

Pitching Away from Sodom: The Reformed Life of Antithesis (2)

Last time, we established that if we as Reformed believers—especially Reformed young people—in the 21st century would avoid the sin of Lot of pitching away from the church and toward Sodom, we must follow the exact command of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions to live antithetically. In this article, we consider the demands that this calling lays upon us. Because for us, as the church of Jesus Christ of the New Testament, the antithesis of spiritual separation and warfare commanded by the call “Come out of her, my people” has several very important, indeed *vital*, demands for our lives.

In the first place, the antithesis demands that the Reformed believer is a member of a true, instituted church of Jesus Christ. The Belgic Confession, which is binding upon every Protestant Reformed church member, lays out clearly the marks distinguishing the true from the false church: “if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin.”^[5] Article 28 of the Belgic Confession draws the clear, unmistakable, urgent line of the antithesis: “It is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God has established it.”^[6] The two-fold, antithetical calling laid upon believers is to forsake all persons who do not and refuse to belong to the true, instituted church of Christ displaying the marks of the pure preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline, and to join themselves in membership to that church, wherever it might be located in the world. This joining of the believer to the true church is demanded of the believer regardless of hardship or the circumstances of life, yes “even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it [as they were in the perilous days when Guido de Bres authored the Confession], yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment.”^[7]

In his recent book *Bound to Join: Letters on Church Membership*, Prof. David J. Engelsma notes that “Article 28 [of the Belgic Confession] specifies some extreme hardships possibly attending obedience to [the command to the believer to join himself to a true church], including loss of one’s life.”^[8] He then remarks, “Earlier the article states that ‘all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it.’ One reason is that ‘out of it there is no salvation.’”^[9] He explains:

This is how important church membership is. The ground for this statement of the Belgic Confession is that the means of grace and salvation have been given by Christ to the instituted congregation and are enjoyed only by members within the church. Christ, the living, life-giving Christ, is in the church as the savior. As there was salvation only in the ark so there is salvation only in the instituted church.[\[10\]](#)

So vital is membership in the true church that God is pleased to save his people in the way of their membership within its embrace. If Israel dwelt in safety alone, then the New Testament church dwells in the safety of the true, instituted church of Jesus Christ alone.

In the second place, the antithesis means for the Reformed believer “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” This is the Holy Spirit’s command in II Corinthians 6:14a. The Reformed believer may not be yoked with the unbeliever in friendship. This is both impossible and forbidden. The believer, elect child of God in Jesus Christ and the unbeliever, enemy of Jehovah outside of Jesus Christ, are radically and irreconcilably different. No superficial interest in a common activity, whether basketball, tennis, painting, or biking around the Grand Rapids area, may serve as grounds for fellowship between the believer and the ungodly.

Especially may there not be fellowship to the extent that the believer and unbeliever are yoked together in the institution of marriage. How can this be? How can the elect, regenerated believer in Christ exist in a union of closest intimacy with one who is the sworn enemy and despiser of God completely apart from Christ, as a *picture* of Christ and the church and to the glory of Jehovah? Is it not utterly impossible? And yet some dream that they will pull it off. Arguing that the unbelieving party is “nice,” “has a sweet personality,” or “understands me as no one else does or can,” the believer rushes into an impossible union. Such a marriage as is built on these criteria—primarily and solely upon these criteria, as there is a place for their consideration—is built foolishly upon sand, and will almost certainly collapse at the first wave of trouble, like the house of the foolish man of Christ’s parable (Matthew 7:26, 27). If somehow the marriage weathers the storms which God in his providence sends upon the marriage (likely, this weathering of the storms will be accomplished only through the concession of the believer to the unbeliever), then—although the believer cannot be lost—he or she will go lost in his or her generations through the apostasy of the children of the marriage to the ways of the unbelieving parent. Did not God warn Israel that he would “visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me”? (Exodus 20:5b). Would we avoid God’s curse in our generations? Then let us commit ourselves to the antithesis in our friendship and especially in our marriage!

Make the true believers in Jesus Christ—who show their devotion to Christ chiefly in their membership in a true, instituted church of Christ—your true yokefellows!

If the antithesis between the members of the church of Jesus Christ and the inhabitants of the ungodly world is to be maintained, the antithesis must be taught to the covenant children of believers. Indeed, the instruction itself which is given to the children must be antithetical. This antithetical instruction begins in the Christian home, on father's knee and in mother's lap.

As an extension of the home, the good Protestant Reformed Christian school and its teachers also instruct the children of believers antithetically, setting forth the truth of creation in opposition to the theory of evolution and its daughter philosophy which is widely accepted in most Christian schools today, theistic evolution. The teachers explain the truth of God's providence in the light of rejection of deism or rule by an impersonal fate or chance. And they teach that the Reformed Christian's goal in his career is the glory of God and therefore is to be selected and ordered according to all the commandments of God, especially the fourth: "keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it...Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work" (Deuteronomy 5:12a, 13), as opposed to the world's self-serving and thankless pursuit of the most lucrative career or of the one that will give him large power over other men.

Finally, the church instructs the children antithetically in the catechism room. "Antithetical Catechism Instruction for the 21st Century" is the series title of three incredible installments by the Rev. Nathan J. Langerak appearing in *The Reformed Perspective* publication of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church. Rev. Langerak defines "antithetical catechism instruction" as:

The practice of teaching the truth to the children of the church in which in the course of setting forth the truth of the Word of God, the errors and lies that oppose that truth are clearly exposed and sharply condemned in order that the truth may stand out more clearly and victoriously and the people of God consecrated to God more and more in the love of the truth and the hatred of the lie.[\[11\]](#)

The covenant of sovereign particular grace established with the elect children of believers only, to the exclusion of the reprobate children of believers who are born only into the sphere of the covenant of the home, church, and good Christian school demands such antithetical catechism instruction. Therefore, "If the covenant demands it, then it must be in the catechism room regardless of whether or not some might find it distasteful, forbid it, or oppose it."[\[12\]](#)

Rev. Langerak emphasizes: "Antithetical instruction in the catechism room is the Reformed method."[\[13\]](#) Citing the Heidelberg Catechism's Q&A 80's condemnation

of the popish mass; LD 11 Q&A 30's rejection of those who seek salvation "of saints, themselves, or anywhere else" in addition to Christ; and the denouncement of good works as merit for salvation in LD 24, he writes that "the Heidelberg Catechism...is polemical and sharply polemical and was intended to be so, if its precise language is done justice."^[14] The Belgic Confession, ending as it does many articles with the words "therefore we reject the errors, therefore we reject the Anabaptists, therefore we detest the errors of such and such a sect,"^[15] is just as polemical as the Heidelberg Catechism. And the Canons of Dordt, "set forth the truth of the doctrines of grace with outstanding clarity and then proceed to demolish, reject, and damn as originating out of hell the errors of the Arminians."^[16]

The antithetical teaching of catechism which is the Reformed method requires an antithetical prophet, that is, one who antithetically instructs, admonishes, and warns the children of the church. The Reformed minister is required to be such an antithetical prophet if he is to be faithful to his office as a pastor in Christ's church. He must, as Herman Bavinck writes in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, "...oppose the thoughts of God to the thoughts of human beings, his truth to their lies, his wisdom to their folly."^[17]

In faithful, antithetical catechism instruction as setting forth the truths of the authoritative Word of God over against the lie, "the truth, as truth, has the authority to demand faith and a certain life of holiness."^[18] This life of holiness is to do justice and judgment. It is to *live out the antithesis in one's own life*:

To do justice and judgment refers to doing all things in harmony with the revealed will of God in his law with a right discernment of good and evil, *especially as this becomes practical in their rejection of friendship and fellowship with the ungodly, as the...history of Lot in Sodom makes plain.*^[19]

Would we avoid the sin of Lot? Would we desire that we and our children live as pitching away from Sodom and within the true, instituted church of the Lord Jesus? Then we must teach—and desire to be taught—antithetically, that we might live doing justice and judgment before the face of God!

Through the means of faithful, antithetical catechism instruction, indeed of faithful, antithetical instruction of all kinds, "God rids the church of strange children [cf. Psalm 144:11-15]...There is a vital relationship between God's ridding the church of strange children and the church's spiritual health and prosperity."^[20] Antithetical catechism instruction is God's means of hardening the reprobate children of the sphere of the covenant so that they reject the church, leave the church, and live in separation from the church. Just as God promised to Old Testament Israel that "Israel shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his

heavens shall drop down dew” (Deut. 33: 28), so he promises that in the way of antithetical instruction, he will prosper his church by ridding the church of the reprobate seed. “Indeed,” concludes Rev. Langerak, “*happy* is that people who is in such a case because Christ delivers the church by means of faithful, antithetical—faithful, antithetical catechism—instruction.”[\[21\]](#) To this end, we ought to pray, and pray fervently, “Lord, give us such antithetical instruction in our catechism rooms, in our schools, and in our homes, so that thy church might be mightily purified of the reprobate seed through the setting forth of thy truth and the condemnation of the lie, so that we might be enabled to rightly live before thee in justice and judgment, and by this glorify thy most worthy name. And give us men who will so teach!”

Next time, in our final article, we will emphasize the rejection by the Protestant Reformed Churches—and every member of the PRC—of the failed fiction of common grace as a way of life, a worldview, that drives out the antithesis and thus has failed in all places where it has ever been adopted.