



SHARING REFORMED CHRISTIAN RESOURCES AROUND THE WORLD

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

Dr. H. Bavink

Meditations Before and After Admittance to the Table of the Lord

Translation by Gilbert Zekveld.

1 THE BASIS OF THE CONFESSION

*And I will establish my covenant
between me and thee and thy seed
after thee in their generations for an
everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee,
and to thy seed after thee.
Genesis 17: 7.*

The covenant is established on God's unwavering and everlasting mercies. With the first covenant that was established before the fall, God came to man with the demand of obedience, and promised him eternal life and heavenly salvation only after fulfilling the law. That covenant reckoned with the will and work of man, in some respects it was in his own hand, and therefore it was unstable and could be broken.

But the covenant of grace has its foundation and stability in God's gracious counsel alone. It rests not in man and does not depend on his approval. It is eternal, unchangeable, constant as the Lord Himself. "Mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee" (Is. 54:10).

In this covenant God is first and last, the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega. In a beautiful way it maintains the absolute Sovereignty of God in the whole work of salvation. For from its beginning to its very end, there is nothing in it of man. Redemption is pre-eminently a Divine work, a work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All boasting is excluded; all the glory is the Lord's, Who is Creator and also Re-creator of all things.

That is why it is a covenant of grace, of pure grace. This covenant has its origin in the Divine virtue of grace. Its contents are gifts of grace; glorification of grace is its destiny. It is God Who established this well-ordered and eternal covenant. It is God Who accepts the (by sin from Him estranged) man; Who grants him all the blessings of the covenant; Who makes him walk in the way of the covenant and leads him by this covenant to heaven and salvation.

The surety of this covenant is reason why in Scripture it is repeatedly introduced as a testament. It is not a mutual treaty or pact; it is not like an agreement between two persons, who after much deliberation sign the contract. But the covenant of grace is an institution, a merciful decree of the Lord, a gift in Christ. "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me" (Luke 22: 29).

As testament, as last and free arrangement, in the form of an inheritance, the Divine blessings of this covenant become ours, outside and without our will. It is the most precious gift, the most perfect gift, which descends on us 'from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.'

Let us have a look and see, what kind of goods they are, which make out the contents of this free and eternal covenant. Together they form a kingdom of spiritual and material, of heavenly and earthly, of eternal and temporal blessings. There is opened here for man a fullness of blessing, a fountain of salvation and a well-spring of life. One grace changes into another and in turn it is replaced by new grace. From Christ's fullness we receive grace for grace.

In the first place they are benefits, which are granted to man in this covenant. For before anything else Christ came to earth, to seek and save that which was lost. He did not come to reform society, as political leader of the nations, as artist or one worldly wise. Saviour was His name and office. He was thereunto anointed with the Spirit, by the Father, to preach the gospel to the poor; he was sent to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, and set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

They are first of all spiritual blessings, whereby the congregation is blessed by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forgiveness and regeneration, faith and repentance, sanctification and perseverance, become the possession of believers in communion with Christ. Both -their conscience and being, their state and standing are renewed by the Spirit of Christ. Through the Spirit Who Lives in them they became other people; they are not from beneath, but from above; they are born of God, by Him adopted to children, and destined for the heavenly inheritance. The old is past, behold, all things have become new,

But these spiritual and eternal blessings are coupled with earthly and temporal blessings. Heaven and earth, spirit and matter, soul and body are closely aligned, and absolute separation would not be possible. The glorious image of the future which is shown by the Old Testament prophets, does not only tell us that Israel will be a holy people, by the Lord from eternity betrothed, that He will cleanse from all impurity and give them a new heart, but also, that under the Prince of Peace, the house of David shall enjoy unknown prosperity and extra-ordinary fruitfulness of the earth.

That is also how the New Testament joins spiritual and material blessings. It does emphasise the former. We must seek first the kingdom and its righteousness; and that kingdom becomes already part of those who believe the gospel of Christ, and turn to Christ with a true heart. For in the first place it is established in the heart, it is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Whoever looked for and found that kingdom as a pearl of great price, will receive all the other things on top of the former. These people do not need like the heathen, be anxious and ask the question, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? For our heavenly Father knows that we have need of these things. He, Who did not spare His own Son, shall with Him give us all things. The hairs of our head are all numbered. Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure.

Those who would follow Jesus must leave everything, but they will receive already in this life, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and fields, and in the age to come everlasting life. Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

All these benefits of the covenant are put together in the one great promise, that God will be our God and the God of our seed.

With this promise commences the proclamation of salvation, when God looks for man after the fall, breaks his friendship with Satan, making him his enemy instead, and takes him up again in communion with Himself. It is the most prominent aspect of the covenant that was established with Abraham. It has a place above the law that was given to Israel, and is sum and substance of the dispensation of the covenant of grace in the days of the Old Testament. In the midst of misery God's people find blessedness and comfort; Whom do they have in heaven besides God? and there is nothing on earth they desire beside Him. He is the strength of their heart and their portion forever. When Israel forsakes the Lord their God, is this their comfort, that in spite of this the Lord will remain their God, gathers them again from exile and on the end of days establishes a new covenant, in which they will be His people and He will be their God.

And this promise passes over into the New Testament. It is fulfilled in Christ Who in the greatest temptation, in the agony of Gethsemane, in the suffering on the cross, remained standing, because God was His God and He His much beloved Son. It is fulfilled in the congregation that came in Israel's place and glorying in Emmanuel, God with us, became His people. It shall be fully realised, when the new Jerusalem shall descend from God in heaven, when His tabernacle will be with man, and He shall dwell among His people.

Is there greater gift than the Lord Himself? What can He give more than Himself, Himself with all His virtues and attributes, with His grace and wisdom, with His righteousness and omnipotence, with His un-changeableness and faithfulness? For when God is for us, who can be against us? Whatever may happen, He is and remains ours, in misery and death, in living and dying, for time and eternity. For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living. Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord!

This promise is so much richer, while God therein commits Himself, to be not only our God, but also the God of our seed. It would be great already if God granted communion with some people, who were not related; when in an arbitrary way He would, not taking in account generations, take His elect regardless of all historic coherence of flesh and blood.

But that is not how the Lord works. He establishes an organic covenant with humanity, with Christ as its Head, first with Adam then with Abraham who is the father of all believers. With His grace He follows the line of generations. In re-creation He joins creation. He executes election in the way of the covenant, He moves as Father of all mercies in the way, to which as Father of all things, He Himself set His signature.

That is why the covenant of grace is eternal in the sense, that in history it continues from generation to generation and is never cut off. Grace is like a stream which commences after the fall, digs a bed for itself in the history of humanity and discharges in eternity. As covenant it may run through several dispensations and appear in different forms, through God's almighty power it has become an element in this world, which cannot be eradicated, and an indestructible good for humanity.

Precisely because it is a covenant it bears this indestructible character. For in all covenants there are contained two parts. First the Lord God gives Himself to us; but then we are admonished of God and obliged to new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength, that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life" (Form for Baptism), When God gives Himself to us, He will that we too shall give ourselves to Him, wholly, undivided, unconditionally with our soul and body, our talents and

strength, our money and possessions, with our children and children's children. Before everything with our children, who are the Lord's inheritance and His most cherished earthly blessing. They must be God's, because we are of Him.

Yet, in the covenant He is first and demands us and our children for His service; He glorifies to us and to our children the riches of His grace. He is first, when He calls Adam and Noah, Abraham and Israel into His fellowship, but He remains this also, when He takes their children with them in His covenant. I will be your God, and the God of your seed after you - is the promise, wherewith He commits Himself to the elect in their generations. And before our children did good or evil, He it was, Who as the Sovereign, said, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. (9: 15).

Our children do not enter the covenant, because we dedicate them to the Lord. Much less, because by any virtue or merit they made themselves worthy. They are in the covenant by virtue of God's promise. They are in the covenant from the time of their birth, not by nature, but by grace, while God has committed Himself to be the God of believers and their seed.

The same law that rules in the spiritual realm, rules in the natural realm. All of us received a natural life that through our parents we received from God, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. It is not by our merits that we possess life. We did not give it to ourselves, did not merit it, we even forfeited it by our guilt. It is God's gift in a complete sense, not of His particular grace, but of His common grace. We receive it by conception and birth, whereby we are altogether passive. Outside of our awareness and will we are placed in a world, that is filled with rich goods, and we enter into the mighty inheritance of former generations. We stand on their shoulders and enjoy what they brought together in the sweat of their brow.

In much greater measure this is true of the spiritual goods of the covenant. For it is not so that for a long time we wander about outside of the covenant, until at a later date, by faith and repentance we enter the covenant by our own will. For faith and repentance are no conditions outside and to the covenant of grace, but they are blessings of the covenant, assuming communion with Christ and opening the door to the joy of His blessings.

All these blessings, of forgiveness and renewal, sanctification and glory, come to us only from the Mediator, Who bought them for the price of His blood. They cannot be ours, unless we have an interest in His Person. The mystical union with Christ precedes all blessings, and first reveals itself in faith and repentance. As natural life is granted us in birth and after that turns to acts of understanding, so spiritual life becomes our possession by regeneration, and after that will bear the fruits of faith and repentance.

Again, it is not possible to have communion with Christ, but by the Father Who gave us Christ. The offer and gift of Christ precedes all His benefits. It is God, Who in Christ, gives Himself to us and in communion with Him, successively imparts to us all the blessings of the covenant and complete salvation.

Baptism is the sign and seal of this unspeakable gift of God's grace. For it is certain that someone who is baptized in truth, with Christ's blood and Spirit, of the uncleanness of the soul, that is cleansed from all sin, as the body is outwardly cleansed by water.

Baptism is a baptism in the name of God Triune.

"When we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals unto us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptised into the name of the Son, the Son seals unto us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. "Likewise, when we are baptized into the name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal." (Form for Baptism).

Baptism is our witness, that God will be our God forever, being a merciful Father, For He has commanded to baptize all those, who are His, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

In baptism the Lord gives us visible evidence, that in Christ He gives Himself and adopts us to His children.

That adoption is the basis of our confession.

2. INSTRUCTED IN THE CONFESSION

*Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceedeth
out of the mouth of God. Matt. 4: 4.*

In the covenant the Lord teaches His children to be free and independent.

While election contains only those who will infallibly inherit eternal life, the covenant describes the way in which the elect are led to their destiny. Election and covenant are therefore not distinct in a smaller and larger circle, for both contain the same persons; but while election takes these by themselves, the covenant views them in coherence with the whole human race.

Although the covenant maintains God's Sovereignty in the work of salvation in a beautiful way, and nothing of man is allowed to enter, at the same time does it not violate man as he was created after God's image. When the Lord receives His honour, man too receives the place and honour, which is his according to God's will. He elects His own in Christ, that they should be holy and blameless before Him in love.

Indeed, in the covenant of grace Christ is the Head of the congregation, but He is there with His believers, and does not take them from their place. He is at all times the Surety for His people, but in such a way, that they themselves, taught by His Spirit and enabled, consciously and voluntarily, live and walk in the covenant. The covenant of grace is indeed established with Christ, but through Him extends to all His people and it takes them with body and soul, with mind and will and all their strength.

Since God works in them to will and to do after His good pleasure, He exhorts them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. By God's grace they are, what they are; they can do all things through Christ, Who strengthens them. Because Christ lives in them, they live by faith in the Son of God.

That is why, although the children of believers are already before they know or will anything, taken up in the covenant of grace, the call comes to the parents to bring up their children in the aforesaid doctrine, and cause them to be instructed therein. Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, the covenant of grace admonishes and obligates us to new obedience. When the Lord tells us, "I am your God, He adds: walk ye before My face and be upright! Giving Himself to us, He wants us to give ourselves and all we have to Him.

However, children cannot right away confess and walk in that confession. The parents are responsible for the children, They perform as witnesses by the baptism of their children, and pledge their Christian upbringing. On the basis of adoption from God's side, they must bring their children to a conscious and voluntary confession of faith.

Here too, the natural is a symbol of the spiritual. Natural life which by conception and birth is ours from the parents, is in complete sense a gift, unmerited and even forfeited before we were born. But life, from its early beginnings, is in need of care and protection. Without care it would languish and perish.

The first and highest cause of these provisions is God. He is not only Creator, but also Provider of all things. When life, by Him called into being, was not kept from moment to moment by His almighty and omnipresent power, it would descend into nothing. If it pleased God, He could keep all this, without making use of any means, like He kept Moses forty days on the mountain and Jesus in the wilderness. He would also be able to feed them, like He fed Elijah at the brook Crith by the ravens and fed Israel forty years with manna from heaven.

But as a rule the Lord works by means. He uses food and drink to feed us, and He avails himself of parents as the natural providers for their children. The parents must gather treasures for their children. The children live off these treasures. They don't merit any, they are purely dependent and live by grace.

Yet, it is not really the bread that feeds us, but the Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Men does not live just by bread only, but by the Word, the commandment, the power, the blessing laid in there and communicated by the Lord. Only that satisfies, which the Lord is pleased to support with strength and virtue.

Feeding in the natural realm, is what instruction is in the spiritual realm. It would not be too wonderful for God to keep the life of man's soul without any means. But it pleases Him to instruct people by people, and especially by use of the word to form the mind. From the early years, mind and heart, conscience and will, emotion and imagination are in this manner formed by the work of others. And also by caring for the spiritual life, which is realized by regeneration, the Lord does not follow any other way.

In the first place, the parents serve as instruments in God's hand, to develop the spiritual life of their children. The means they must use thereby is the Word of God as laid down in Scripture. It is not only the parents, and not just the Word by itself, which give life or preserve it. For here too we must remember that man shall not live by bread alone, by the Word without more men cannot live, but by the blessing and power which proceeds from the mouth of God. It is not from Paul who plants, or Appollos who waters, but it is the lord alone Who gives the increase.

Yet, in the hand of parents and teachers, the Word of Scripture, under God's blessing, serves to sustain spiritual life. What food is for the natural body, that is the Word of God for spiritual life. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103).

That Word meets us from the first moments of our earliest years. It came to us not only when the Bible was opened, and was read and searched by us; neither did we for the first time meet the Word in the worship service, where it was heard by us.

But that Word came to us from our earliest days. It came to us Men Father reprimanded us, in Mother admonishing us, when the teacher instructed us, in associating with friends, in the witness of the conscience, in life's experiences. It accompanies us all the time, from the cradle to the grave, it never leaves us alone. We hear it in the blessing of the congregation, when we sing, when the Word is spoken, in command or prohibition always set before us. We are always led, ruled, admonished and comforted, encouraged and discouraged, convicted of sin and pointed to Christ by the Word. It is the atmosphere we breath, from the time of our birth, it is the food, the drink, the air, the sunshine, the rain for our spiritual life.

That Word is always a power. We do not know how or when, but when it exercises the heart of man, at all times it remains in itself a power of God unto salvation. It is never a vain sound, a dead letter, an empty phrase. It is always "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebr. 4: 12). It judges the thoughts and intents of the heart; it is a hammer that breaks the heart of the hardest sinner; a sword of the Spirit, which strikes dead the proud and self righteous man; A witness of God, that awakens the conscience; a seed of regeneration, a power unto sanctification, "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 16). In one word, a means of grace, going before, and is much more than the sacraments.

Even there where it does not spread a blessing, it exercises its influence. The devils believe and they tremble. For unbelievers it is a savour of death unto death. It is a rock of offense on which the ungodly hurt themselves. If it does not soften the heart it will harden it. Man who is touched by the Word will never remain the same. He will be better or worse, but can never hide behind the shield of neutrality. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Is. 55: 10,11).

The origin of this power lies in the fact that this is the Word of God. Holy Scripture is not just for one time inspired by the Lord, but is continually maintained as such by His almighty and omnipresent power. The gospel, which comes to man from Scripture in many forms and in many ways, is at all times by God upheld and inspired. At all times it remains His Word. It is always accompanied by the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in the congregation, and from there goes out into the world and convinces those in the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. It is a word that continually proceeds from the mouth of God, comes to us in Christ, and by the Spirit of Christ is attested to in our hearts or consciences.

That is indeed why the Word is food and drink for our spiritual life. It is a means, not the fountain of grace. God is and remains the giver and steward of all grace; no man, no priest, no word, no sacrament is by Him supplied with the treasure of grace, or charged with its dissemination. Ministers can give the sign and seal, but only God grants the signifying matter. Only He has - this is also grace vowed in sovereign grace, that when the Word is administered after the meaning of the Spirit, everyone who accepts it in faith, will be granted Christ, Who is food and drink for our souls, the bread that came from heaven, the water of life, of which he that drinks shall nevermore thirst.

But the Word must be received in childlike faith, and accepted in all humility. It is like bread that can only maintain our body, when we eat it with our mouth and is digested by the body. That is also how the Word of God only becomes food for our soul, when accepted by faith and implanted in the heart.

Both are destined and designed for each other. He Who created food, created also the mouth to eat it. He Who gave the Word, also gave new life through regeneration, a life that can only be fed and strengthened by the food of the Word.

They are related to each other. The Word works and strengthens spiritual life. By its nature, spiritual life in virtue of its character longs for this food, like the child for its mothers milk, like the hungry one for bread and the thirsty one for water.

For they both proceed from one Spirit. In the natural realm knowledge is only possible, while reason in us and the thoughts in creation, together and in mutual relation, are made by that Word, which was in the beginning with God, and was God, by which all things are made. It is the same light that illuminates the eye and that illuminates the object. The same light of knowledge shines in human reason, and also in the works of God's hands. Only then man does see and know, when both rays of light, descending from the one source of light, meet each other. "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light"(Ps. 36: 9)

That is how the spiritual man and the Word of the Spirit belong together. It is the same Spirit, i.e., the Spirit of Christ Who brought about and maintains the Word, and saw to it that the spiritual man was born in us. In Scripture He places Christ before our eyes; and in our hearts He has Him living by faith. From Scripture He showed us the image of Christ; and after that image He recreates us more and more. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3: 18). It is therefore an unmistakable sign of spiritual life, when our heart goes out to the Word. It is natural that the hungry longs for bread and the thirsty for water and the sick for medicine. It is just as natural for the spiritual man to long with a desirous heart for the Word of God and to Christ, offered to him in the Word. He does not grow above the Word, like the mystic dreams of it; he does not use the word as a ladder, to ascend for a way and then takes to his wings to go in his own power. We cannot deal like that with the Word, for soon we would fall to the ground. Those who refuse bread, will die of hunger. If we do not esteem the Word of Christ, we do not love Him. We don't need the doctor if we refuse to take his medicine.

But the spiritual man, as long as he lives, feels himself connected to that Word as a means of fellowship with the Lord. According as he grows in faith and becomes stronger, he moves closer to that Word. He holds on to it like ivy that sticks to a wall. He leans on it like a stick and staff during his pilgrimage. He loves it more all the time, deems it of ever greater value, at all times finds it richer treasure for his heart and life. More and more it becomes to him a Word of God, a letter from his Father, sent to Him from heaven, to guide him to the Father's house above. Thy word is a light upon my path and a lamp unto my feet. Thy law is my delight, how do I love thy law.

That is why parents must feed the child of the covenant with that Word. If done with discernment, this cannot begin too early.

Already the reverence shown by family members during prayer and bible reading, cultivates in the child a realization of things that are holy, which often remains until the later years of life. The short prayer that is taught to the children for and after meals, before they go to sleep and after they rise, will many a time leave indelible memories, and in later years it reminds of a devout youth. We don't have to wait with teaching children religious words until they understand them, as if little hypocrites would be raised; for by words they learn to understand the matter, as by the matter they understand the words, the one helps the other.

In general there is in the child a striking similarity between the feeling of dependency and humility in its nature, and the attitude the Lord wants to see in us, and which pleases Him most. If we do not become like children, we shall in no wise enter into heaven.

But this bringing them to the Word must at the same time be teaching and upbringing, it must affect heart and mind, and together be directed to knowing and doing. We must watch against the onesidedness of orthodoxy and also that of pietism. Religion is not just knowledge but also living. Man has not only understanding, but also feeling and will. God requires in His law, that we must love Him not just with our understanding, but also with the heart, the soul and all our strength.

Therefore we must teach the children; teach them the truth, carefully and painstakingly, that they may have pure ideas, clear concepts, and a true knowledge will be formed in their minds. Cultivating emotions and impressions without clear and true concepts can be dangerous; it short-changes truth; opens the door for errors and lies, and often leads to a dissolute life.

Yet, clear concepts and pure impressions are not enough. These are very difficult to teach, especially in the religious realm, without influencing the mind and the heart. For true understanding and real knowledge cannot be known without the heart.

With all learning, attention, interest and love are needed. We only know truly what we love in the depth of our soul.

That is why upbringing does not succeed education. The heart does not get its turn shorter or longer time after the mind; we do not first teach pure concepts in the hope that later they will be accepted in true faith and have their influence on life. From the first beginning education must be coupled with upbringing. Education must at all times have an upbringing character. God's truth is of a nature, that it cannot be rightly known without upright faith in the heart. To memorize these things without the heart, is like having just an image of the matter, but is to remain foreign to the matter itself.

Therefore, influencing the conscience and will, the training to know and to do, imparting clear, pure images and arousing deep impressions of the mind must always go together. We may not separate the matter from the words, or the words from the matter. For God united these two. He has bound Himself to give to everyone who believes the Word in truth, the matter expressed in the Word. To know God in the face of Jesus Christ, is to have eternal life. When we speak of God, Christ etc., these names may not just be sounds, but we must think of those who are indicated by them. Then there is a rich gospel, not something unimportant, but a world of invisible, eternal goods, which are signed, sealed and given to us.

When home, school and catechism classes, education and upbringing work together, we may expect, that with the Lord's blessing, spiritual life will increase, lead to faith and repentance, and reveal itself to the outside world into a confession of mouth and heart.

But we may never forget that the increase must come from the Lord. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vein that build it' (Psalm 127: 1). Parents, teachers and pastors are nothing but instruments in His hand. He is the only true Father and Pedagogue of His children. He feeds, leads, preserves, protects and strengthens them to perfection. Not served by the hand of men as being in need, He gives life and breath to all. He disposes of the power over the Word and the working of the Spirit.

Jesus is the Vine, believers are the branches, and the Heavenly Father is the Husbandman.

3. **THE ESSENCE OF THE CONFESSION**

*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth
the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart
that God hath raised him from the dead,
thou shalt be saved. Rom. 10: 9.*

It takes time to live and grow. All what lives and grows takes time to develop. Artificial stimulation of growth results in green house plants, that have no resistance against storms and bad weather.

Spiritual life is also subject to this law of development for organic beings. Holy Scripture knows of a great diversity among God's children. It speaks of lambs and sucklings among the sheep of Jesus' flock; it mentions children, young men and fathers in the faith. Scripture makes a distinction between minors and adults, and in connection with this, between milk and solid food that is administered to believers. Repeatedly it admonishes them, to increase in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, to put on the new man, which is created in true righteousness and holiness, to be strengthened after the inward man and renewed in the spirit of the mind.

As the natural, so must spiritual life develop. It may not remain hidden from man or buried like a treasure in the field. Life is foreign to being idle. Life is movement, life is power, life is to act. All what lives moves and develops. It can be hindered in its growth and resisted, but as long as there is life, there is activity from which it cannot be separated. This is certainly true of spiritual life, that is implanted by the Holy Spirit by regeneration, and bears an everlasting indestructible character. It reveals itself wherever it is found in word and deed, and shows itself in deeds of faith and repentance. And when there is faith, there is confession.

Confession is a glorious word for a more glorious matter. But it has largely lost its beauty and power for us. When we ourselves mention it or hear it mentioned by others, we usually think of the doctrinal standards of some Christian Church, or the public confession, when the young people of the congregation, once in their life time, confess their faith, before they are admitted to the Lord's Table.

But the meaning of the above are derivatives of the word confession. The original sense in Scripture is much richer and much deeper. It is none other and none less than someone's testimony and speaking of his personal faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Two things are included here. In the first place a true, upright faith, a deep, solid conviction of the heart. A confession in the real sense is not possible, when there is no faith in the heart. Confession is a matter of the heart. Its roots are in the heart. It comes from the heart. It is the, fruit of faith in the heart. Without faith, confession is a

work of the lips only, words from the mouth, an impersonal, untrue, hypocritical act, that may not have the fair name of confession, and was condemned by the Lord in the Pharisees of His day.

In the second place it is included, that faith is not ashamed and speaks out, openly to the world. Without faith it is impossible to confess. But he who believes in truth and uprightness, must make confession, he will speak in front of friend and enemy, before the face of God, angels and men. Whatever insult may be connected with it, what hate and persecution may be involved, those who believe will speak, loudly, forcefully and boldly. We believe and therefore do we speak.

Jeremiah, by his prophesying, made himself a mockery in the midst of his people, but he could not be silent. The Lord deceived him, was too strong for him and prevailed over him. He said, "I will not make mention of him. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20: 9). The lion roared, who will not be afraid? When the Lord speaks, who will not prophecy?

Believing with the heart and confessing with the mouth go together. To believe and not to confess is acting against the Lord's will. Both are necessary, said a certain church father: a sure, solid faith and a voluntary confession, that the heart may be decorated with the certainty of faith and the tongue confess the truth unashamedly. Another witnessed: the heart needs the mouth, for what fruit is it, to believe with the heart, without openly confessing before men? Faith may justify, complete salvation is found in its confession. Only then faith shines, when it speaks out in confessing, and many profit. On the other hand, the mouth is in need of the heart, for there are many who confess Christ, but their heart is far from Him.

Paul the apostle says that faith grants us righteousness, but confession of the mouth must be added to obtain salvation. We cannot think of both separately, even as confessing the Lord Jesus cannot be taken apart from belief in His resurrection. Faith without confession does not grant righteousness, and confession without faith does not grant us salvation. Faith and confession cannot be thought apart from each other, just like Jesus being lord and His resurrection from the dead, and righteousness and salvation cannot be seen separately. Yet it is true - and this is what Paul wants to say - that although faith justifies, this faith must first become known as a true, justifying faith, when it makes confession. Faith, not the confession justifies. But when this faith is a true faith it is shown in confessing it. True, justifying faith leads only to salvation in the way of confessing. Without sanctification, no one shall see God. Without confessing faith, no one will see heaven. Confessing is not meritorious, but the royal way to salvation.

Faith and confession work together, they support each other. Faith that does not confess is timid, fearful, withdraws and fades away. Confession without faith is like a flower without stem, it fades and fails to the ground. On the other hand, by confessing faith is strengthened, it is established, and its roots grow deeper in the heart. In confessing, faith receives its glow and inspiration; gains courage and boldness; is continually kept and fed as by a hidden fire.

It follows that the so-called public confession is not an act all by itself, that takes place only once and is thereby finished. Many think that is the way it is. A few weeks before the solemn occasion takes place preparations are made. One abstains from public amusements. One attends church and catechism classes with greater regularity. On the very day a new garment is put on. After that they participate only once in celebrating the Lord's Supper. Then, everything is forgotten. Life continues as if nothing happened.

Such a confession is without value. It is not confessing the faith. Confessing is much richer and has much deeper significance. It is a serious act and a solemn hour, when youthful members for the first time do confession of their personal faith in the midst of the congregation. It is a die-stone on life's way, when one becomes of age, and requires entrance into all the rights, which Christ grants His believers. For time and eternity we are bound to the confession we make. God holds us to it, and at one time we shall be judged accordingly. Christ will remember it and shall ask us to give an account of it. The Holy Spirit shall point back to it until the hour we die, unto eternity. It will, if not for us, witness against us in the day of days, and make our judgement heavier.

It is not a matter all by itself that has no connection with life that went before and that follows. It is not a sacrament like what Rome made of it. It has no supernatural holiness in itself. It is not fenced off by the area of unhallowed, natural life. We do not become a new kind of soldier under Christ as King. Confessing our faith publicly is a weighty and grave matter, but it does not stand by itself, it is narrowly connected with the preceding life, and that which follows.

It is preceded by a daily confessing. All faith confesses, after its own measure, in its own way, its own language. Even the faith of the playing child and the youth who is full of life. If it is but a true faith, if there dwells but a true childlike fear of God in the heart, it will come out into the open. It reveals itself in a piety of soul, and upright mind, a tender heart, reverence for what is holy, a delight in prayer, fear for what is evil, in keeping self and others from evil. Our children already confess from the time they were very young, and their confession is pleasing to the Lord.

For what says Scripture? "Suffer the children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mark 10: 14). It is because the name of the Lord is glorious in all the earth, for, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger" (Psalm 8: 2). "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (1 Cor. 1: 27). Children in their simplicity, their uprightness, their humility are proclaimers of the glory of the Lord, which is found in all the earth and appeared most glorious in Christ.

And as confessing from early youth precedes doing public confession, so it is followed by one during one's whole life until the hour of death.

It is true, public confession in the midst of the congregation is done in the first place to gain admittance to the Lord's Table. It opens the door to the table of the Covenant. It appears as if it separates baptism from the Lord's Supper. However, this is not so, much more does it connect the two and keeps them together.

That is how it should be. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments that have the same value. They have the same strength and significance. They are signs and seals of the same covenant. The Word directs both, they are ordained to point our faith to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, as the only foundation of our salvation. They are given to the same believers. Baptism in the New Testament was mostly administered to adults, therefore confession came before baptism. The one baptized was instantly admitted to the Lord's Table.

But since infant baptism came in general use, there gradually came a separation. Baptism can be administered to the children of the covenant, for it is the sacrament of regeneration and incorporation into the Church of Christ. But the Lord's Table presumes that we ourselves take the bread and eat, that we receive the cup and drink. In order to celebrate the Supper of the Lord to our comfort, it is necessary before all things, rightly to examine ourselves, and distinguish the body of the Lord. It is the sacrament of the growth of our spiritual life in communion with Christ, and is therefore repeated at regular intervals.

That is why the confession came gradually between Baptism and the Lord's Supper, not to separate them, but to the contrary, to keep them connected, and to point from Baptism to the Lord's Supper. The confession presumes baptism and prepares for the Lord's Supper. In confession, the one baptised accepts his baptism and it is his desire to be admitted to the second sign of the covenant. By grace the Lord accepted him as His child; and at the present time, having come to years of discretion and awareness, he speaks humbly and childlike, but also believingly, before all God's people, that God is His God. He places his hand in the hand of the Lord. Wholeheartedly he consents to the covenant, in which he was taken up since birth. At the promise of the Lord: I

am thy God, he now answers: I am thy servant, the son of thy handmaid, thou hast loosed my bonds. Ps. 116. The Lord brings His children up to be free and independent. He wants a willing people at the day of His power. We love Him, because He first loved us.

That is what the believer says, when at the solemn hour of his confession he is admitted to the Holy Supper. Of that he does confession, when with the congregation he celebrates the Lord's Supper. What the Lord does at the Lord's Supper comes first, it is His gift, His grace. Therein He offers Christ to us with all the by Him obtained benefits. The Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, instituted the Supper to feed and nourish all those who already regenerated and in His family, are by Him incorporated into His Church. We eat His flesh and drink His blood with the mouth of faith, to strengthen our spiritual life.

But in the second place, the Lord's Supper is our confession. The Lord's Supper follows a true examination of ourselves, which exists of three parts.

In the first place, 'We must remember our sins' accursedness, that we may abhor ourselves and humble ourselves before God.' (Form for the Lord's Supper) In the second place, "Let everyone examine his heart whether he also believes this sure promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the complete righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own. (idem)

In the third place, "Let everyone examine his conscience whether he is minded henceforth to show true thankfulness to God in his whole life, and to walk sincerely before His face. (idem).

How significant is the confession we make with the Lord's Supper! We do not go on the Table to testify that in ourselves we are perfect and righteous, to the contrary, since we seek our life outside of self in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that we lie in the midst of death. In celebrating the Lord's Supper we confess that Jesus Christ is the true food and drink of our souls, and that we are members of His body. For it is one bread, seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body.' for we all partake of the one bread. But the Supper is also not far removed from everyday life. It is extraordinary in the sense, that at all times God's special grace meets us, and in an extraordinary way is set before our eyes and assured to our hearts. We also see it often as strange and wonderful, since it is only celebrated a few times every year, and then not nearly faithfully by everybody. But the grace granted us in the sacrament, is no other than what continually is preached by the Word of the Gospel which feeds us from day to day. The first Christian congregations therefore celebrated the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day, even in their assemblies during the week. It was the highlight of the worship service, where believers exercised the fellowship of the saints, as provisions, they took along on the pathway of life.

The Lord's Supper signs and seals the fellowship we have with Christ, in which we share at all times, and which we enjoy by faith. We testify of that faith, not only when we participate of the Supper, nor just on Sunday on our way to the sanctuary.

We confess that faith all our life long, as certainly as we are true believers. For faith can do nothing but confess. It does not ask the question whether good works are in order, but does them before the question can be asked. Confessing with mouth and heart, with word and deed, in our walk and dealings cannot be separated from faith in the heart. It is fruit from the tree, the fragrance of the flower, the light of the sun, the sweetness of honey. It is impossible that those incorporated in Christ should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

To believe is to confess, not only on Sunday but also during the week, not just in Church, but also in family and school, in shop and factory, in store and office, in state and society, in science and art, among believers and unbelievers, before men and angels.

He confesses in maintaining the public worship service, in giving to the poor, in supporting schools, in visiting the prisoner, in clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, comforting those who mourn, admonishing the unruly, in refuting those who are contrary, in giving account of the hope that is in him, in keeping oneself unspotted from the world.

To believe, is to confess. Life itself becomes a confession, a living, holy, sacrifice in Christ Jesus, pleasing to God.

4. THE CONTENT OF THE CONFESSION

*And Philip said, If thou believest
with all thine heart, thou mayest.
And he answered and said, I believe
that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Acts 8: 37.*

There are two things, which according to Holy Scripture make out the contents of the confession. In the first place, all true confession is acknowledging our sin and guilt. At the great day of Atonement in Old Testament times the High priest had to lay both of his hands upon the living scape-goat, confess all the sins of the children of Israel and all their trespasses, of any which nature they were, and lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness.

It was a common confession, spoken by the High priest, in name of all the people. But this common confession did not exclude the personal, individual confession of sins. For we read of the latter, again and again, in the books of the Old Covenant, especially in the so-called penitential psalms. They form a significant element in the prayers of all God's people, of David and Salomon, of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel.

There is no people in the world that have felt their sins so deeply, and confessed them more humbly than Israel, "For innumerable evils compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs on my head" (Ps. 40: 12); and: "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities. O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130: 2); and "Enter not into judgement with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 143: 2).

And we find confession of sin in the congregation of the New Testament. When John the Baptist preached the message of repentance, many were baptised in Jordan, confessing their sins. A multitude of sufferers, received not only bodily healing from the Lord, but an even greater blessing, i.e., the forgiveness of their sins and the redemption of their soul. He taught His disciples to pray, "Father forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. In the parable of the publican He draws a picture, which befits us sinners, over against a holy and a righteous God. The publican standing afar off, durst not lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat on his breast saying, " God be merciful to me a sinner". "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9).

Although confession of sins is very much needed, all by itself it is not enough. The doctrine of sin and misery is not all there is, but precedes that of redemption and gratitude. Yes, whoever is aware of sin and misery, and

makes confession of the same, is already a believer. In the Lord's Days of the Heidelberg Catechism that deal with sin and misery, the unbeliever is not speaking, but the Christian. In the first Lord's Day he already glories in his only comfort and confessed, that with soul and body, both in life and death, he is not his own, but belongs to His faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

A true, upright confession of sins is already fruit of a saving faith. Whoever confesses his sin in truth and humility, has already been before the Lord, placed himself before His face and finds himself in God's presence. He cannot do this but only in believing that God is gracious and of great compassion.

There is also a certain acknowledging of sin, that is not in faith. People that live in the world may have a deep sense of misery. "Cain said unto the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4: 13). Judas called out, that he had sinned, betraying innocent blood. There is a doubtful speaking, which is not born from a broken heart, but wrested from the heart by the horrible consequences of sin. There is a remorse and despair, which does not drive out to the Lord, but flies away from Him and rises up against Him. There is a sorrow of the world, which worketh death.

But the true confession of sins differs from this despairing cry and bears an altogether different character. It is derived from a contrite spirit, which is not despised by the Lord, but is pleasing to Him. It is not about the consequences of sin, but its essence, the guilt of sin, because it displeases God and is in conflict with His law. It is a heartfelt sorrow, that we have displeased God by our sins, we sinned against His righteousness, even more, because we sinned against His love. For, said Jesus at one time, If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin, but now they have no pretext for their sin.

This confession is coupled with a sorrow after God and works a sorrow not to be repented of. It is a confession before the face of the Lord and holds nothing back. It is accompanied by, and born of faith that God is not only righteous, but also merciful and gracious. It is already a confession of faith; it is from, through and unto faith. Faith does not enter after we know our misery, but precedes it and gives it the right form. Above the law we find the word of grace: I am the Lord, your God. True repentance is also gratitude.

That is why Scripture says in the second place, that confession means confessing the name of the Lord. Repentance and confessing the name of the Lord go together. For confessing that name includes a heartfelt, believing admission, that the Lord is the God of the covenant, Who revealed Himself as the compassionate and faithful, Who in Christ fulfills all His promises of grace. Those who repent with a true heart, repent unto God, the living God, Who in Christ is, a reconciled Father.

When therefore in the days of the New Testament, John the Baptist appears, he does not just call to repentance and confession from sin, but he also points them to the Lamb, which bears the sins of the world. John was not just a preacher of the law and penance, but also the herald of the gospel and a preacher of faith. For the kingdom of heaven was near. And after him came He Who was before him, Whose shoelaces he was not worthy to undo. John administered baptism as a sign and seal of the forgiveness of sins, which can be obtained and granted in the way of repentance.

The whole content of the confession of faith in the New Testament is summed up in few words, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He who confesses Him before man as such, shall at one time be confessed by Him before His Father Who is in heaven. It was a grave moment when all of Christ's disciples went back, and He asked the twelve, "Will you also go away*?" But Simon Peter answered in the name of all, "Lord to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God" (John 6: 68, 69). As soon as the Eunuch confessed this good confession, he was instantly baptized by Philip. The spirits are known by the confession that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Whoever makes the confession, that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

Jesus the promised Messiah, the by God anointed Prophet, Priest and King - is the short content of the whole of Christian faith. It is the core of revelation, the heart of Scripture, the bone and marrow of all confession, the central dogma of all bible truths. The centre from which all rays of the knowledge of God flow to the periphery. The Person of Christ determines the essence of Christendom.

With that confession the Congregation took its place in the midst of Jew and Heathen. By its confession she was separated from both. By way of its confession it came to richer development of faith and life. At first, everyone who confessed the Lord Jesus was baptized. Later, this was expanded to the names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the twelve articles of our undoubted Christian faith, this baptismal confession was further developed. Again later, all these articles of the different confessions of the Christian Church were better realized, and received a more detailed description. The confessions are like branches and leafs, together proceeding from the one trunk, which in faith that Jesus is the Christ, was in the beginning planted in the bottom of the Congregation.

For in this short confession, creation and fall, sin and misery are pre-supposed. The whole Person of Christ with His names and natures, with His offices and states is enclosed as a germ. The whole order of salvation, for the individual, for humanity, for the world, is included. In the cross of Christ which was an offense to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks, sin and grace, law and gospel, justice and mercy, guilt and forgiveness are united and reconciled. Over that cross, God and world, heaven and earth, angels and men, people and nations offer each

other the hand of peace. For thereby God has reconciled the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses onto them, and triumphing over principalities and powers.

In the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are partakers of the love of the Father and enjoy communion with the Holy ghost.

5. THE DIVERSITY OF THE CONFESSION

*We do hear them speak in our tongues
the wonderful works of God.
Acts 2: 11.*

The short confession that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God was sufficient for the congregation of the first days.

However this period of simple childlike faith did not last long, and could not last long. The faith was contested from the outside, and deliberations in their own circles pressed the congregation into giving a more detailed account of the contents of its faith.

From that moment on many differences and conflicts arose. Soon there was no more confessing of the faith in unison. Although Church and State at all times attempted to preserve that unity by many coercive measures, even if it was only the appearance,, the process of division continues until the present day. There is discord and contention all over. In the name of Christ, denominations and people, with an appeal to His Word, stand as enemies over against each other. The multi-formity of the Christian faith is continually on the increase. It is impossible to think that unity can be restored.

The disunity among Christians is a great disappointment. For, do we not have one only God, the Father, from Whom are all things, and we to Him, and but one Lord, Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things and we through Him? The congregation is one body and one spirit, she is also called to one hope of her calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Jesus Himself prayed that His disciples would be one, that the world may know that He was sent by the Father. So we would expect, that one confession flowed from the lips of the congregation.

Moreover, existing disunity is not just a grievous disappointment, it is also a great sin before the Lord. Because of this great sin, as Christians we cannot humble ourselves sufficiently. It holds a heavy accusation against us, since it is caused mainly by the darkness of our minds, and a great lack of love in our hearts.

When we are convinced of this, we will appreciate the good intentions of Christians, who in earlier and later times, have attempted to unite Christians, be it through forceful or artificial means.

There is on the other hand the fact, which is of great significance, that all these attempts, in spite of the best intentions, had no other result than that truth was turned into error, freedom was suppressed, and disunity often increased. For, he who withdraws into neutrality, is in danger of becoming the head of another party.

Furthermore, we may never forget, that God has His hand in history, and that He executes His wise counsel. His providence includes all things, nothing happens by chance, least of all in the Christian Church, over which the Father placed Christ in a special sense, as its Head and Lord. The ever continuing divisions in Christianity is a fact which is not outside of God's government and rule, it is determined and taken up in His decree, through which without doubt, the Lord executes His wise purposes.

Although we may in no wise justify that sin, which is the cause of disunity, it is not fair to deny that much good was derived from these separations and schisms. What men think for evil, the Lord many a time turns into good. Darkness He can make into light, the dead He can raise to life, and from the shame of men He can glorify His name. So far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity" (Job 10: 34); God can use sin and force it to co-operate to the glory of His virtues and the establishment of His kingdom.

As soon as the truth revealed in Christ and proclaimed by the apostles, reflected in the human conscience, it was instantly robbed of its purity and mixed with many errors. Heresies and schisms date back to the time of the apostles. But at the same time its expression became clearer and better understood in its riches and many sidedness, and the congregation received ever deeper insight into the mystery of salvation, that was laid down and demonstrated by the Lord in His Word.

For already in natural things people are hopelessly separated from each other. Gender and age, aptitude and character, upbringing and environment, land and people, diversity of gifts of mind and heart bring the greatest modifications in the manner that things are viewed and considered. Not in any way are two people exactly like each other.

This diversity, which exists by nature, is not by grace eliminated. For grace does not erase and destroy nature, but restores and renews it, and the natural diversity is yet more increased by the diversity of spiritual gifts, which are all worked by one Spirit, but divided to every man severally as He will.

The Lord loves unity in diversity. All creation testifies to this. Nature with its mountains and valleys, its seas and islands; the earth with its riches of minerals and plants, of animal and man; the heavens with its planets and stars; the heaven of heavens with its thousands of holy angels. The glory of the infinite rich Being of God, reflects in the works of His hands. God's virtues and perfections are revealed in His creatures.

Yet, this diversity meets us still clearer and fuller in re-creation. There is first of all, Christ, the fairest of the children of men, on Whose lips grace and truth are shed forth. And around Him the patriarchs and prophets,

apostles and evangelists, martyrs and reformers, a great multitude of the redeemed, that are bought with His blood and renewed by His Spirit. They are distinct in heaven, they were distinct on earth. All this diversity, through the error and guilt of man, is an influence for good, in order that we should come to know the truth, and the glory of His grace. The Lord takes them into His service and uses them to decorate His Church. The Holy Spirit makes use of these diversities that all in their own tongue should proclaim the wonderful works of God. One time, at the end of history, the congregation from all languages and peoples, races and nations shall bring honor and glory to the Lord.

For this reason it is not difficult to understand, that the several relationships are reflected, in the diversities of confession, in which grace is placed to nature. The essence of the Christian religion exists herein, that the Father's creation, which was destroyed by sin, is restored again by the death of Christ, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit recreated into God's kingdom. The serious question that always returns, is therefore, in which relationship grace places itself to nature. In practice. Every man must regulate this relationship by himself, in his thinking and life, in his will and work.

In other areas of life as well, it comes repeatedly up for discussion, in Church and State, in family and society, in art and science. What is the relationship between creation and re-creation, between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of heaven, of humanity and Christianity, of that which is from above and that from beneath?

According to his own peculiarity each man shall determine this relationship and apply it in and to his life in a different way. It makes a great difference, whether we see grace as doctrine or as life; is it seen as a supernatural addition to nature, or as a medicine against the disease of sin; is it destined for the heart and the inner room, or for all of the rich diversities in human life; does it only serve to save the soul, or does it imply that to God belongs the glory for all His works. Because of this difference they exist among believers, even the members of one Church, many smaller and greater distinctions in the confession. The truth truly is one, but it reflects itself in the consciences of people in many different ways, One sun sends its rays to the earth, but everyone sees it with his own eyes.

Yet, in spite of the great differences that exist between the confessions of the Christian Churches, there is a unity which is plainly revealed, which we may not overlook. So lightly are we in danger of one-sidedness. It is a fact that there are differences, and there is conflict about all the articles of our faith. But seeing what separates believers, we forget so soon what keeps and ties them together. Beyond disunity, any agreement is not seen anymore.

Yet, such agreement is present. All believers are one, not only with respect to spirituality, since all are incorporated in Christ and members of one body, but also in an outward sense, a visible bond embraces all Christian Churches, and keeps them separate from all none Christians.

It is true, there is no Christianity beyond divisions of the faith. Differences between innumerable Christian Churches are not mechanically added to the points of agreement. The first cannot be deducted from the latter, in a way that the remainder would be even with the foregoing. All creeds are an organic whole. The Roman Catholic is Roman Catholic, even in the apostolic confession of faith, which is adopted by all Churches. The Reformed and Lutherans, Anabaptists and Remonstrants are distinct from each other, not just in the doctrine of election, but also of the Church, the sacraments, and also in those of God, of Christ, of creation and providence, of reconciliation and justification.

Yet, there is a unity in Christianity; a unity, which, well considered, is much greater and of infinite more significance than what divides and separates believers from each other. It may be that this unity cannot be separated from the diversity, it is nevertheless truly and really present and becomes clearly visible. It is true that a written creed often just explains the differences; in the unwritten articles, the prayers, the fruits of faith and the works of mercy there is often touching agreement. The imperfect confession of the mouth does not always do justice to the heart's faith.

So it appears to be the will of the Lord, that the unity of faith and acknowledging the Son of God must make a way for itself through the diversities, that once, on the end of history it may gloriously appear. When the body of Christ shall have reached its full increase, and has come to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ; when the saints together, may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

6. THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CONFESSION

*Therefore let no man glory in men,
For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos,
or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death,
or things present, or things to come;
all are yours; And ye are Christ's;
and Christ is God's.
1 Cor. 3:21 and 22.*

The diversity of the confession does not violate its catholicity. There are many Churches, and all of us Christians, confess one holy, catholic Church, which becomes revealed in the many Churches of Christianity, be it in a very imperfect way. The Christian confession is Universal and Catholic, in the sense, that it is spread out over all the earth, includes all believers, is for all men, and has significance for the whole world. Christianity is the religion of the world, for all peoples and ages, destined and suited for every place and time. And most universal is that Church, which has expressed most purely in its confession this international and cosmopolitan character of the Christian religion.

The universality of the Christian religion is a direct reflection of the unity of God, which is taught therein. God is one, and therefore His words and works can never be in conflict, the one with the other. All things have their connection, their system in His Being, His will and counsel. They exist together in the Son, Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creatures, through Whom and to Whom they were created. This Son is also the Christ; the way, the truth and the life, without Whom no one can come to the Father; the only name, given under heaven, whereby man must be saved; the Head of the congregation, in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Father, that He through Him, having made peace through the blood of the cross, should reconcile all things to Himself, be it things on earth or things in heaven.

Christianity is therefore an absolute religion, the only true religion. It will have no other religions of more or less the same value beside itself. By nature it is intolerant, like truth must at all times be intolerant of the lie. It is not even satisfied with being the first of all religions. It claims to be the real, full religion, which absorbs and fulfills all that is good in other religions. For Christ is not a man beside others, but the Son of men, Who by His resurrection declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. He received from the Father a name above every name, and for that name every knee must bow and all tongues confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In this unity we find the catholicity of the Christian religion implied. While there is but one God, He is the Creator of all things. Because there is but one Mediator of God and man, He is the Saviour of the whole world.

And because there is but one Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, He guides in all truth, is the only Teacher in the Church, the all sufficient Comforter of all believers.

Holy Scripture preaches this universality of Christianity in a clear and fair manner. The Father loved the world and therefore sent His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. In the Son God reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Christ Himself came to earth, not to condemn the world, but to save it. He is the light, the life, the Saviour of the world, reconciling not only our sins, but the sins of the whole world. In Him, all things in heaven and on earth are reconciled with God, and are gathered into one. The world that was made by the Son, is also destined for the Son as its heir. At one time all kingdoms shall be of our God and His Christ.

This great, glorious truth has many a time been denied and misjudged. There have been throughout the ages many Christians, we still have them with us, who see the significance of the gospel for the religious moral life, but restrict its influence for the natural life, and see no use for it in the family, for society and state, for science and art. Yes, many were of the opinion, that creation was an enemy of re-creation, that grace set nature aside, and therefore the best Christian was the man of world-flight, who confined himself to loneliness.

Exponents of unbelief made use of this and said that Christianity is an enemy of culture, and therefore not fitting for this day and age. It may have been of great use at one time, and at the present time it may be of use for depressed spirits; but for humanity in general, Christianity is outdated and vanishing. Civilization, science, the arts, trade, industry - they are the gods, which go before us and deliver us from bondage. But the gospel of Christ is finished; His kingdom is not of this world and has no message for today. Religion may be of some use for the inner room; in everyday life there is not any longer a place for it. Religion and politics do not mix. In the schools of science, the temples of art, in the counselling chambers of the nation the Almighty is not needed. Liberating the world from religion and divine things will be continued until the end.

There is a truth in this way of reasoning, that we may not deny. Jesus came indeed to earth, and assumed our natural life, but He took it upon Himself to deny it again on the cross. He was not married, exercised no trade in society and held no office in the state government. He was no man of science and no artist. All of His life was a sacrifice, which was completed when He gave Himself up to death. He came to die. Death was the purpose of His life. He Himself witnessed of this, when He said, he did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.

He did not just do that for Himself, He required from His disciples to follow Him and walk in His steps. We must take up our cross, if not, we cannot be His disciples. He who will keep his life, shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose it for Christ's sake, will find it. If we love father and mother more than Christ, we are not worthy of Him, but he who leaves everything for His name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and inherit life eternal. In order to enter into the kingdom of heaven, the offending eye must be plucked out and the offending hand and foot cut off, for it is better to enter heaven without hands and feet, than to be cast into hell fire.

We may take nothing from this grave demand of the gospel of the cross. The gospel may be for man, it is in no respect to man's liking. To make it palatable for the spirit of the age, the ideas of the day, is robbing it of its power, and will be a disappointment, when we think this to be the way to make it accessible. For Christ was in no way a political leader, nor a reformer of society. His gospel is not suited to serve a social program; Scripture is no law book nor a manual for art or science; the proclamation of the Word is no preaching of human wisdom; the government of the Church is no display of power; the diaconate is no institution to solve the problem of poverty. Christ did not come, nor was His Word given for any of this. Christ is Saviour, that is His name and His work, nothing more, nothing less. His sacrifice is an atonement for sin. His gospel a glad message for salvation. His Church is a communion of saints. Christianity is religion, no philosophy.

But then, that is indeed what it is, fully and completely, the true, real, full religion. Restoration of the right relationship with God, and therefore to all creatures. Christ is Saviour, nothing else; but He is that so perfectly, that His gospel is the power of God unto salvation, for all who believe.

Therefore He rejects no one. The rich he sends away empty, but the poor He fills with goods. He speaks out a threefold "Woe" over the Pharisees who think that their own righteousness is sufficient. But when on earth He invites publicans and sinners to come to Him, He heals the sick, He makes the lame to walk, He cleanses lepers, He opens the eyes of the blind, He raises the dead, He blesses little children, He proclaims the gospel of God's kingdom to the poor, and doing good and spreading blessing He traveled through the country side.

In all this He is human with humanity. Not like John the Baptist, who came eating and drinking, and was called a glutton and a winebibber. Jesus was at Cana's wedding, took invitations to eat and drink with people, forbade His disciples to fast, portrayed the coming of future salvation like a celebration, and promised His disciples the last night of his life on earth, that He would no more drink with them of the fruit of the vine until He would drink it with them in the kingdom of His Father.

He acknowledged and revered the ordinances of natural life in all areas, for He did not come to destroy the works of the Father, but those of the devil. He paid taxes, refused to arbitrate between two brothers who quarrelled about an inheritance, commanded that Caesar should receive that which is his, told the people to be subject to those who sit in Moses' seat, and forbade His disciples to make use of the sword even under most trying circumstances. He never encouraged to resist, words of love always came from His lips. Love your enemies; bless those that curse you; do well to those who hate you; and pray for those that persecute you.

Nature He loves with childlike joy. He enjoys its beauty and is refreshed when He sees its beauty. He has an open eye for the grass that grows out of the earth and the lilies of the field, for the birds of heaven and the fishes in the sea. Vine and figtree, mustard seed and the grain of wheat, grape and thorn, fig and thistle, field and flock, catching fish and business acumen served Him for examples and parables, when He taught about heavenly things. All of nature speaks Him of the Father which is in heaven and Who lets His sun rise over the good and the evil, and rains on the just and the unjust. And so little does He disparage all luxury, that when Mary anoints Him with precious ointment, He does not complain about any waste to His disciples, but accepts the costly token of honor with gratitude.

And last but not least - Jesus did indeed laid down natural life, for our sakes, but He took it again and rose from the dead. When in His flesh He bore our sins on the cross, and thus freed natural life from its guilt and curse, He made it again His possession, but now reborn, spiritualized, sanctified. Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead is sufficient evidence, that Christianity is no enemy of humanity or the natural, but it will only redeem it of all that is sinful and sanctify creation unto God.

That is the way Jesus' disciples have to go. if we would follow Jesus, we must leave everything, but we receive all of it back again, thirty, sixty and a hundred fold. "For if we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6: 5). If we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him, not first in heaven, but already here on earth. For the believer has eternal life and is renewed from day to day. From the cross to the crown, through death to life - that is the way, for both Jesus and His disciples.

That is why through death, everything returns to them in the resurrection. Being dead and raised with Christ, from now on they live the time of the flesh by faith in the Son of God, Who loved them and gave Himself for them. Although crucified to the world, they remain in the world, but are kept by the Father from the evil one. They remain in the calling wherewith they are called. The Jew who is converted to the Lord, has no need to put on the foreskin, while the Greek who comes to faith, does not have to be circumcised. The servant remains a

servant, even though he is the lord's freeman. He who was free remains free, although he is Christ's servant. The unbelieving man is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.

All natural ordinances remain; they are not cast down but recreated by the Spirit. For the kingdom of heaven is not food and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4: 4). Believers have only to think of, 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report' (Phi]. 4: 8). It remains that everything is theirs, for they are Christ's and Christ is God's.

That is why godliness is profitable for all things, not only for the life to come, but also for the present life. When we look for the kingdom of God and its righteousness, all the other things are given us. The best Christian is the best citizen. With his confession he is not outside or above natural life. He takes his confession with him into the world, and everywhere he plants the banner of the cross. The gospel of Christ is a joyous message for all creatures, for mind and heart, for body and soul, for family and society, for science and the arts. For it delivers from guilt and redeems from death. It is a power of God unto salvation, for everyone who believes.

7. THE DUTY TO CONFESS

*For ye are bought with a price:
therefore glorify God in your body,
and in your spirit which are God's.
1 Cor. 6 20.*

The root and origin of the confession are from the heart, but confessing itself is a matter of the mouth, a work of the lips. However, many think that the latter is an addition, in any case, a good work that is superfluous. And they are happy to defend their meaning, for, as they say, concerning our personal faith in Christ and the salvation of the soul, the heart is important, not what we say. Silently confessing and witnessing in the quiet is of more value and bears richer fruit than speaking great words and the use of pious terms. Jesus Himself said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven" (Matt. 7: 21). It is better to confess God in the inner room, than to do so in public, and cast your pearls before swine. For the kingdom of heaven is not of this world, it does not come with observation, it is within us. Man looks at the outside, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Over against the great lie which often dominates confessing with the mouth, the reminder of the necessity of a converted heart is wholly in its place. The confession of the mouth is often rife with hypocrisy. There is a so-called orthodoxy, which seeks to be justified before the Lord, by an outward and intellectual acceptance of the doctrine. We will not be saved by works, but neither by doctrine, which also looks down at the multitude, that does not know the law, and is unfruitful in the works of mercy and charity. That is why it is our duty and calling, over against a false orthodoxy, to emphasize uprightness before the face of the Lord. For "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight" (Prov. 12: 22). The lord is not pleased in a people that honors Him with their lips, but their heart is far from Him. The Lord requires the heart of men in the first place, for from it are the issues of life. It is not for the Christian to speak great words, but to do great things for and with the Lord.

But this does not mean that Holy Scripture does not attach great value to the witness of the lips and the confession of the mouth. There is no book that exposes all hypocrisy like Scripture, and at the same time speaks so highly of the significance of the word and the power of testimony.

Speaking is nothing less than one of God's essential attributes, His eternal, unchangeable work. Speaking, the Father generates from eternity from His Being, the Son, Who is the Word, the spoken and at the same time the speaking Word, which was in the beginning with God, which was God. Speaking in and through that Word, the Lord creates all things from nothing, and at the same time He maintains, rules, recreates and renews them. His

Word is action, His Word is power. He speaks and it is, He commands and it stands fast. He calls things, that are not, as though they were.

In this respect also, man is created after the image of God. He received from His Creator not only mind and heart, but also the tongue and language, and is therefore called upon, not only to think and feel, but also to speak and witness. His speaking must be praise, a proclamation of God's mighty works. That is how the angels praise Him, when they, standing before the throne, call out, the one to the other: holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is filled with His glory! That is how the saved praise Him when they sing 'the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?" (Rev. 15: 3, 4). Yes, repeatedly God's creatures are by Scripture called upon to praise the name of the Lord. "Bless the Lord all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure! Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion! Bless the Lord, O my soul" (Ps. 103: 21, 22).

Men, who received the word to utter his thoughts, may not be silent in the midst of those praising and God glorifying creatures. He cannot be silent. Even his silence is counted for consent. Neutrality for the heart, as for the mouth, is impossible. Not to confess Christ, is to deny Him. Silence will shortly turn into doubt, unbelief and enmity "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it defiles the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire of hell. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God" (James 3).

That is why in re-creation, the Lord will have men speak and proclaim His virtues. God redeems the tongue not less than the heart, language as well as thought. Men's soul and body are both liberated, and his tongue is loosened to speak. He fills the mouth with laughing and the lips with singing. Thought and word belong together and cannot be separated. The word is the finished thought that has become independent and free. The thoughts within men are as it were the branches, and the words are the blossoms, which through the lips and mouth come to fruition. Also of these fruits of the lips, consisting of the sacrifices of praise, God is the Creator.

That is why the godly in the Old Testament pray: Lord, open my lips, so shall my mouth proclaim thy praises. Let my mouth be filled with Thy praise, all the day with Thy glory. When the lord sends forth His Spirit, Moses' prayer, that all the people may be prophets, is heard. Then sons and daughters, old people and servants begin to prophecy, each in his own tongue proclaims the mighty works of God. At such a time silence is impossible, the mouth runs over with the things of the heart. I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation. I shall praise thee with all my heart. I shall sing psalms to thy praise, O, most high; I shall tell

of all thy wonders. I shall praise Him among the nations, I shall praise Him at all times; His praise shall be in my mouth continually. I shall praise Him evermore.

The Lord values the fruit of the lips so much, that over against enemies that dishonor His name, He ordains strength from the mouth of sucklings and babes, Ps. 8: 2. When the disciples are silent, the stones almost call out. The Lord demands all of our lives for His service. He wants men to love Him with heart and mind, with mouth and tongue and all their strength. When men because of sin withholds honor from the Lord, it is He Himself Who through Christ gathers a Church, which proclaims the virtues of Him, Who called her from darkness into His marvellous light. It is God Himself Who obliges and calls, enables and makes His people willing. He urges them by His Spirit, for the Spirit leads them into all truth, makes them confess Jesus as Lord, testifies in them of their adoption to children and makes them call out: Abba Father. Because they are bought for a price, the blood of the Son of God, they are called to glorify God with body and soul which are God's.

It is the duty of every believer to confess the name of the Lord. In confessing with the mouth it becomes clear whether we are serious about it, whether the service of the Lord means more to us than the friendship of the world. It is the crown upon God's work in us. In confessing by the mouth, returns again to God, what through grace and love He worked in our hearts. It is no hard duty, no command difficult to follow up, but a service of love, a blessed privilege, a great honor. For the children of man there is nothing more glorious, than to be able to confess God and proclaim His praises.

It is the privilege of the individual believer, but also of the congregation as a whole. God's people believe and therefore they speak. The congregation confesses all through the ages. To enemy and friend she gives a reason for the hope that is within her. Her witness is as the voice of many waters. She speaks about her faith in assemblies and other religious duties, her prayers and songs, in her works of mercy and gifts of love. She is, and cannot be anything but a confessing congregation.

When the Church makes confession of her faith, it would be very one-sided to think only of the written expression of that faith. It is certain that because of errors, written confessions are needed. Even when the Church comes to the world with its written confessions, that too is a glorious witness of her faith.

The right of the congregation to confess its faith in writing, in order to be able to maintain its purity, has been denied from several sides, and we think altogether without basis. For with a written confession she does not curtail the Word of God in any way, but only develops the content of the Word, after the measure of faith and knowledge, that was given her at certain times. The authority of the Word is not at all affected, but an attempt is

made to maintain the truth, that Scripture shall not be given into the hands of some who would use it to please self. With her written confessions she does not bind the consciences, but makes them free from the repeatedly returning errors of men, and strives to lead every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Development is not cut off, but an attempt is made to keep and lead in the right track, a way that builds up and does not destroy. The Church places the confession not beside, much less above Scripture. Scripture is, and remains the only, perfect, sufficient rule of faith and life.

Is a Church without a written confession, she would always, as long and in as far she is Church, have a confession. But when she describes her faith, she has the advantage, that the truth, in as far as by her acknowledged, can be delivered from generation to generation and better maintained against all error and heresy. The confession of the Church has great educational value. The individual, growing up in the Church, takes these in, freely and independently. Like a child in all areas gradually entering into the labours of former generations, so it identifies itself from year to year with the spiritual inheritance of the fathers.

No one begins anew. We all stand on the shoulders of those that went before. Everyone lives off the treasures gathered by the forefathers. Only to us comes the demand, with great effort to make into our own possession, whatever we inherited from the fathers. That is how the child accepts the confession of the Church, in order that this confession may become the free and independent expression of its personal faith.

But therefore, no matter how important the written confession may be, it may never be separated from the cohesion with all the testimonies and acts, wherewith the congregation is distinct from the world and places itself against the world. It is not a document that binds us because of its age. it bears no authority laid upon us by the distant past. But she is, with all other acts, from moment to moment inspired by the faith of the congregation, and accompanies her from generation to generation. At the present it is still our confession, not because it was framed by the Fathers and by them delivered to us, but because, like it was for them in another age the most pure expression of God's truth, so for us it is the most beautiful demonstration of the treasures of salvation, which are given us by God in Christ.

Brought up from our earliest days with the confession of the Church, we now confess therein our own faith.

8. RESISTING THE CONFESSION

*But I certify you, brethren,
that the gospel which was preached of
me is not after man.
Gal. 1: 11.*

Confessing is against flesh and blood, against the world and Satan. By nature, each man is an enemy of the preaching of the cross of Jesus Christ. It may seem strange to the shallow minded person, that there has always been so much resistance against the gospel. For it is a joyful message for all creatures; it speaks of nothing but grace, peace and salvation; it demands nothing, but gives everything. Yet, it finds enmity and resistance all over; it is an offense to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek. It may be for man, it is not after man. It is of Divine origin and therefore not in accordance with the thoughts and desires of men. Mind and heart, desire and will, soul and body are against the gospel of Christ. In their resistance men are supported by the world and the whole kingdom of darkness.

There certainly is a difference in circumstances. In days of peace and quiet, it is less serious, then when the congregation is oppressed and persecuted by the world. We need more courage to confess Christ, in an ungodly environment of sinners and mockers, than in the circle of relatives and friends, who together confess the truth. It needs a more courageous faith, not to be ashamed of the cross of Christ, when surrounded by the great and learned, than in the midst of common people in a distant village.

But in principle the resistance is the same all over. For flesh, the world and Satan are always the same, and the greatest and strongest enemy that resists the confession of Christ, lives in our own heart. The forms in which the enemy operates may be different, but confessing the name of Christ always demands that we deny self and bear His cross. Whoever, from which circle he may come, when he will follow Jesus, must submit to insult and contempt.

Even when faith is worked in the heart, and urges to confessing, there still be can so much that keeps the lips closed, and keeps us from boldly confessing the name of Jesus!

Look at Peter, who in a hour of danger denies his Master, and later in Antioch from fear for the brethren of the circumcision turns into a hypocrite. Yet, Peter was first among the apostles, who for his glorious and courageous confession that Jesus was Messiah, received the name of Rock. He felt so close to Jesus, had such fervent love for the Master, that he would die for the Lord, and did not think it possible he would ever deny his Lord. When

Peter could fall and did fall, who shall remain standing? And who does not need the warning: let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

There are many examples in the history of the Christian Church, where we read of steadfast martyrs, but we also read of the thousands, who denied the faith in the hour of temptation. When oppression and persecution come for the sake of the Word, those, who at first heard the Word with joy, but had no root in themselves, are instantly offended, and are but for a time.

There are so many dangers to which the believer is exposed, so many rocks at which he can suffer shipwreck. The desire of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, fear to lose name and honor, good and blood, work together to draw Christ's disciple away from the certainty of faith. Among all these temptations, a so-called sense of false shame could be the most severe of all. For even when oppressions and persecutions are past, it continues to slay its thousands and ten thousands. Among the low and mighty, this sense of false shame kept many from confessing the name of the Lord.

There is something very humiliating in the thought, that basically, in our hearts, we are ashamed to confess Jesus. For He was a man going through the country, doing good and blessing men; Who was meek and lowly of heart; Who being innocent, died on the cross, being condemned by those who were His enemies. There must be something out of order with us, we must be spiritually sick, when we are ashamed for such a Man, and are afraid to take His name on our lips.

Shame in general is an unpleasant feeling, which connects itself with some act in us, as if the esteem from others for us becomes less. It can be something positive. When Adam after he sinned is ashamed because he trespassed the commandment, he gives evidence that he sees his act as evil and is aware that he fell. To be ashamed is not always a fruit of faith, it is also known by the natural man, and is evidence that men did not become animal or devil when he fell. He is still man, and a feeling of dignity and honour remains with him.

But beside much that is true and good, there is also a false sense of shame. It occurs when we feel embarrassed about something, which is good in itself, but can lower us in the esteem of others. We are often ashamed for the good impressions that are left from the preaching of the gospel; about the accusations of our conscience; about the sorrow that we feel after a sin committed; about emotions to which we are subject at certain times. We are afraid that others knowing about this, will despise us, and make fun of us; that we will lose the name of being courageous and strong people.

It is this sense of false shame, which often surprises us with respect to the gospel of the cross. We are ashamed of the congregation, which consists not of many nobles, not many wise. We are ashamed of the Bible, which is so different and is contested by men of science and culture. We are ashamed of Christ, Who claimed to be God's only Son, the anointed of the Father. We are ashamed of His cross, which was an offense to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek. We are ashamed of God's special revelation, which discovers us to ourselves, and shows us in our spiritual poverty.

We are also afraid when taking the side of Christ, we will lose our name and honour as men and become subject to insult and mockery, libel and oppression. We fear, that by confessing Christ, our dignity, our personality, our being human will suffer harm.

Even a sense of false shame has the dark underground, that at one time we were created in God's image and must uphold a certain honour and status. No one is indifferent to the esteem of self and of others, because in his deepest fall, man remains man, that is, he still retains the image and likeness of God.

But under the influence of sin this sense works the wrong way. For it is true indeed when we give ourselves to Christ for our salvation, the esteem of ourselves and that of others will lessen and we will lose our name and honour by men. But such esteem is nothing but delusion, and such honour and delusion are but imagined. For by nature we see ourselves as rich and enriched, having need of nothing. But when we embrace the gospel, we see that we are poor and blind and naked.

That is how the honour of men is for the greatest part nothing but ignorance and show. The art of associating with man consists in hiding our real being, so they form a judgment about our person, according to our outward, acquired behaviour. God is true, but all men are liars. Man just does not happen to speak lies, but he lives a lie; he is untrue in his very existence. Appearance and substance, being and revelation, inward and outward do contrast each other. While at times the mouth flows over with love and the countenance shows nothing but friendship, from the heart of men proceed evil surmisings, murders, fornication, adultery, theft, false witness, slanders. A saint, who knew the inner man and could see the bottom of the heart, would flee from him, horror stricken. And unforgettable is the love of Christ, Who knew man, but in spite of this looked for him and gave Himself over into death for him.

That is how we live for ourselves and others in a delusion and imagination. Well considered, we abandon nothing, when we believe in Christ, for we have nothing. We only abandon the delusion that we are rich and

enriched, that we have need of nothing. The greatest misery of sin is not that we are blind, but being blind we think that we see. Sin is guilt and shame and stain, but it also is foolishness and lack of wisdom.

That delusion is disturbed in us by the Word of the Lord. If we would be saved by Christ we must do away with that delusion. For to become a Christian is to esteem the judgment of others for nothing, accepting the judgment of God upon ourselves and hope in His grace. To confess Christ includes, that we lose ourselves and all that is ours, our name and our honour, our good and blood, our soul and our life. It is exactly this that is resisted by a sense of false shame. The desire to apparent self preservation, urges and drives men to resist the gospel with all his strength.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8: 7). The natural man does not understand the things of God's Spirit, and he does not understand, that denial of self is the only way to true self-preservation.

9. THE POWER TO CONFESS

*Wherefore I give you to understand,
that no man speaking by the Spirit of God
calleth Jesus accursed:
and that no man can say
that Jesus is the Lord,
but by the Holy Ghost.
1 Cor. 12: 3.*

What is impossible with man, is possible with God. Our sufficiency is from Him. An upright confession comes from the heart, which is God's gift, and fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit. Had Christ finished everything, it would have been without fruit, had He not sent His Holy Spirit Who leads into all truth, after He ascended into heaven. For all the world stands over against Christ and loves darkness rather than light. But the Holy Spirit came to witness of Christ in the midst of the world. He is the only, but at the same time the Almighty witness of Christ. All others scorn Him, but the Holy Spirit glorifies Him. All others condemn Christ, but the Holy Spirit justifies Him. All others reject Christ, but the Holy Spirit takes His side and pleads His cause in man's conscience. All others call Christ accursed, but the Holy Spirit says, that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He witnesses of Christ in the Word, and by prophets and apostles He wrote that down in a book. He witnesses of Christ in a world, which He reproveth of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He witnesses of Christ in the congregation, who confesses Him as her Lord and her God. He witnesses of Christ in the heart of every believer, who thereby knows himself to be a child of God and calls, "Abba Father". Nothing, and no one is able to stand up against that witness of the Spirit. As soon as He couples His Almighty power with the word, the hardest heart is broken, the most daring mouth is stopped. All our thoughts and considerations mean nothing. No one, speaking by the Holy Ghost calls Christ accursed, and everyone who receives the Spirit confesses Him as his Saviour and Lord.

But then, when faith is planted in the heart, the working of the Spirit, which makes faith change into word and deed, is needed in all the many temptations. For it is God, Who not only works in us to will, but also to work after His good pleasure. From Him is the strength to believe and the courage to confess.

That is why David prayed, that God would not take His Spirit from him, but renew a right spirit within him. When Peter and John stood before the high council, and being let go, they told their experiences to the brethren, and said, "Now Lord behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Acts 4: 29). When they finished praying the place was shaken, and they were all filled with the

Holy Ghost and spake the Word with boldness. Even Paul requested the congregation to pray for him, that the word should be given him in the opening of his mouth with boldness, to make known the mystery of the gospel.

This boldness to speak and testify is in the first place indispensable for the preacher and furthermore for all believers. It is a fearless testimony to each and all, of God's truth in Christ. It is based on the blessed awareness that our guilt has been taken away, boldness to come before the throne of grace, and to make known all our desires before Him. It is strengthened in us by the many examples of courageous and steadfast confessions that we find in Scripture and history.

There is first of all the example of Christ. In Himself He was the Word, the Truth, the complete Revelation of God. He came to a world that lay in sin and served the lie. Only His appearance, without more, was a protest that must awake the hate and enmity of the world. The world could not suffer Jesus. His existence was their condemnation. That is why the world attempted the utmost to destroy Jesus. But Jesus remained faithful to the Father and obeyed Him unto the death of the cross. He resisted all temptation, He endured all enmity, before the Jewish council He held up His Divine Sonship, and under Pontius Pilate He confessed a good confession. That is how He showed Himself to be the true and faithful witness, the apostle and High priest of our confession, Who left us an example, that we should follow in His steps.

There is furthermore an innumerable company of angels, to whose fellowship believers came in Christ Jesus. They too encourage us to persevere. For they accompanied Christ in all His ways and ascended and descended on the Son of man all the days that He walked here on the earth.

They followed the congregation on its way throughout the world, and are sent out to minister to those who shall inherit salvation. They are desirous to look into the mysteries of salvation and rejoice in every sinner that repents. In the Lord's prayer they are set for our examples for their perfect obedience, and must through us be made known with the manifold wisdom of God.

There is also the great cloud of witnesses around us, A the Church triumphant, who by their example encourage us to follow them. Some of them were afflicted, suffered bands and prison. But they were not ashamed to confess a good confession and persevered unto the end. And their number is multiplied daily. A multitude that no one can number form the spirits of just men made perfect, taken up in heaven, who are our leaders and examples of a true confession of the Lord Jesus.

There is finally the church militant on earth, that is our support by holding on to the immovable confession of hope. It has been said, and truly so, that although many around us fall away, the Christian's faith must be so

steadfast, that he remains immovable. But in general, man is not destined for such loneliness. The Lord will grant grace, that although forsaken by others, we will run our race rejoicing. But as a rule He keeps us standing in and through the communion of the saints. So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. As such all believers have communion with the Lord Christ, of all His treasures and gifts, and we all must use our gifts willingly and joyfully for the other members.

So the confessors of Christ are never alone. They may at certain times and in certain places feel lonely and forsaken. But even then it appears that there are the seven thousand that with them did not bow the knee for Baal. And when their souls are oppressed and they look at all the earth, throughout the ages, they are members of a fellowship, who from the beginning of the world unto the end thereof are gathered, protected and kept from all generations, in the unity of faith, by the Son of God. The congregation of Christ is the core of humanity, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Whoever is a living member of that Church, counts the best and most noble of our race, prophets and apostles, Church fathers, martyrs and reformers, among his brothers and sisters. And more than all is the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.

There is no reason in our fatherland, to be discouraged and withdraw from the world. For Christians are never and nowhere a sect, even though they are contradicted, at least they are not like that in Holland, for this nation was born out of the Reformation. Christianity here is truly national (early 20th Century, Tr.), and the confessors of the Reformed religion are no strangers and foreigners, but citizens, children of the fathers, who fought with good and blood for the truth.

When we think of all these things, we must be truly faithful in confessing and holy conversation! A strong faith is needed to bear up when people spake evil of us for the sake of the gospel, although they speak lies. The influence of the masses is like a charm cast on the individual. The danger is always great to submit to the majority.

On the other hand, believers may be encouraged by the thought that together they came to Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the general assembly of the first born, who are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and the spirits of men made perfect, and to the Mediator of the New Covenant.

So we have nothing to be afraid of, for those that are with us, are more than those that are with them.

10. THE WAGES FOR CONFESSING A GOOD CONFESSION

*Whosoever therefore shall confess
me before men, him will I confess
before my Father which is in heaven.
Matt. 10: 32.*

A reward is promised to those who confess the Lord's name, a reward that is great in heaven. Scripture speaks repeatedly of a reward that shall be given to believers when Christ returns from heaven. It is granted as compensation for what the disciples was denied, suffered, or the good works of love and mercy they performed for the sake of Christ. Scripture does not hesitate, by reflecting on these wages, to urge believers to persevere in their confession. Scripture is not concerned that hereby a false principle is brought into practical godliness, that will give occasion to serve God for happiness and heavenly salvation.

Scripture speaks repeatedly of wages, but is averse of all service for wages. Payment that awaits the faithful servant, is no obligation, is no right by nature, is not paying a debt for work that is done. Scripture knows nothing about that kind of wages, and by the relationship in which she places the creature to its Creator, she cuts it off by the roots. He who does everything that is commanded, is still an unprofitable servant. Man is, and has nothing of himself, and therefore can give nothing to God on Whom he depends. He can give nothing, because he must receive everything. He is no party over against God, who has inalienable rights, and in the form of a contract can ask wages for work that he does.

God from His side has freely promised, that all who walk in His ways He will richly crown with gifts of His favour. To that He obligated Himself in the first covenant, when He opened the way to eternal life and heaven's salvation, to all those who obey His commandments. These are no wages as payment for work that is done, for what comparison is there between the relative easy and in itself obligated keeping of the Lord's commandments and the free gift of eternal life in communion with God?

He also obligates Himself in the covenant of grace, to grant eternal life to all who believe in Christ. But for wages is here in the true sense of the word, even less a place. For believing is nothing but accepting the gift of grace, which appeared in Christ, and merits no more than taking hold of the rope by one who is in danger of drowning. But God is so good to grant faith, not for its own sake, but for Christ's sake, forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, and by glory awaiting the believer, encourages them to persevere.

So both are true, on the one hand all benefits of the covenant are secured before any work, and is bound only to faith, and on the other hand we are seriously urged to do good works, as if that is the way in which these benefits are received. Believers are elect from eternity and must make their calling and election sure. By faith they are

partakers of life eternal and yet at one time for denying self, shall receive wages from the Father's hand. They are branches of the Vine and without Christ they can do nothing, yet they are admonished to abide in Him, in His Word, in His love. They are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God ordained, yet they must walk in them. They are holy, and yet, must sanctify themselves from day to day. They crucified the flesh with its lusts, and yet, are called upon to mortify their members that are here on earth. They are certain of their salvation, for God's election cannot be changed, His calling is without repentance, His covenant immovable, His promises Yea and Amen. Yet they are continuously urged to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, to be faithful unto death and to persevere unto the end.

Holy Scripture promotes no passive, but a working, active Christianity. Scripture wants the believer to increase; that they obtain what they inherited; that more and more they make it their possession, what in Christ they own. That is how what is seen as an unmerited gift, can be introduced as wages. It can be called wages, because faith and persevering faith is the only way whereby believers may become full partakers of the benefits, which Christ, by pure grace gives them. Without sanctification no one shall see the Lord.

By those wages we can understand heavenly salvation itself, but also the different degrees of glory, which shall be given to believers according to their works. As it is on earth, so shall it be in heaven. There is diversity in unity. Another is the glory of the sun, and another the glory of the moon, and another is the glory of the stars; for the one star differs in glory from another star. In the house of the Father, where all God's children go, are many mansions. According to their faithfulness, the congregations receive their own crown from the King of the Church. For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ, and everyone shall receive according to what he has done, be it good or evil.

Then the separation between man and man will be complete. With Christ's first coming, yes, with the very first announcement of the promise of His coming, this crisis, this judgment began in the world. Christ came to the rise and fall of many. He did not come to bring peace on the earth, but the sword, to make a man rise up against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. He compels everybody to choose for Him or against Him. His Word is judge of the thoughts of the heart. His gospel is a savour of life, or a savour of death unto death. That separation shall come to an end at the day of His coming, when everything shall be revealed before the judgment seat. For the Father gave all judgment to the Son, for He is the Son of man.

The lot of every person is then determined, whether Christ will acknowledge him for His own and confess him before His Father, in heaven. Our salvation depends wholly upon His public confession.

Christ was not ashamed of us at His incarnation. He had many reasons to be ashamed of us. For He was the firstborn of the Father, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, Who thought it not robbery to be equal with the Father. And we were loaded with sins, unclean from the head to the feet, and subject to condemnation. Yet, He was not ashamed to call us His brethren, not before God, neither before the holy angels. He took our flesh and blood, our nature, and became like one of us, sin excepted. Even God was not ashamed to be called our God in Christ.

And so He shall not be ashamed of us in the day of His coming. When He comes again it will not be as servant, but as Lord, not to suffer, but to be glorified, not to a cross but to a crown. But He shall not be ashamed of us. For He Who ascended far above the heavens, is the same Who descended in the lower parts of the earth. He that judges, is the Son of man, Who came at one time, to seek and save that which was lost, Hallelujah! Our Judge is our Saviour, Who never forgets nor leaves His own. He who shall confess Me before men, He testifies, Him I will also confess before My Father, Who is in heaven.

Openly, in view of the whole world, in the ears of all creatures, He shall speak for them. However despised they were here on earth, Christ shall take their name upon His lips, and speak in the ears of all, that they are His and no power on earth or in hell can take them from Him.

And as Christ says, so shall it be. His Word shall have power in all of creation. His confession is valid for all creatures. No one shall be able to criticize these Words. His judgment is above all criticism and shall be high above the judgment of men and devils. Heaven and earth, hell and all creatures shall never be able to change it.

More than this - the Father shall rest in this work of His Son. As God saw, after He created that what He made, see it was very good, so shall He with Divine good pleasure on the end of days, look down at the great work of redemption, that Christ accomplished. When the Church without spot or wrinkle is presented before Him and the finished Kingdom shall be given into His hands, than shall the Father take all those redeemed by the Son to be His children, they shall partake of His fellowship and rejoice in seeing His glorious face.

The public confession by Christ, of the believers, before His Father Who is in heaven, shall be warrant for their eternal blessedness and glory.

11. THE TRIUMPH OF CONFESSING

*Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him,
and given him a name which is above every name:
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
of things in heaven, and things in earth,
and things under the earth;
And that every tongue should confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Phil. 2: 9-11.*

Deep in his heart man hides the hope that truth shall at one time gain the upperhand, and good shall triumph over evil. All religions cherish that expectation and speak of a blessing, which the kingdom of light, on the end of the age shall gain over the kingdom of darkness. All philosophical systems paint an ideal situation, in which humanity surrounded by the pure air of the future and its clear sunshine, shall live in peace and joy, true, free and good. All people seek for paradise, to which innocence returns and prosperity shall be the portion of all. Even the most unbelieving think of this sweet hope and dream of a kingdom of the true, good and beautiful, that after shorter or longer time will be their portion.

But only, there is no ground for that hope. For on what ground can we believe on the triumph of truth and righteousness, when there is no God of truth and righteousness, and no Christ, anointed by the Father, to institute the kingdom and create a new heaven and a new earth? The gods of the heathen are the work of the hands of men. The future hope of philosophy is imagination of the human mind: and the true, good and beautiful are pleasant sounds, but no powers that are able to bring themselves to rule all people.

To expect salvation here, it is necessary to build on men and to expect from them, that they slowly and gradually will appreciate truth and exercise virtue. Because of this it is very unlikely that this hope will be realised. For certainly, there is progress in material prosperity, expansion of men's rule over nature, its powers render more charm to everyday living.

But as all acknowledge, material progress is not equivalent to moral progress. Our age looks down on all that went before, yet justice is trodden under foot, truth fails in the streets, greed and covetousness are on the increase, and there are no limits to glorifying the powers. Civilization, science and the arts are willing to serve brute force. On the one hand culture is satiated, but there is misery and complaint on the other hand. It seems that man is further removed from paradise than ever before.

In any case, history has clearly proven, that we may not expect anything from human efforts, and the immanent self development of humanity in the world. When there is nothing else, there only is room for discouragement

and fearful doubt. To be without God and Christ in this world, is to be without hope in the world. Our salvation is from above.

Again, it is in the spiritual as it is in the natural. Like the earth receives its light and air, its rain and sunshine, its increase and fruitfulness from above, so also for its spiritual life, mankind depends on the world of invisible and eternal goods, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God.

That is why He, Who is the light, the life of the world, descended from above. From there He gathers, keeps and protects His Church, which is His body. For He is exalted to be the Head on the Father's right hand, and He will fill all things with Himself, and rule as King until all His enemies are laid at His footstool.

And so He will at one time come down from heaven. His second coming is included in the first, and of necessity at its time flow forth from it. It is not just an appendage, but is inseparably connected with it. For the work of Christ is to save; not just making salvation possible, but granting salvation itself, completely and forever.

But His work was not finished with just obtaining salvation on earth. How could a Christ, Who only died for us and not lived and prayed for us and not appeared for good before God's countenance for us, be to our profit? But He Who descended is the same, Who ascended far above the heavens, that He should fill all things. He applies what He obtained. What He began, He will finish. He does not rest, may not rest, before He completely saves His people, and renews heaven and earth.

Maranatha, the Lord is coming. He comes again, first of all, for His own sake. His name, His office, His honour are at stake. He comes again to show to all the world, that He is the true, the perfect Saviour; that He saves, not only in name but in deed and truth; that He grants eternal life to all that are given Him of the Father; that no one plucked them out of His hand, or will do so; that He is the same yesterday, today and forevermore.

He comes again, to do vengeance with flaming fire over all those, who know not God and are disobedient to the gospel. But also to be glorified in His saints; to be acknowledged and honoured by all creatures as the only true Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So the history of the world will end in union of confessing. At one time angels and devils, the righteous and the ungodly shall acknowledge with one voice that Christ is God's only Son, and therefore heir of all things. At that time every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

At the present time this confession can be spoken against and be resisted. For we are looking at a world that contains invisible things. To see its truths, we need a faith that is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. We walk by faith, not by sight. The world that only reckons with things that can be seen, can contradict the congregation, deem its faith foolishness, and sees her hope for a dream. Even the appearance is against us. For from the day that the fathers fell asleep, things remain as they were from the creation, and mockers ask the question, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

But it will change, Maranatha. In a vision John saw "Heaven opened, and see, a white horse, and he who sat upon him was named Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and makes war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. And He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written: KING of KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19: 11- 15).

When Christ shall appear in glory, no one will be able to resist Him. All eyes shall see Him, also those who pierced Him. They shall see Him with their own natural eyes, and no unbelief, no doubt shall be possible. Then all creatures must acknowledge, that Christ is Lord. They must acknowledge it, if not voluntary, they will be pressed into acknowledging it, if not willing, than unwilling. From the throne in the midst of heaven, through all creation, into the depths of the abyss, only one voice will be heard: Christ the Lord! And all creatures together, shall bow the knee for Him, Who was deeply humiliated and died on a cross, but is also highly exalted and is set on the throne on the right-hand of the Father.

What a future, what a spectacle! All creation on its knees before Jesus! And on all lips, the ever repeating, but all embracing, now by many despised, but then by all acknowledged confession, that Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment. And He Who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, Will not blot out the name of that believer from the book of life, but will confess his name before the Father, and before His angels.

A Brief Biography

Born in 1854, Herman Bavinck was the son of Jan Bavinck, a minister of the Afscheding (Seceded) churches in the Netherlands. He, much to the surprise of his family, chose to study at the modernist University of Leiden, where he composed his doctoral thesis on the ethics of Ulrich Zwingli. However, this time at Leiden did not subvert Bavinck's Reformed foundations. He went on to become a professor at the seminary of the Seceded Churches in Kampen and would later join Abraham Kuyper at the Free University of Amsterdam. Bavinck's field was dogmatics and he made several important written contributions in this area, the most noteworthy of which was his four volume Gereformeerde Dogmatiek (Reformed Dogmatics, presently being translated into English). Bavinck introduced the notion of organic inspiration of the Scriptures and also developed a solution to the infra/supralapsarian conundrum. Although Bavinck passed on in 1921, he remains a powerful force in Reformed theology. Several important Reformed theologians owe large debts to him, including Cornelius VanTil and Louis Berkhof.