegstra comes down to this: he maintains and we deny that the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God to all mankind. And our difference with the official declaration of the Christian Reformed Church is that they teach and we deny that this preaching of the gospel is *grace* for all mankind.

In another place we wrote:

Take note, the question is not whether the gospel must be preached by the minister to all who are in his audience without distinction. Every Reformed person believes that. No, but the question is whether the minister may say to his audience: "God well-meaningly offers His salvation to each one of you, even head for head and soul for soul." That is the question. Also Rev. Keegstra will not be able to interpret *well-meant* otherwise than *with the purpose to save*.

I could cite much more to show that Dr. Kuyper, after having read my brochure, had no reason any more to misunderstand me. Yet throughout he leaves the impression that I oppose the presentation of a general preaching of a particular gospel. He does that when he quotes the *Canons of Dordt* II, 5, to oppose me. He writes: "Clear language is spoken here. A twofold fact is expressed: first, that the promise of the gospel must be preached and second, that this promise must be declared and published to *all nations and to all persons without distinction*." We would like very much to ask Dr. Kuyper where he ever read anything from my hand in which I deny this. He can also find my explanation of this same article. He also read it. We ask him: What is your objection?

Where has Dr. Kuyper read from my hand the following:

Rev, Hoeksema imagines that he is arguing entirely logically when he maintains that Christ did not make satisfaction for all mankind, but only for the elect, and that for that reason Christ may not be offered (preached, presented, *offere*, HH), to all mankind, that such an offer is not sincere, cannot be honestly made.

I would never write that Dr. Kuyper.

And I never did write that.

What I continually have written is, *that God on His part does not offer salvation well-meant to all mankind without distinction, that is, with the purpose to save them all.*

We do not believe that this wrong presentation, which is not an honest evaluation of me, was given by Dr. Kuyper intentionally. Therefore I have enough confidence in him to believe that he will correct this error.

Second, Yet Dr. Kuyper does not maintain his own presentation. He wrote that he wanted a general offer of a particular gospel. His first article left the impression that he was averse to a general preaching of a general gospel. As to its content, so he said, the gospel must remain particular, that is, it must never be proclaimed that God desires to save all mankind. That is soundly Reformed. In that respect we fully agreed with him, as we wrote in our first answer.

But yet he does not maintain that.

Some of the expressions in his first writing already caused us to fear that he would wander from the line of his own presentation and finally end up with a general gospel. We already received a less favorable impression from the words: "It is indeed self-evident that this grace is not offered unconditionally but conditionally, namely, upon condition of faith and repentance." Indeed if a Reformed individual desires to speak accurately, he does not suggest conditions for the reception of *grace*. There are no conditions for the grace of God. Also faith is no condition. That also belongs to the grace that God (does not offer but) gives to us. Our impression was supported when in citing Lord's Day XXXI Dr. Kuyper underscored the word *all* and *every one*. But the article states; "When according to the command of Christ, it is declared and testified to every *believer*" etc. It is not discussing all and every one in general, but *only* the believers, and *all of them*.

But Kuyper is even more emphatic in this article.

We have already pointed to the fact that Dr. Kuyper leaves somewhat the impression that he writes to overgrown children when he gives the advice to read carefully a few texts. But from the manner in which Dr. Kuyper underscores the texts that he quotes it is evident that he still makes the contents of the gospel general. Indeed he would read these texts in this manner. "O, *all*, ye that thirst, come to the water." And: "Come unto Me, *all*, who labor and are heavy laden."

He wanted to lay the emphasis on the *all*, and not on the limitation that is added: those who thirst, labor, and are heavy laden. And from this *all* he seeks to draw a basis for the doctrine of a general offer.

This *all* certainly affects the content of the gospel that must be brought.

It makes a big difference whether I say: Preach the gospel to all mankind, or that I say: Preach the gospel to *all mankind*, that Christ will give rest to you *all*, that He well-meaningly calls all to the rest.

According to his emphasis in these texts the latter is what Kuyper desires.

Now this is certainly not the meaning of these texts. It makes a big difference whether I say: Come *all ye*, or that I say, Come *all ye that thirst, that labor, and are heavy laden*.

But in any case, in his attempt to defend a general offer, Dr. Kuyper departs from the line that he himself first drew.

He wanted a general preaching of a particular gospel. He ends up with the preaching of a general gospel.

Third, Dr. Kuyper is not honest in his presentation of my reasoning. Time and again he leaves the impression that all my reasoning is an attempt to make a logical conclusion from the doctrine of election and reprobation. I would never believe in a general offer because I wanted to maintain the truth of election and reprobation. He says that I busy myself too much with hidden things and he advises me to occupy myself more with the revealed things.

Nor do I agree with this.

I do not in any way occupy myself with hidden things. Dr. Kuyper cannot mention one such hidden thing wherewith I would want to busy myself. I do not even see how this would be possible.

Certainly, I do busy myself very much with sovereign election. But I do that according to the example of the Scriptures, which speak throughout of this election and reprobation. Surely Dr. Kuyper would not want to call the truth of election and reprobation a hidden thing? Well then, neither must he say that I occupy myself with hidden things. To a certain degree it is for us a hidden matter as to *who* are elect and *who* are reprobate.

But that is exactly a matter with which I never busy myself. From my standpoint that is not at all necessary. I preach the gospel to my entire audience, according to the Word of God, and as long as I do that, (preaching it according to the Word of God), I do not come in conflict with the doctrine of election and reprobation.

That a Reformed person can preach a particular gospel in general is perfectly clear to me. There is no mystery or contradiction involved in that. The mystery arises when someone wants to bring a general gospel (according to its content) in harmony with the truth of election. That is impossible. But I never occupy myself with hidden things. I do not visit fortune tellers, and I certainly do not take note of the barking of dogs or the cry of birds.

But let that be as it may, it is still not true that I merely reason about election and reprobation entirely in the abstract, and that therefore my presentation should be nothing more than a wrong conclusion, seemingly logical, even hyper-logical, but basically rationalistic.

The following line of reasoning appears in my brochure:

First of all, I show that a general offer of grace, if one does not play with words but means exactly what he says, in no way can be harmonized with the Reformed truth, not only not with the doctrine of election, but also not with that of particular redemption and the total depravity of the natural man.

Thereupon I showed that Rev. Keegstra, whom I mainly oppose in my brochure, runs completely amock with his reasoning.

In the third place, I prove that Calvin, who is quoted by Keegstra, wants no part of such a general offer. I give various citations to show this.

In the fourth place, the presentation of a general offer of grace is not only not in harmony with the Holy Scriptures, but the Scripture literally condemns it. To prove this I refer to six scriptural passages, which very clearly prove the point.

In the fifth place, I proved, with a rather broad argument, that the presentation of a general offer of grace on the part of God, well-meant for all mankind, is not in harmony with the Reformed Confessions.

And I conclude with a chapter dealing with the scripturally Reformed presentation of the subject of grace.

If Dr. Kuyper has indeed read my brochure, how can he possibly dare to give his readers the impression that I reason purely from the aspect of election and reprobation?

Why does he not do justice to my reasoning and then in a manly manner answer argument with argument, instead of assuming that he can brush us aside with a few texts?

No, Dr. Kuyper has done his work poorly.

He does not enter into any of my arguments. He acts as if they do not exist and as if I as a rationalist had put my own reason on the foreground.

Is that the way the leaders in the Netherlands deal with their opponents?

Finally, Kuyper still must prove that my reasoning is not logical, merely has the appearance of being logical, and maybe should be called hyper-logical, when I maintain that the presentation of a general offer in the sense of Berkhof and Keegstra is anti-Reformed.

You can find my reasoning in my brochure.

There I demonstrated the following:

- 1) That if one does not wish to play with words, the following elements are included in the presentation of an offer according to Keegstra:

- a) That there is in God the earnest *desire* to grant His grace to all mankind.
- b) That the one who offers *has in his possession* that which is offered; that there is therefore grace in Christ for all mankind. Otherwise God cannot offer it to all mankind.
- c) That the offered object is *highly commended* to someone, i.e., that God has revealed in His Word that He *earnestly* desires to give grace to all mankind.
- d) That they to whom something is offered *can accept* that which is offered.

2) That not one of these elements of a general offer is in harmony with the Reformed truth:

- a) God does not will to give grace to all mankind, even though He wills that the gospel shall be preached to all mankind.
- b) There is in Christ no grace for all mankind, for the atonement is particular, even though the grace in Christ must be proclaimed through the preaching to all mankind.
- c) God states nowhere in His Word that He wills to save all mankind.
- d) No man can accept a grace that is merely offered to him.

Now let the reader be reminded once more that this reasoning is the basis and proof for all my argumentation.

But will Dr. Kuyper be so kind as, not merely to say, but to prove that my reasoning is not according to the rules of logic?

By merely *stating* something Dr. Kuyper surely *proves* nothing.

Dr. Kuyper, Jr. writes in his third article as follows:

GENERAL OFFER III) - Conclusion

We have seen that Rev. Hoeksema, reasoning one-sidedly from the aspect of the truth of eternal election and reprobation, teaches that therefore there may be no general offer of grace in the preaching, since grace is only and exclusively for the elect, and not for the reprobate. According to Rev. Hoeksema that which cannot be given and received cannot be offered, such an offer is not seriously meant and therefore is not true.

When Rev. Hoeksema says that such preaching is unbiblical and unscriptural, then we refer to Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:28,29; and also to John 6:37: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." We maintain the command, cast upon all waters, preach the gospel to all creatures, instruct all nations. The offer is general, but with the condition of faith and repentance.

When Rev. Hoeksema says that such preaching is in conflict with the Reformed Confessions, the characteristic element of which is the doctrine of eternal election, we grant this wholeheartedly, but we dispute his conclusion, for the *Canons of Dordt* teach emphatically that the promise of the gospel must be declared and published to *all nations and all persons without distinction* with the command to repent; and they declare plainly that God *calls all earnestly and truly*, even though only the elect come to faith and repentance. The general offer of grace is therefore true and sincere because if a person does not come to faith and repentance it is his own fault.

Thus we have seen that Scripture and the Reformed Confessions teach us something different from what Rev. Hoeksema teaches, whose chief error is that he reasons too much out of the *hidden* council of God. In this concluding article we still wish to say what *Reformed Dogmatics* of Bavinck teaches us in this regard. Prof. Bavinck has written about it in Volume II, page 528 of his *Dogmatics*:

It (*de voluntas signi*, i.e., the revealed will of command) gives us the right and lays upon us the obligation to bring the gospel to all mankind without exception. We do not have need of another basis for a general offer of grace than this *plainly revealed will of God* (emphasis, AK). We need not definitely know in advance for whom Christ died any more than we need to know who are chosen of God unto eternal life. The calling does rest upon a particular basis, for that belongs to and proceeds from God's covenant, but it directs itself *in harmony with God's revealed will* (emphasis, AK) and with the sacrifice of Christ, which has fully sufficient value in itself also for them who are outside of the covenant, in order that they also may be taken up into the covenant, and receive the proof of their election in the very faith itself.

In volume IV, page 4, Prof. Bavinck returns more directly to this matter, and tells us that the advocates of common grace accuse the Reformed people of not being able so much as to mention a call to all because, according to them, Christ died only and exclusively for the elect. If they do maintain the general offer of grace this is not earnestly meant on God's part. Only the demand of the law can be brought to the person without grace, not the offer of grace, even if it conditional.

Prof. Bavinck says that even though the doctrine of election and of particular atonement seems to demand something else, yet Reformed persons have maintained a general offer of grace, and he adds to that: "*and correctly so*" (p. 5). And for this reason: First, because the gospel must be preached to all creatures, according to the demand of the Holy Scriptures. The command of Christ is the end of all argument. In that regard the counsel of election and reprobation does not enter into consideration. The gospel is preached to people, not as elect and reprobate, but as sinners who all need deliverance. When ministered by men, who do not know the hidden counsel of God, the gospel cannot be anything else but general in its offer. Second, the Reformed person offers the gospel to all mankind. He can and must do that, even though he knows that salvation can become our portion only in the way of faith. Third, that general offer is seriously meant, for God does not say thereby what He will do, but what He demands of us, namely, that the sinner comes to faith and repentance, because then He will give him eternal salvation. Fourth, the general offer is not vain and unnecessary even when the purpose of bringing the sinner to salvation is not thereby attained. Indeed that purpose is not attained in all; but in that case God has another purpose. Fifth, the preaching of the gospel also has fruit only for this present life (Heb. 6:4-6). Sixth, God never relinquishes His claim on the creature and unceasingly asserts that right: therefore, He calls through the law and the gospel, which calling is never in vain or unnecessary, since God always attains His purpose with it.

One more thing we wish to say. Rev. Hoeksema prefers to refer to II Corinthians 2:15, 16 where we read the well-known statement that from the preaching proceeds a savor of death unto death and a savor of life unto life. As he sees it, the savor of death unto death is inconsistent with a general offer of grace. The preacher must preach Christ, without an offer of grace, leaving it to God to determine for whom that preaching of Christ proceeds as a savor of death and a savor of life.

Rev. Hoeksema calls himself a Calvinist; he says that he thinks highly of Calvin. Calvin remarks on this text:

The gospel is preached unto salvation; this *is its attribute*, but only the believers are partakers of this salvation. In the meantime it is unto the condemnation of the unbeliever, which occurs *by their*

own sin. Thus Christ did not come into the world to condemn, for why would that be necessary, since apart from Him we are all condemned!... Thus one must always distinguish between the *peculiar function of the gospel* and the (so to speak) incidental or secondary, which must be ascribed to the evil of mankind whereby the outcome is that their life is changed into death.

Thus the peculiar function of the gospel is to spread a savor of life unto life, but that also a savor of death unto death proceeds from the preaching, is not the fault of the gospel, but finds its cause in the sin of mankind. *Sapienti sat!*

We will not add much to this.

It would merely be a matter of repetition.

Anyone who re-reads the articles of Rev. Rietberg of Maassluis and those of Dr. A. Kuyper of Rotterdam will soon discover that, the *Kerkbode* of Rotterdam is certainly read in Maassluis. The similarity between the articles of Kuyper and of Rietberg is too obvious not to lead to this conclusion.

Instead of writing about the general offer of grace as well-meant on the part of God, both write about the preaching of the gospel to all mankind without distinction.

Both writers follow the same line of argumentation. Both appeal to the same texts, to the same quotations from the *Confession* and in the same manner, to the same citations from Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, and to the same quotation from Calvin!

Neither of the two has shown that he was able to understand the question that is involved. Neither one gives my presentation accurately. Neither one enters into my arguments. And both finally continue in the vain delusion that their miserable writings are weighty enough to settle the question or to clarify it.

This is what Rietberg wrote as a pious wish at the end of his articles.

And Kuyper ends in the same high-handed manner which characterized all he wrote: *sapienti sat!*

Yes, yes, *sapienti sat!* but poor wise men (I should have written: fools), who deem themselves satisfied with that which the leaders write in *De Rotterdamse Kerkbode* and in *De Wachter*.

In the meantime let one read, in answer to this conclusion of Kuyper, that which I wrote in answer to the last articles of Rietberg.⁹

The same answer serves for that which both have written.

And: *Sapienti sat!*

Chapter 11

Review in the *Gereformeerd Theologische Tijdschrift* (*Reformed Theological Periodical*)

Also Dr. S. Greydanus of Kampen gave a review of my brochure in the *Gereformeerd Theologische Tijdschrift*. (*Reformed Theological Periodical*). As with the former articles, we quote this review in its entirety.

For approximately ten years there has been a conflict in the Christian Reformed Church in America about the question whether the preaching of the gospel may be called a well-meant offer of grace to all mankind on the part of God. Alas, this conflict already led to a split. Hoeksema's little book contains a number of articles which appeared in the *Standard Bearer* against a series of articles by Rev. Keegstra which appeared in *De Wachter* (*The Watchman*) (The American paper). From the very nature of the case we will not enter into those polemics, because this would demand an accurate comparison of that which was written back and forth, and I do not have at hand those articles of *De Wachter*. To discuss the entire issue would require a whole volume. A sharp distinction of concepts is required if we would not want to talk past each other, since one understands or accepts words and expressions differently than the other. But a few general remarks could serve a good purpose.

A term such as "general well-meant offer of grace or salvation to all" does not appear in the Holy Scripture nor in the Reformed Confessions. That as such does not make it worthy of rejection. We have all kinds of expressions that do not appear literally in the Holy Scripture and in the Confessions, and yet are sorely needed. Nor does the term necessarily need to be wrongly understood; perhaps be wrongly understood because there is no mention in it of the demand for faith and conversion. The *Canons of Dordt*, III/IV, Articles 8, 9, say something slightly different. It also makes a difference whether this expression is used in loose conversation or whether it is a subject of theological dispute, in which case precision is necessary.

Rev. Hoeksema sums up rather extensively in four points what to his mind is the content and meaning of the term. He does this again when he writes:

- (1) That God wills that all who hear will receive the salvation in Christ (common grace).
- (2) That the offered salvation is there for all mankind (general atonement).
- (3) That Scripture presents salvation as if it is intended for every single individual without exception (general offer).
- (4) That the individual is capable of accepting that which is offered (free will).

Now one is not necessarily compelled to agree with him in this. For example, he writes in regard to the fourth point that such an offer implies, "that the one who offers does so either *unconditionally or upon the condition that those to whom the offer comes can accept it*. This element is also an essential part of a well-meant offer"; but he does not seem to reckon sufficiently with the *character* of sin. For as further explanation he immediately adds: "If I set a delicious meal in front of someone who is firmly bound hand and foot and I offer it to him expressing my eager desire that he may enjoy it, I am actually mocking him." But the sinful inability of mankind is not that kind of physical inability. Scripture presents and even greater impossibility (Jer. 13:21; Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:1; John 3:3) that of *another nature*, not only guilty since it proceeded from the guilty transgression of Adam in Paradise; but also guilty since sin is still continually desired and mankind in its corruption still finds pleasure in it

(*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 5, 8). Otherwise the gospel preaching could not also be a savor of death unto death (II Cor. 2:16), and the rejection of the gospel could not be explained in terms of: Ye have not willed (Matt. 23:37). But since aforementioned term (offer) seems to be considered in this sense, this leads even more to the question, is it not better not to use the term? Or in any case to make a renewed investigation whether it is a question of the use of the term. But a term can present or create an improper presentation.

I would greatly desire that the brothers in America who are now separated on this point would meet together once more in good will to discuss this matter down to its basics. I cherish the hope that then it would prove to be possible to remove the separation between them. If the question be raised whether, and eventually what sort of, grace is obtained from the gospel by those who are not saved, that could not be answered with a single word. First of all, it would require that the term “grace” be defined and its meaning investigated. All gospel preaching is in any case not merited and always forfeited. Also every minute God still averts final destruction. And rejection of the gospel brings about an increase of guilt and punishment. But the preaching of the gospel can also serve as a protection from all kinds of sins for those who are not saved by it, and to that extent are still spared from a greater eternal punishment. These matters are not so simple.

S. Greydanus.

We are thankful to Dr. Greydanus for his charitable writing. It was gratifying, especially after we had read the series of articles by Dr. A. Kuyper in the *Gereformeerde Kerkbode*, to read this review of Dr. Greydanus. In the first place, it is evident that the esteemed reviewer took far more notice of our book than did Dr. Kuyper. We are willing to accept the fact that Dr. Kuyper did read our brochure; yet considering that which he offered us in the *Kerkbode*, it is impossible for us to believe that he actually succeeded in understanding the issue involved. At least his articles show very plainly that he (Dr. Kuyper should take no offense at my statement, but it is literally true) did not understand what it is all about. As to Dr. Greydanus this is different. Actually he did not judge that which we had written, but he confined himself to general remarks. Yet even from these general remarks it is evident that the esteemed brother has understood the issue far better than Dr. Kuyper did. In the second place, and in close connection with the first, Dr. Greydanus does not look down upon us, as did Dr. Kuyper. The latter thought that the entire issue could be brushed aside with a wave of the hand, referred to us as being illogical, rationalistic, hyper-logical, and then, when all was said and done, he failed to give one single proof for all his wild charges. It lies in the very nature of the case that such distinguished nonsense gets us nowhere. The only result of the writing of Dr. Kuyper is that even the common people among us marveled at the superficiality of the esteemed brother. But also in this respect the writing of Dr. Greydanus gives a much better impression than that of Dr. Kuyper. He writes in a very charitable manner and grants that the issues involved are not so simple. He is of the opinion that the last word has not yet been said. He desires a discussion that goes down to the basics. Even that means much to us, that is what we always desired. But our opponents only answered by casting us out of the church. We are thankful to Dr. Greydanus for this considerate writing.

As to the rest, we will also limit ourselves to a few general remarks.

1. We would have appreciated it if our esteemed reviewer had written more about the issue itself, even if he had to devote an entire volume to it. The history of the Christian Reformed Church in our area has proved, and still proves, how necessary it is that we make sharp distinctions in regard to those matters that are related to the issue of the preaching of the gospel. Repeatedly there are departures, with regard to the subject of God's sovereign grace. This is especially true in our times and in our country. Such departures do not force themselves into the churches quite suddenly, but develop gradually. And the presentation of a general offer of grace is so closely related to the preaching of a general grace that the two can never be separated. Therefore we would have no greater desire than that this matter were earnestly delved into and that we would be able to have a discussion on the issue.

2. However such a discussion would require a treatment of the entire doctrine of common grace. Our struggle is not merely concerning the offer of grace but concerning the whole theory of common grace, namely, as this

was developed by Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr. Indeed the situation is this: this theory has never been adopted as a dogma in the Reformed churches; it has never been taken up in the confessions; yet in spite of all that it is still virtually regarded and treated as such. Anyone who raises a doubt about the theory of common grace is looked at in amazement and quite readily regarded as a heretic. It is a dangerous practice to adopt a certain theory as the dogma of the church, even though it was never taken up into the confessions of the churches. It is our conviction that this theory is thoroughly unscriptural and not only diverts us from the entire line of Reformed faith and thought, but brings us right into the world and makes us a part of it. This is the more reason why there is a crying need that we give ourselves an account of the principles of the common grace theory, in order that we do not continue to proceed on the wrong way merely in the name of one or more great men.

3. We are pleased that Dr. Greydanus agrees that the *Canons of Dordt*, III/IV, 8 and 9 speak a different language. These are the very articles to which the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church appealed in 1924 to prove, not only that there is a general offer of grace and salvation, but also that the preaching of the gospel is actually grace for the reprobate. But, as Prof. Greydanus remarks, it is certainly true that these articles speak somewhat differently. They certainly do not speak of a grace for all mankind in the preaching of the gospel.

4. Naturally we have not written, nor meant that sin is committed through a certain physical necessity. We understand very well that when we speak of the inability of mankind to perform any good, that this is a moral inability, that is, that the sinner wills and chooses the evil which he commits. The nature itself is depraved. The will is evil and the mind is darkened. Therefore, by nature a person cannot will the good, neither does he will it. With all his power he seeks that which is evil and delights himself in it. The example that we used was intended to clarify only this one point that it is pure mockery to offer something to someone of whom we know that he cannot accept it. It is true that a person does not want it. That is also his responsibility and guilt. It is also true that he cannot want it, unless he has received grace to want it. Therefore we emphasized the fact that *grace* is never in any way a matter of offer and acceptance but a gift of God.

5. It is not clear to me that the preaching of the gospel, in whatever manner or whatever sense, can ever be grace for the reprobate wicked. That the preaching safeguards from all sort of sins is only true in the sense that it causes sin to develop in a different manner. In other words, it may safeguard from some forms of sin, only to cause the sin to be revealed in another and worse, be it a more refined form. A very refined professor in an unbelieving university probably does not bow before wood and stone, but he tears the Scriptures to shreds and mocks the cross of Christ. That is worse than gross idol worship. Otherwise, how is it possible that someone's judgment could ever be increased by the preaching of the gospel? Scripture also gives us a different picture of the influence of the preaching of the gospel upon those who perish. Matters become continually worse with them and they gather unto themselves treasures of wrath. If the preaching is not grace for the reprobate, but indeed a savor of death unto death, and that according to God's intent, as the Scriptures plainly teach, then it is not proper to speak in this connection of gospel preaching as undeserved and forfeited. In that terminology is already implied that it is grace for the reprobate when he hears the gospel. This is certainly not the case.

The latter applies also to the expression: "also every minute that God guards from eternal destruction." Strictly speaking that is not the case. God eternally guards from eternal destruction or He does not guard from it at all. He that believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he that does not believe in the Son is in death, will not see life, the wrath of God is upon him and remains upon him and "follows him to the grave" (versification of Psalm 37, Dutch *Psalter*, verse 1). In our dispute we are not speaking of people as we see them, but we are speaking of the *elect* and the *reprobate*. The former God saves from eternal perdition, the latter God does not guard from perdition, not for a minute.

In all this we express once again our hearty appreciation for that which Professor Greydanus wrote. In that manner we can discuss the subject with each other. In our country this is not wanted, no matter how much the esteemed brother on the other side of the ocean desires this. As such, we also bemoan the fact that separation and a split has come between us. That there must always be split and separation between those who should unitedly confess the Reformed truth—who would not bemoan that? Nor did we seek it or desire it. Our opponents were out to destroy us. They could not condemn and cast us out with Scripture and the confessions. Therefore they formulated the "Three Points." However, now that the separation has become an established fact a reunion may well prove impossible. One cannot turn back the clock of history. Here on this side of the ocean the Reformed truth must be sought with a candle. And it is rapidly growing worse. It remains

to be seen whether our Protestant Reformed Churches will be privileged to maintain the Reformed truth for a long time to come. But God the Lord calls us to battle. As deplorable as it may be that Reformed people are always separating, I do not believe that there will ever be a reunion between us and the Christian Reformed Church. The development of those churches is running in the wrong direction. Sometimes mention is made in those churches of still another split. But even this is a hopeless situation. Men like Y. P. DeJong formerly agreed with us openly and very emphatically that the churches were thoroughly Pelagian. They knew that very well. But there is not strength for another secession other than the one that was forced upon us in those churches. They are not willing to discuss these matters with us under any circumstances. They prefer to ignore us and the issues between us. Nor do I have a great expectation from the Netherlands, especially not after I had spent a few weeks there a few years ago. Which is the more reason why the charitable spirit breathed in the articles of Dr. Greydanus pleased us.

Chapter 12

Review in *De Wachter* (Netherlands)

Also Joh. H. Rietberg of Maassluis, Netherlands, wrote something in *De Wachter* (*The Watchman*) (The Netherlands paper) in regard to our brochure in which we clearly showed that the grace of God is no offer, wherewith God well-meaningly comes to all men who come in contact with the gospel. As is our practice, we shall also cite articles in their entirety.

A POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION, OR GRACE NO OFFER

(I)

Under this title a brochure appeared in America written by Rev. H. Hoeksema, editor of the *Standard Bearer*. This brochure was sent to our editor with the kind request to devote a broad discussion to it in our paper.

Because of the great importance of this subject I will gladly comply with this request, with this reservation that the discussion will not be extremely extensive. The space in our paper does not allow this, and if one would enter into this issue extensively this would require a brochure at least as large as that of Rev. Hoeksema which totals approximately 150 pages in the Dutch edition. Besides that, this brochure of Rev. Hoeksema is an answer to the articles that Rev. Keegstra wrote in *De Wachter* (American paper), and I do not have these articles to compare them with the brochure.

Yet I will try to show in a few articles the standpoint that Rev. H. takes, and whether his view is correct, in harmony with God's Word and the Reformed confessions.

It deals with the question: Must the preaching be a general offer of the grace of God in Jesus Christ?

One answers this question with an unqualified yes, and says that this is the demand of scriptural preaching, while the other maintains that it is entirely unscriptural and in conflict with the Reformed confessions.

The first sentiment is defended in America by Rev. Keegstra, the second finds its defender in Rev. Hoeksema.

In his "Introduction" Rev. H. says:

A Reformed confession that the gospel is a power of God unto salvation for every one that believes, and the presentation as if the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of grace on God's part to all mankind without distinction, is, according to our conviction, a self-contradictory confession.

At this point a choice must be made.

I cannot treat everything that Rev. H. writes. I want to try to limit myself to the main issue. I do not intend to do Rev. H. any injustice when I say that this is his view (briefly repeated as much as possible in his own words).

The presentation of a general and well-meant offer of grace can not only not be harmonized with the Reformed doctrine of election and

reprobation, but it is also contrary to the entire Reformed line of thought, faith, and confessions. From practically every aspect it is a denial of the Reformed confession with regard to God's grace.

What is the exact purpose and significance of an offer?

(a) The sincere and honest desire of the one who offers is to give something to a certain person or persons. If there is an offer of grace on the part of God to all mankind, then it implies (if it is to have any value at all) that there is in God a sincere will and desire to grant salvation to all mankind. If this is not the case, if the defenders of this teaching deny this, the offer is simply not honest and sincere.

(b) An offer implies that that which is offered actually exists and can be given. Otherwise the one who makes such an offer is a mere 'bluffer.' Therefore, if the general offer of grace and salvation means anything at all (if one does not play with words when he uses the term) then there must be grace and salvation for all mankind.

(c) Anyone who offers reveals his sincere desire that it shall be accepted, and therefore recommends it. Anyone who preaches the general offer is therefore of the opinion that God reveals the sincere desire that all mankind head for head shall be saved. This is impossible with God considering the decree of election and reprobation.

(d) An offer is either offered unconditionally or upon the condition that it can be accepted. The general and well-meant offer of grace must mean that God knows that every individual can accept. Otherwise this is a playing with words.

From this the position of Rev. H. is quite evident. Unconditionally he strongly maintains the decree of election and reprobation. He argues from the aspect of that decree and completely rejects a general, well-meant offer of grace.

He is of the opinion that Scripture does not teach us to approach people with such an offer. Neither can such an offer be well-meant; we must regard it as untrue. A minister of the Word who approaches people with such an offer declares more than he can account for. Rev. H. (who formerly was a member of our churches in America) is of the conviction that a sermon that includes such an offer is not Reformed, but on the contrary is Pelagian, Remonstrant.

He points out that God does not will that all mankind, head for head, shall be saved. We read:

God desires to grant the elect salvation, no one else. This is the clear scriptural, Reformed doctrine. Not only has He determined to give grace *only to some*. He has also determined *to give no grace to others*. There is therefore in God a definite decree to give no grace to some. Hereby the first essential element of a general offer is eliminated, and at once made impossible. You cannot be Reformed and speak of a general offer of grace on the part of God.

We read:

In one Word, it is Reformed to say that there is no one among all mankind who is even in the least able to accept the proffered salvation. With this presentation the possibility of an offer falls completely away. For what sense does it make to speak of offering

something to individuals of whom one is certain that they cannot accept that which is offered?

Rev. H. does desire that the gospel be preached to *all* mankind, and not only the elect. He writes:

Indeed the Scriptures do teach us not merely that Christ did not make satisfaction for all mankind and that only in general there are elect and reprobate, but also that the reprobate as well as the elect belong to the visible manifestation of the congregation; that the reprobate as well as elect are brought under the preaching of the gospel by the Lord Himself. In other words, he (the preacher) knows that it is the will of the Lord that the gospel shall be brought not only to the elect, but also to the reprobate. All anxious questions whether all are indeed elect are at once excluded. A preacher who would desire to preach only to the elect does not understand the will of Him who sends him, cannot possibly fulfil his task.

And:

Thus our difference is certainly not in regard to the question whether according to the will of God the gospel must also be preached to every one in the audience, reprobate and elect alike.

This is an established fact.

But our difference does deal with the question, what is the actual character of that preaching, what must be its content, and what is God's purpose with this preaching in regard both to the elect and to the reprobate.

Then our difference with Keegstra is this, that he maintains and we deny that the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of grace and salvation on God's part to all mankind.

And our dispute with the official declaration of the Christian Reformed Church (who expressed themselves in this regard in 1924, R.) is this, that they teach and we deny that the preaching of the gospel is *grace* to all mankind.

Herewith I have interpreted the position of Rev. H.

Next week, D.V., we will investigate whether this position is correct.

And in the following issues of *De Wachter* Rev. Rietberg proceeds to enter into this investigation and to offer his judgment to the readers, as follows:

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A POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION,  
OR GRACE NO OFFER

(II)

With regard to the subject that Rev. Hoeksema treats in his brochure we must carefully distinguish between the *general offer of grace* and the *offer of general grace*. It makes a tremendous difference whether the word *general* modifies "offer" or "grace."

The offer of *general grace* is the preaching which says that Christ made satisfaction for all mankind; that therefore it completely denies election and brings the message to everyone that Christ has satisfied for him and that he must now accept this. It need not be shown that this is unreformed and unscriptural. This is more than evident to anyone who somewhat understands God's truth and knows the Reformed confession. Rev. Hoeksema also wants none of this. He firmly maintains the doctrine of election and the truth that God has paid the ransom only for His own. Here we do not differ.

However, it is a different matter in regard to *the general offer of grace*. In this regard the question actually is: may the gospel be preached to all mankind without distinction? May the preacher present the general offer of God's grace in Christ? Can this general offer be harmonized with the decree of election?

Now it is an established fact for us, Reformed, that the question may never be: how can I harmonize the one with the other, how can I bring the one portion of the truth in harmony with the other? But the first question always remains: What does the Lord say? And even though there should be apparent contradictions, which to our minds cannot be solved, we may not reject one element of the truth for the other, but we must leave the solution to God. We would also have to do that even if the doctrine of election were in conflict with the general offer of grace.

But that is not the case.

The Holy Scripture teaches us plainly that there must be a general offer of grace.

We find this already in the Old Testament; to mention but one example. The Lord speaks in Isaiah 45:22: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

This is still clearer in the New Testament. John the Baptist preached to all without distinction the demand of repentance unto the forgiveness of sins and the gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 3:3, 8, 18). The Lord Jesus Himself called upon all without distinction that they should repent and believe since He caused His invitation to be sent forth to *all* that labored and were heavy laden (Mark 1:14, 16; 2:13; 4:1, 2; etc.). And He gave His apostles the mandate to go forth among Israel with the same preaching, while He has commanded His church: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to *every* creature" (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15).

And after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the apostles of our Savior were not disobedient to this demand of their Lord and King. They did not say: "We may preach the gospel only to the elect," but in obedience they went into the world with the banner of the cross; they brought the Word to everyone, and preached the Christ to Jews and heathens (Acts 8:4, 5; 13:46).

Paul did the same. The Acts of the Apostles and the epistles teach us very emphatically that Paul came to the people with a general offer of grace. Paul, who certainly refers so emphatically to election, did not place himself before the question: "Am I actually dealing with the elect?" but as much as possible he preached to all.

The Christian Reformed Church has followed this example. She caused the gospel to be heard by all whom she could reach.

And we may do nothing but that. Also for us the Word of our Savior still stands firmly established: "Preach the gospel to every creature." In doing this we may

not ask whether this can be harmonized with election; no, the command of our King impels us: “Go into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23).

Therefore the demand of the Lord is that the gospel must be preached to *all*. And what is that if it is not the general offer of grace?

A minister of the gospel does not know who are God’s elect; he may not pry into that. That belongs to the *hidden things* which belong to the Lord our God. He who is sent to bring the gospel has no other duty than to obey the *revealed will* of his Sender, and that is: Cast upon *all* waters, and preach to *every* creature.

Certainly, this gospel of the grace of God may not be brought *unconditionally*. It may not be said universally: It is for all of you, please accept it! It is also the revealed will of the Lord that this grace must be offered upon condition of faith and repentance. Never may a gospel of general atonement be brought.

The gospel includes: a command and a promise.

The command is, that the individual must repent and believe in Christ, who is come into the world to save sinners.

The promise is: that for every one who repents and believes his sins are forgiven and salvation is granted.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

This is what the Lord says to us.

Command and promise; repentance and forgiveness; faith and salvation—that is the gospel.

And that must be brought to everyone.

That is the general offer of grace.

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Who, when he reads this so-called investigation whether our viewpoint is scriptural and Reformed, can suppress the question: Can the people in the Netherlands no longer distinguish, or do they not care to distinguish, or do they try to shake off the question we are discussing?

This is certain and evident to everyone, that Rev. Rietberg simply searches out the question whether it is in harmony with the Scriptures to preach the gospel to everyone without distinction. He does no more than that. The proposition he defends is: the Scriptures teach that the gospel must be preached to everyone in the audience, and in doing so the minister must not ask: who are elect and who are not.

In that regard Rev. Rietberg and I heartily agree.

And Rev. Rietberg *knew* that *very well*.

This is evident from his first article. He himself wrote: “Rev. Hoeksema does desire that the gospel be preached to *all* mankind and not merely to the elect.” And he quotes my exact words to prove this.

But in spite of the fact that there is no difference between us in regard to this truth, in spite of the fact that Rev. Rietberg very well knows that I do not differ with him on this point, he puts forth every effort in the second article to show clearly that the gospel must be preached to all mankind without distinction.

The latter is entirely uncalled for. Rev. Rietberg and I agree heartily on this. It was not necessary for him to write his second article. I would not care to waste another word on this matter except that Rev. Rietberg leaves the impression with the readers of *De Wachter* that our difference comes down to this, and that I should want to maintain that the preacher of the gospel may preach the gospel only to the elect. I do not say that he deliberately leaves this impression. I will accept that he does this in good faith, that he has not fully understood my brochure. But the fact remains that he does that and that is not dealing honestly with me. He who writes for the public must know what he is writing about, and he who judges another must first thoroughly understand his view.

As far as my own person is concerned I would end the discussion right here. If the people in the Netherlands receive a wrong impression of me, that actually makes no difference, as long as the truth becomes evident. But this is exactly the issue. It is a matter of the truth. With soothing tones of a general offer of salvation the churches are led into Arminian channels. That is what is happening in America. In the Netherlands that is no less true.

That is the reason why I am writing again. It is a matter of the truth.

The preaching is made into a general offer of grace on the part of God to all mankind. When they are attacked they answer that all that we are interested in is that the gospel be preached to all mankind without distinction along with the command to repent and believe. Once again we both are heartily agreed. But in the meantime they still continue to speak of a general offer of grace on the part of God to all mankind. Under that slogan they still continue to pour into people the pernicious poison of the Pelagian error. Such juggling must stop. We must know where we stand.

The matter is far too serious to leave it at that, as if it can be brushed aside with a bit of small talk.

The outcome is evident from the various statements that flowed from the pen of Prof. L. Berkhof in his brochure in which he defends the *Three Points* adopted by the Christian Reformed Churches in 1924.

In an explanation of Romans 2:4 the professor wrote:

That explanation must be sought in the purpose that God had in mind with this revelation of His love. What was that purpose? To dash the wicked Jews farther into destruction? No, but to lead them to repentance . . . Yet in the instance of the Jews the result did not attain the purpose. (p. 28)

God's purpose to lead the wicked Jews to conversion was therefore not attained! God has offered them His grace with the design to save the Jews. *That is the well-meant offer to all mankind on the part of God*, according to Prof. Berkhof. But the Jews refused and hardened themselves. Therefore God's purpose to save the Jews was not attained. If this is not Arminianism then I admit that I do not understand why our Reformed fathers in 1618-19 had to deliberate a half year to oppose the Pelagian errors in the teaching of Arminius.

In regard to the second point of the "Three" the professor wrote to explain Genesis 6:3:

The Holy Spirit set Himself in opposition to the wickedness and evil of the generations that lived before the flood. *He sought to restrain their wickedness and to lead them to conversion*. In the meantime He postponed the well-deserved punishment and waited patiently for fruit upon His labors . . . *But the Spirit strove in vain; sin spread rapidly*.

Now we will not enter into the obvious fact that the professor overthrows his own proposition that there is a restraint of sin by the operation of the Holy Spirit. (Obviously there was no restraint of sin, in spite of the attempts of the Holy Spirit, according to the professor). What I do want to point out is that the Spirit tries to bring people to repentance, according to Prof. B., but that this effort is in vain. Here you have the same teaching of a well-meant offer whereby God intends to save the wicked who nevertheless are not saved. But

now it is applied to the operation of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit wants repentance; the individual does not; that is the issue. If this is not the doctrine of the resistible grace of Arminius, then I admit again that I do not understand which doctrine our fathers opposed at the Synod of Dordt. (The emphasis in the quote is mine.)

The matter therefore is serious.

Rev. Rietberg must not say that this is the same as a general proclamation of a particular gospel.

That is exactly what it is not all about.

Rev. Rietberg could have known this. I have presented the matter clearly and sharply in my brochure.

Yet he does not place the issue involved in the proper light when he writes: The question is: "*Must the preaching be a general offer of the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ?*"

That is not the question.

If one would be willing to change the word *offer* in the question, as Rev. R. Rietberg presents it, into *preaching* then I can readily answer in the affirmative. The word *offer* does not fit in that context, for *grace* is not *offered*, but *given*. Apart from that I would have no objection to the proposition that the preaching must be a proclamation of God's grace in Christ.

But Rev. Rietberg could have known that that is not the issue. In fact, he quotes me when I present the matter in this way in my brochure: "But our difference does center about the question, what is the actual character of that preaching, what must be its content, and what is God's purpose with this preaching both with the elect and the reprobate. And then our difference with Keegstra is this, that he maintains and we deny *that the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of grace and salvation on the part of God for all mankind.*"

That therefore is the question.

The question is not: To whom must the gospel be preached? To that question we all answer: To all to whom God in His good pleasure sends it, without distinction.

The question indeed is: What must be preached? May a preacher say that God well-meaningly offers His grace to every one head for head? May he say, *that it is God's intent to save all?*

That is the general offer.

And that is all that anyone ever can make of a general offer.

If you may not say that, you have no general offer, but a general preaching of a particular promise. If I preach in my congregation: I promise ten dollars to all who have no work and are in need, if they come to me, then that is a general proclamation of a particular promise. The proclamation is general, the promise is particular. It is a particular offer. When God says: To all those who labor and are heavy laden, who come to Me, I will give rest, then that is indeed a general proclamation, but the promise is particular. When God calls: O all *ye that thirst* come to the waters, then this is proclaimed in general, but the promise concerns only the elect. When God says: Turn ye unto Me, all ye ends of the earth, then it may be remarked in the first place, that all the ends of the earth does not include every one head for head; but in the second place, that God promises salvation to those who turn to Him, who repent, so that also here you have a particular promise. And since it is God Himself who must work the true labouring and thirst and repentance, it is as plain as day that all these passages basically concern only the elect.

However, with a well-meant offer on the part of God one means no less than that God's intent with the preaching of the gospel is to save all.

Otherwise why do they always speak of a mystery when they compare this offer to the doctrine of election and reprobation? Indeed there is no mystery whatever in the teaching that God causes His gospel to be preached to all without distinction in order to save the elect and to harden the others. The calling through the gospel makes the reprobate wicked responsible, places the depravity of his sinful heart in the clearest light and

increases his judgment. That is God's intent. *The result answers completely to God's intent.* And God carries out His counsel. He still maintains man's responsibility and the justice of God. What is so very incomprehensible here? This is the clear teaching of the Scriptures, as I showed in my brochure.

No, the incomprehensible, the nonsense of the presentation is created when you try to bind the Arminian teaching of a general offer to the Reformed teaching of particular grace. Then you say: God desires to save only the elect; Christ brought atonement only for them; God can give His grace and work conversion only in them; but yet God offers His grace well-meaningly, with the intent of saving them, to all mankind; and if this grace is not accepted the result does not answer to the intent!

This is not a mystery. It is nonsense. It is so nonsensical, because the latter is not true, while the former is true; the latter is not in harmony with Scripture, the former is: the latter is not Reformed, the former is thoroughly Reformed. You want to join the lie to the truth. Therefore you end up with a so-called mystery.

Rev. Rietberg could have known all this. We said it plainly enough in our brochure.

However he did not consider that, but investigated whether the preaching of the gospel should be directed to all without distinction.

The investigation was entirely uncalled for. I do not know of anyone in the whole world who teaches that the gospel must be brought only to the elect.

In fact, no one would do that for the simple reason that no one knows who the elect are, head for head and soul for soul.

But to put Rev. Rietberg at ease on this point, I want to express it even more emphatically: Even though we did know who were the elect, then the call of the gospel would still have to go forth, according to God's command, to all without distinction, to whomever God sends the gospel.

And if Rev. Rietberg is completely at ease on this point, so that we indeed need not quarrel about this, will he then also for once institute an investigation into the question whether that which we wrote in our brochure is scripturally-Reformed or not scripturally-Reformed, and answer the question whether God well-meaningly, that is, with the intent to save, offers His salvation to all who are under the gospel preaching?

Then we can write again.

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When we took up and answered both of the previous articles of Rev. Rietberg in our *Standard Bearer* we thought that the Reverend had finished his review of our viewpoint. However in this regard we were mistaken. He wrote two more articles, which we present in their entirety as follows:

A POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION,
OR GRACE NO OFFER

(III)

Against the teaching that the gospel must be brought to all, the objection is realised that it is dishonest to say that the gospel is well-meant because Christ certainly did not die for all mankind, but only for those given to Him by the Father. If then the gospel is brought to all, is that not dishonest in relation to those for whom Christ did not die?

Here again one is arguing out of the hidden will of God. We may not speak in that manner. The question for us is: What does God require of us? To that there is but one answer: God demands that we bring His Word: "Repent and believe the gospel. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Besides this the Lord has not revealed to us who the elect are. For that matter, that is none of our affair. That is for the Lord. We must cast on *all* waters and leave the outcome to the Lord.

Certainly, if we preach: You can all be saved—that would not be honest, not be well-meant. But if we say to every one: He who believes in the Son will be saved—that is honest and upright according to the Word of God.

The church must work in the world, just as a physician does in a city or town where a serious epidemic has broken out. The doctor goes from house to house and writes everywhere a prescription or gives an injection. He does not know whether all the patients will recover. Presumably a certain number will die, and the physician is convinced of that. If he is a Christian physician, he knows that it is determined by God who will die and who will recover, and all his means cannot change the will of God. But he does not reckon with that for a single moment . . . That will become evident later. He needs simply to apply the means. Regardless of that, the fact of God's counsel makes the means not fruitless, but real and good means, whereby God carries out His counsel.

Let the church bring the gospel in that manner. Election and particular satisfaction are facts: truths of God. But that is none of the affair of the church in the sense that she may lay down her labors. Let her preach the gospel, and doing so she knows that this is the means whereby God is carrying out that counsel (Dr. C. Bouma, *Geen Algemeene Verzoening—No General Reconciliation*, p. 162).

Our great theologian, Prof. Bavinck, does not differ from this. In his *Reformed Dogmatics* he says (vol. III, p. 528):

The revealed will, the will of command gives us the right and lays upon us the obligation to bring the gospel to all mankind without exception. Another ground than this *plainly revealed will of God* (emphasis ours) we do not need for the general offer of grace. We need not know in advance for whom Christ died any more than we need to know who are chosen by God unto eternal life. The calling does rest upon a particular basis, for it belongs to and proceeds from the covenant, but it directs itself, *in harmony with God's revealed will* (emphasis ours) and along with the value of Christ's sacrifice that is all sufficient in itself, also to those who are outside of the covenant, in order that they also will be taken up into the covenant, and receive proof for their election in faith itself.

In the fourth volume of his *Dogmatics*, the professor enters into this matter even more fully and more extensively. *He regards the general offer of grace to be absolutely proper* and mentions in that connection no less than eight grounds, which I repeat briefly.

1. Scripture leaves no doubt but that the gospel may and must be preached to all creatures. The command of Christ is the end of all contradiction. The outcome of the preaching is certain, but, be it said with respect, it is not our task, but it is God's responsibility to bring the outcome in harmony with this general offer of salvation. We know only this, that exactly according to God's decree the outcome is bound to and attained through those ways and means which are prescribed for us. In that category lies also the preaching of the gospel to all creatures. In that connection we have nothing to do with the decree of election and reprobation. The gospel is preached to people, not as elect and reprobate, but as sinners, who all need salvation. Ministered by persons who do not know the hidden will of God, the gospel cannot be anything but general in

its offer. As a net that is cast into the sea catches good and bad fish, as the sun shines upon the weeds as well as upon the wheat, as the seed of the sower does not fall only upon good ground, but also upon stony and arid places, so the gospel in its ministry comes to all mankind without distinction.

2. The preaching does not proclaim to each individual, head for head, Christ died in your stead. But: the forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available. But they become our portion only in the way of faith. God demands of us and gives us faith and then assures us infallibly in Christ of full salvation.

3. The offer of salvation on the part of God is also seriously and honestly meant. For He does not say in that offer what He Himself will do, or whether or not He will give faith. He has kept that for Himself and has not revealed it to us. He only explains what He desires, what we must do, that we must humble ourselves and seek our salvation alone in Christ.

4. This preaching of the gospel is therefore not vain and unnecessary. It would indeed be unnecessary and vain if God intended that even through ignorance and impotence all would be saved through the general offer of the gospel. For how few there are in whom this purpose is attained. But there is also another purpose.

5. If through the calling salvation becomes the portion of only a few, it therefore still retains its great value and significance for those who reject it. For all without distinction it is an evidence of God's infinite love, it seals the word that God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but rather that he repents and lives. It proclaims to all that the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for the reconciliation of all sin, that no one is lost because it is not powerful or rich enough, that no sin nor Satan can interfere with its application, for not as the offense, so also is the free gift. It is often even for those who repeatedly harden themselves against the fountain of blessing: enlightenment of the understanding, heavenly gifts, etc. (Heb. 6:3-11).

6. Not only that, but the external calling through the law and the gospel also attains the purpose that God intends. Anything that God does is not vain and unnecessary. His Word never returns void. The purpose is not only and not first of all the eternal salvation of mankind, but the honor of His own name. By His calling through the law and the gospel God maintains His right upon His creature. The sinner imagines that by his sin he can free himself from God and be excused from serving Him. But that is not true. God's right upon fallen mankind remains uncurtailed. And that comes to expression in the preaching through the gospel.

7. It is a blessing for humanity. Religion, morality, etc., all have their root and basis in that calling which proceeds from God to all mankind. The calling through the law and the gospel restrains sin, decreases guilt, and checks the corruption and the misery of mankind.

8. The calling is also a preparatory grace. Christ came into the world for a fall, but also for a rising of many. The calling through the law and the gospel, with all that it grants and works, is intended to prepare for the coming of the Lord in mankind and in the individual.

In the following article I hope, D.V., to show what our Confessions say about the general offer of grace.

OR GRACE NO OFFER

(IV)

Before I point out what is said concerning the subject at issue in our Confessions, I wish to refer to something else.

That is: the appeal to Calvin.

Rev. Keegstra did that in *De Wachter* (American) and Rev. Hoeksema also does that in his brochure. Hoeksema then criticizes Keegstra for not citing Calvin accurately, and for not understanding the quotations. Calvin would look up in amazement!

Now one must always be careful when quoting another. It is easy to make a person say the very opposite of that which he intends. Anyone who quotes, must be complete in that quoting.

An appeal to Calvin is indeed of significance and of great value, but it is not conclusive. No one should think that if he has found something of Calvin that this is the end of all contradiction and the one who contradicts must meekly hang his head and stammer: I was wrong!

The *Three Forms of Unity* tells us what is *Reformed*, and anyone who does not agree with that must serve a gravamen or no longer declare himself to be in all respects Reformed.

If then I now quote Calvin I do not mean to say thereby: this decides; but I do say something against the quotations of Rev. Hoeksema.

And so I cite what Calvin says in regard to II Corinthians 2:15 and 16: “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”

Calvin translates, “a sweet savor of Christ”; and then says that the apostles and the other preachers of the gospel are called a *savor*, “not because they emit any savor from themselves, but because the doctrine they bring has a savor sufficient to fill the whole world with its fragrant aroma.”

And he adds to that:

Paul then answers them, that the faithful and upright ministers of the gospel are a sweet savor before God, not only when they bring souls to life by the sweet savor, but also when they bring destruction upon the unbelievers; because of that the gospel should not be less highly esteemed. It is (he says) in both instances a sweet savor unto God whereby the elect are renewed unto salvation, and whereby the reprobate are cast down. This is a beautiful passage whereby we are taught that no matter what the outcome of our preaching may be, this nevertheless is pleasing to God that the gospel is preached, and that our obedience is gratifying to Him, and that the worthiness of the gospel is not minimized because it is not an advantage to all; for God is also glorified in this that the gospel serves unto the destruction of the reprobate; yes, that is what must happen. Even as it is a sweet savor unto God, so it must be for us also; that is, it is not proper for us to be offended by the fact that the preaching is not unto the salvation of all; but we should consider that it is abundantly sufficient for us, that by bringing condemnation upon the reprobate

we are promoting the honor of God. The gospel is never preached in vain, but it is always powerful unto life or unto death. But here the question is raised, how does this harmonize with the character of the gospel, which afterward he (i.e., Paul) will call a savor of life? One can answer thoughtlessly: that the gospel is preached unto salvation is *its uniqueness*. But only the believers are partakers of this salvation, meanwhile it is the cause of the damnation of the unbelievers which occurs by *their own accountability*. Thus Christ did not come into the world to condemn, for why would that be necessary, since apart from Him all are damned! Nevertheless He sends the apostles to bind just as well as to loose, to retain sin just as well as to forgive sin. He is the light of the world, but He blinds the unbelievers. He is the foundation stone, but also for many a stone of offense. Therefore it is necessary that one makes distinction between *the very purpose of the gospel* and the incidental and the accidental (so to speak), which must be ascribed to the wickedness of mankind, which is the reason why life is changed into death.

Finally yet the appeal to our Confessions.

Rev. Hoeksema is of the opinion that a general offer of grace may not be preached; this cannot be well-meant nor honest, because Christ did not die for all.

In the *Canons of Dordt*, II, Article V, we read:

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. *This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published without distinction, with the command to repent and believe.*

Here the general offer of grace is certainly plainly taught.

Further, we read in Article VI of these *Canons*:

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

Thus a person is lost through his own accountability.

Besides that, our churches confess that such a general offer is indeed *sincere*.

In *Canons*, III/IV we confess in Article VIII:

As many as are called by the gospel are *unfeignedly* called. For God hath most *unfeignedly* and truly declared in his Word what will be acceptable to him; namely, that all who are called should come to him. He also *seriously* promises *rest for their souls and everlasting life to all who come to him and believe.*

I am of the opinion that hereby I have complied with the request from America.

I heartily hope that the small bit that I have written may still contribute toward clarification.

M. R.

The reader will recognize the fact that Rev. Rietberg in these articles still argues about the question (which is not the issue at all), whether the gospel must be brought to all mankind without distinction.

That is too bad.

Thereby he gives an entirely wrong impression of my view to his fellow countrymen, or rather, let me say, to the Reformed brethren in the Netherlands.

The presentation that he gives of my view is indeed a bit foolish. I am ashamed of it. To use an example. It is as if I had written that a horse has four legs, and Rev. Rietberg writes four articles to make his readers think that I wrote that a *chicken* has four legs.

And Rev. Rietberg once again devotes a few articles to prove clearly that a chicken has only two legs!

Therefore he should shame himself for the labor that was entirely uncalled for, useless, and unprofitable.

And then he still expresses at the end of his articles the hope that the small bit that he has written may contribute toward clarifying the issue!

But it is much worse that Rev. Rietberg so completely avoided my view that we still have no opinion from Rev. Rietberg on the point that God's grace is no offer, but a power of God unto salvation, and that God does not offer His grace well-meaningly to all mankind. We would gladly have read an opinion of this view. This view was indeed also presented to him by our friend who sent him our brochure for review. Where in the whole brochure, we ask Rev. Rietberg in all seriousness, did we ever ask him to criticize the proposition, that the gospel may not be preached to all mankind? In one word, nowhere.

What then compelled Rev. Rietberg to write exactly about that proposition?

That for me is a riddle.

But that is the way it is,

Whether Rev. Rietberg never understood my brochure, or whether he did not wish to or could not enter into the matter, the outcome is that he writes about the proposition: the gospel must be preached to all mankind without distinction.

Whether objections have ever been raised against this teaching, as Rev. Rietberg states, I do not know. That the will of the decree (Rev. Rietberg speaks of the hidden will) is an objection to preach the gospel to all mankind I deny. One can freely proceed from the counsel of predestination and still preach the gospel. Not, as lies in the very nature of the case, if we regard that preaching as a general, well-meant offer of grace on God's part to all mankind. In that case we must not only not proceed from the counsel of predestination, but we must deny it. Obviously this counsel includes that God wills that His elect shall be saved, and the others, the reprobate, shall be hardened. To say that God in the preaching offers His grace well-meaningly, that is, with the intent to save them, to all those whom He has determined not to save, is in contradiction with itself. The theory of a general offer on the part of God is then also a denial of predestination, specifically, of reprobation. But apart from that the preacher must stand precisely with both feet on the counsel of predestination in order to be able and to dare to preach the gospel. For it is exactly in that awareness that he can preach the gospel. Then he knows that the Holy Spirit wills to work powerfully through the gospel in the hearts of the elect unto salvation; then he also knows that God through the gospel inescapably justifies Himself in the wicked reprobate. This twofold purpose is God's purpose. This twofold purpose must be attained. Otherwise all gospel preaching is futile. It is exactly the counsel of predestination that assures him that this twofold purpose will certainly be attained. No, we do not know with any certainty whom God has chosen and whom He has reprobated. This makes no difference. Even if we did know with all certainty, we would still be compelled to preach the gospel to all without distinction. Therefore we are by no means in agreement with Rev. Rietberg when he asserts that we must not proceed from the counsel of God in order to be able to preach the gospel to all mankind, but I insist that we must precisely stand with both feet on the basis of that counsel in order to be able to preach the gospel according to the will of God to all mankind without distinction. And there is no contradiction here whatever, if only the preacher does not bring a general

offer of grace on the part of God, but is willing to preach the Word of God without human additions; and that the same time is willing to be a sweet savor unto God, whether that be as a savor of death unto death or a savor of life unto life. That God's grace is an *offer* he will never find in the Scriptures.

Furthermore all those proofs that Rev. Rietberg cites have nothing to do with the proposition that God, on His part, offers grace well-meaningly to all mankind without distinction.

The example of the doctor who goes about the town with his injection instrument to check a severe epidemic has nothing to do with the issue. The preacher is not such a doctor and he does not possess such injection instruments against the epidemic of sin and death.

The citation from Dr. Bouma's book is also not pertinent. It only proves that the church may not neglect her task, not that the preaching is a general offer of grace on the part of God to all mankind without distinction.

Also the quotation from Dr. Bavinck's *Dogmatics* is not pertinent. Dr. Bavinck also confuses the preaching of the gospel to all mankind without distinction with a general offer of grace. It is actually not clear whether he wants to defend the one or the other with the grounds he offers. And let me add to this, that this is also a common weakness on the part of Dr. Bavinck. I consider his *Dogmatics* a gigantic work. I have to a certain degree a high respect for it. But you must not look to Bavinck if you want to know exactly what his opinion is on certain point of dispute. He can sometimes discuss far and wide without giving you a clear understanding of his opinion.

Neither am I in agreement with all the grounds that Dr. Bavinck quotes as proof that the gospel must be preached to all mankind without distinction.

For example, I am not in agreement with point 3:

The offer of salvation on the part of God is also seriously and honestly meant. For He does not say in that offer what He Himself will do, or whether or not He will give faith. He has kept that for Himself and has not revealed it to us. He only explains what He desires, what we must do, that we must humble ourselves and seek our salvation alone in Christ.

The latter is absolutely not true. In the proper preaching of the gospel God declares exactly what He has done and what He does, that He has chosen His people, has reconciled them to Himself in Christ, that He draws them out of darkness into His marvellous light, gives them faith whereby they are justified, sanctifies them, and preserves them, finally to give them glory. God proclaims all this in the preaching of the gospel. He who does not preach this, but, on the contrary, preaches what the individual must do, simply does not preach the gospel of God. But it does lie in the very nature of the case that this *grace* is no *offer*. You cannot offer reconciliation, but you can preach it. You cannot offer faith, you can call to faith. You cannot present conversion as an offer, but you can demand it. In one word, grace is never something to be offered, but is a gift of God's Spirit. But it is simply not true, that the gospel only proclaims what we must do, and not what God does. The very opposite is true.

Also I do not agree with ground 5, as if the preaching of the gospel should be a source of blessings for those who harden themselves. It is true that those who abide under the gospel and are not saved do, according to Hebrews 6:4ff. taste gifts of the Spirit, enlightenment, heavenly gifts, etc. But it is also true that this same passage teaches that all this does not serve as a blessing to them, but as a curse. They reject that which they taste and their situation becomes hopeless, so that they can never more come to conversion.

And, finally, not to speak of a so-called preparatory grace which would only apply to the elect, I am still less in agreement with ground 7, which says that the preaching of the gospel is a blessing for mankind in general, would activate religion and morality, would restrain sin, would check corruption and misery, and decrease guilt. This is certainly not in harmony with God's Word, which teaches plainly that the guilt of those who reject the gospel is increased and they in due time will be beaten with double stripes. Nor is this in harmony with the history of Israel, which makes a point to teach us that no nation is so wicked as the one that in a historical sense abides under the covenant, and yet is rejected. Nor is this in harmony with Christendom, which offers us the same spectacle as that of Israel. Nor is it in harmony with our experience. Sin may take

on another form, may present itself to us in a more refined form, but never can we speak of improvement or a restraint of sin through the preaching of the gospel.

The quotation from Calvin is entirely in my favour. It merely teaches that the preacher of the gospel must proclaim the gospel even though he knows in advance that it is no general, well-meant offer of grace on the part of God to all mankind. He must be willing to be a savor of death unto death as well as a savor of life unto life. That Rev. Rietberg takes this quotation out of Calvin can only be explained from the obvious fact that he does not understand the issue.

And the same is true of the citation from the Confessions. Rev. Rietberg can know, and likely does know, that we also have those citations in our brochure. There we also explained them. It surely must be clear to him that our Confessions never speak of a general offer of grace and salvation to all mankind, well-meant on God's part.

The latter is and remains Remonstrant.

Grace is no offer of God but a power of God unto salvation.

But Rev. Rietberg did not write about the issue. He devoted his articles to the proposition that the gospel must be preached to all without distinction.

In that regard there exists no difference among us.

Chapter 13

Conclusion

To round out the discussion, a concluding word may certainly not be regarded as superfluous. If the “review and reply” had appeared only in the *Standard Bearer* this conclusion would not have been necessary. However now that it has been published in the form of a brochure to reach a broader area of readers, a concluding remark will be necessary. This is especially true because the board of the R.F.P.A. intends to send various copies to the Netherlands.

It is a remarkable fact that a discussion which began in our circles concerning *Common Grace* developed into a debate on the issue of a general offer of grace in the preaching of the gospel, that is, on the issue of *saving grace*. This is striking. It shows plainly that basically the words *Common Grace* (*Gemeene Gratie*) and *Saving Grace* (*Algemeene Genade*) have the same meaning.¹⁰ *Common Grace* (*Gemeene Gratie*) in the sense in which Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr. spoke of it, and *General Grace* in the sense of the Remonstrants, cannot be separated. Nor, no matter how hard one would try, can one keep them apart, even in his own consciousness. Basically they mean the same thing. This may also become evident to the observant reader from the articles of Dr. A. Kuyper, Jr. and Rev. Rietberg.

Therefore it is also of greatest importance for the Reformed churches, both here and in the Netherlands, that they give this considerable thought and that they subject that which Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr. delivered to us in his *Gemeene Gratie* to an earnest and thorough scrutiny. I do not doubt but that it will then become evident that the viewpoint of *Common Grace* can simply not be maintained on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions, and that it leads us in the wrong direction.

This book deals with a single part, a sub-point, if you will, of the broader issue of common grace.

I cherish the hope that the Reformed constituency will read this; that they who understand and love the Reformed truth will investigate the issue that is discussed here in the light of God’s Word.

I would also eagerly desire to see that they who are in a position to do so will publicly make known to us their opinion, whether they agree with our position or not.

Only let the opinion be based on solid grounds.

Let them not brush us off with a dignified wave of the hand. Let them work into our arguments one by one, and judge them in the light of the Word of our God and our Reformed confessions.

Then only can we make some progress.

Notes

1. The Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen, one of the common grace protagonists of 1924, HCH.
2. While it is true that Calvin's work, *A Treatise On the Eternal Predestination of God*, to which Hoeksema here refers, was written after some of the earlier editions of the *Institutes*, it was not written after the last edition of 1559. The date of the work to which Hoeksema refers is 1551.
3. A little brochure entitled, *Calvin, Berkhof, and H.J. Kuiper: A Comparison*. In earlier years, Prof. L. Berkhof and the Rev. H.J. Kuiper were two of the chief defenders of the Three Points of Common Grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, HCH.
4. It is evident that Hoeksema means by the term "conditional" the same as particular: the promise is only to believers and is therefore particular.
5. See previous note.
6. This has since been done.
7. In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, page 161. Rev. H. Hoeksema gives the following definition for reprobation: "Reprobation is the eternal and sovereign decree of God to determine some men to be vessels of wrath fitted for destruction in the way of sin as manifestation of His justice, and to serve the purpose of the realization of His elect church."
8. Prof. Berkhof, judging according to the content of his brochure, would want to preach about Ezekiel 33:11, somewhat as follows:

There are preachers who contend that God is filled with love only for sinners who are elect, that He causes the gospel to be preached only to bring thereby the elect back to his Father-heart. They only, as these preachers say, are God's beloved children. Them alone He seeks to save. Yes, these preachers dare boldly to teach that God allows the gospel to be preached to the others as a judgment, thereby to increase their condemnation in His wrath and sore displeasure. This however is a horrible doctrine. These preachers make God a tyrant, who loves only a few people and has destined the others unto destruction. However my text speaks a different language. Take note that this Scripture passage mentions God's great love for sinners, His desire to bring the wicked as His wandering children back to His Father-heart. He seeks their salvation. And do not allow it to escape your attention that the text does not speak of elect, but of sinners in general. That includes all mankind. Not only the elect are meant, but also the others. God loves all mankind. He seeks to save all the wicked. Also in His love for sinners He seeks all of you, none excluded. He pleads with you to accept this grace, etc.

This example of preaching, which is, of course, entirely my own, is in every detail based on that which the professor writes in his brochure. That is our earnest conviction. If we present the content of his brochure in an improper light, he has the opportunity to criticize it in our paper, and we gladly retract every bit.

9. These articles and Hoeksema's answer can be found in Chapter 12.
10. This does not make a lot of sense to one who does not understand the Dutch. The English speaks only of "grace." The Dutch has two words for "grace," namely *genade* and *gratie*. Dr. A. Kuiper, Sr. spoke of *gemeene gratie*, or "common grace" because he repudiated the idea of a well-meant offer, although he did teach a grace common to all men. The Arminian as well as the CRC spoke of an *algemeene genade* or a general grace, by which they intended to include the well-meant offer.