

February 24, 2021

Sermon Analysis

Date Delivered:	November 15, 2020
Preached by:	Rev. Andrew Lanning
Text:	Jeremiah 23:4, 14
Sermon Title:	Shepherds to Feed You
Evaluated by:	Elder Dewey Engelsma Elder Bryan Van Baren Deacon Joseph Boverhof Deacon Keith Gritters Deacon Tyler Ophoff

Information:

1. On Sunday morning, November 15, 2020, Rev. Lanning preached a sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14, entitled "Shepherds to Feed You."
2. At the consistory meeting on Thursday, November 19, a motion was made to approve the sermon "Shepherds to Feed You," with the ground that the sermon was "faithful to the text and the doctrine was sound." This motion was tabled until the motion to bring in the church visitors was treated.
3. The consistory then discussed and adopted the motion, which had no grounds, to bring in the church visitors for help with the sermon "Shepherds to Feed You," "with regards to direction for going forward."

Points:

1. The consistory did not engage in the work it alone was called to do regarding the sermon. There was never a committee assigned to bring advice about the sermon, and therefore there was no meeting with a committee and Rev. Lanning to discuss the sermon. At no time was a study done of the sermon, holding the sermon up to the light of scripture and the creeds to see "whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11) and to make the judgment whether or not the sermon was "in truth, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13).
2. By not doing the work it alone was called to do, the elders abdicated their office, the distinct duty of which is "to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation" of the pastor (Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons).

To rectify this abdication of the office of elder and this despising of Jesus Christ, who equips the men He calls to the office, we now humbly submit to you, the dear flock of Jesus Christ, our judgment of this sermon. We do this by God's grace, in faithfulness to 1 Corinthians 2:13, by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

Jeremiah 23:4, 14: 4 And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. 14 I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

Listen to these first words: beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ. That's what this whole word proceeds from: beloved. Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah prophesied during the last five kings of the southern kingdom of Judah, which represented about the last forty years or so before Judah was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar and by Babylon. And conditions in Jerusalem especially, but in all of Judah, at that time were so spiritually awful it makes us shake to read about them. So spiritually awful. And we'll get into some of those conditions here this morning. But there was also this about Jerusalem and Judah, that if you looked around, it didn't look so bad. Things looked pretty much okay, because they had all of the formal, outward things that they had always had. Things looked like they always had in Jerusalem. There was a temple; there was worship in the temple; there were priests; there were prophets; there were kings; there were the people and their families who could come and keep the feasts, to bring their sacrifices; they could listen to the priests and hear the priests' instruction; the prophets were going through the land crying out, "Thus saith the Lord; thus said the Lord." That's the way it had always looked, and that's the way it still looked in Jerusalem. The form was there, but the spiritual condition was awful. In fact, if we had taken these prophecies of Jeremiah back in those days and we read this and then we looked around in Jerusalem, we might think, "Well, where is all of that, that Jeremiah is talking about?" And there were people in Jerusalem who said that to him. "Jeremiah, you keep telling us we're going to be judged. Where is it? Where is it? Where is your word that you spoke? We don't see it. We don't see it anywhere." The form was all there, but the spiritual condition was corrupt.

And that makes this word a perfect word for our congregation in these days, because the same, same situation characterizes the Protestant Reformed Churches. The form is there. It looks the same as it always did. We've got churches; we've got consistories; we've got ministers; we've got sermons; our families come to church on Sunday. The form is there, just like it always was in the days of our fathers and our fathers' fathers. But there's something wrong.

Rev. Lanning is issuing a warning against a danger that the people of God always face, namely, to worship God in outward form only. Warnings against this error occur frequently throughout the Holy Scriptures, represented here by a text from Isaiah and our Lord's reference of it in the book of Matthew: "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (Isa. 29:13-14). "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:7-9).

This warning is always in season, but especially so as the day of our Lord approaches.

There's something so dreadfully wrong in the Protestant Reformed Churches and in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. And what's so dreadfully wrong is the same thing that happened in the days of Jeremiah: the word of God was perverted, corrupted, twisted. And there are those who will look around and say, "Where is that? I don't recognize that. I don't see that. We've got everything we always did. Where is that corruption you're talking about?" But it's there.

Warnings about our own doctrinal error and laxity must be identified and rebuked before we point out the errors of others. This is commanded in Isaiah 58:1: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." The word of rebuke must come first against the church. "And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand" (Ezek. 3:4–6). This is further commanded in 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." This is also part of the vow Rev. Lanning took when he was ordained into the gospel ministry: "instructing, admonishing, comforting, and reproof, according to every one's need; preaching repentance towards God" (Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word).

This sharp warning is a word in season for the Protestant Reformed Churches. As churches we perverted, corrupted, and twisted the word of God. We did this by displacing the perfect work of Christ and by compromising the gospel of grace and justification by faith alone (see *2018 Acts of Synod*, 70). We did this by deposing an elder who was faithful in his duty to oversee the preaching of the word and who rightly protested a sermon teaching that our obedience is a way to the Father. We did this in our response to the controversy when we judged according to appearance and did not make righteous judgments, directly contrary to John 7:24.

Rev. Lanning contends that the word of God "was perverted." At the February 2018 meeting Classis East did, in fact, pervert, corrupt, and twist the word of God. They did so by declaring that the truth of unconditional fellowship with God as defended by the appellant was "heretical," and the lie against which the appellant was fighting was truth. That is fact, not a charge of sin.

There will be one of two responses to such a rebuke. The one response is a response of unbelief and is found in Zechariah 7:11: "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone." That response is also found in Acts 7:57, where the people, upon hearing the rebuke of Stephen, "cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord." The other response is the response of faith, a response which rends the heart and turns unto the Lord (Joel 2:13). The response of faith will bring forth the blessed fruit of repentance and sorrow: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. 7:11).

That was quite a word to the prophets of Jerusalem, because the prophets of Jerusalem made sure that they looked a lot different than those prophets up north in Samaria, in Israel. And God talks about those prophets too, in Samaria, in verse 13: "I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err." Things did not look the same as they always had in Israel.

Prophets were walking around prophesying in the name of Baal, building altars to Baal. That looked a lot different. But in Jerusalem—in Jerusalem the prophets were walking around wagging their tongues, saying, “He saith! He saith! The word of the Lord! The word of the Lord! Thus saith the Lord.” And that was awful of them. Terrible, terrible spiritual condition.

And we this morning must not think that because we don’t look like Rome that everything’s well. It’s not well. The word of God has been perverted! There is one calling for the congregation and the denomination: repent! Repent.

What was going on in Jerusalem? What was all of this? Verse 14, our text: “I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: *they commit adultery*.” Now that adultery that Jeremiah refers to here is very likely spiritual adultery: the spiritual adultery of false doctrine. There was also sexual adultery that was rampant in the church in those days. At every level, wherever you looked in the church, there was sexual adultery. But likely what Jeremiah is referring to here is spiritual adultery, because, as he says in verse 11—as God says in verse 11—he found this adultery *in his house* by the prophets and the priests. Something that the prophets and the priests did in the house of God was adultery. Now maybe that was sexual adultery. But what the prophets and priests did certainly in the house of God in those days was spiritual adultery—the spiritual adultery of false doctrine.

And that this was spiritual adultery is evident from the fact also that God says immediately after that, in verse 14, “they walk in lies.” They walk in lies. The prophets and the priests walk in lies. And then the rest of the chapter after that is about the things that the priests say and that the prophets say. And what the prophets and priests say is a perversion of the word of God, as the end of the chapter makes clear, so that this adultery is the spiritual adultery of false teachings that take the hearts of the people away from God their husband and unite the hearts of the people to some other things—whether it’s the prophets themselves, so that the prophets seek the glory and the accolades and the praise and the love of the people; or whether it’s some idol god. The prophets speak false doctrine to turn the heart of the people of God away from God. That’s adultery. That’s what God saw in the prophets of Jerusalem.

And it was lies. They walked in lies. The idea of walking in lies is not this, that somebody slipped up. A mistake happened. Somebody got confused. These lies were pervasive: they *walked in them*! Lies regarding the truth of Jehovah, as God says later in the passage: “Ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God.” Those lies were compelling. Lies are compelling. That’s the way lies work. That’s the way false doctrine works. Lies—false doctrine doesn’t come out and say, “Hey, I’m false doctrine.” Lies come out to deceive. Lies cloak themselves; they make themselves seem good. They try to trick you. That’s what lies do: they trick you. And false doctrine does that by using all the right words: God, Jesus, faith, justification, sovereignty, providence—all the right words. In fact, lies sometimes use the right words so often that you’d think that false doctrine was all about that true word that it used. That’s the way it was with Arminius. Arminius said, “Grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, grace” over and over and over, until the people thought, “All he teaches is grace. That’s all he’s interested in.” And he wasn’t! It was a lie! It tricked the people, because what he was really interested in was this: man’s will. Will. The will will save you. Lies work that way. False doctrine works that way. Later, later, after the lie has been exposed and condemned, then a generation can look back and say, “That was false. It’s so obvious to us that that was a lie, so obvious.” But when you’re in it, when you’re in the generation that’s battling it, it’s not obvious. And it’s not meant to be obvious. The lie works that way: it tricks you. That’s what the prophets of Jerusalem were doing: they were walking in lies. Those lies were the perversion of the word of God.

And that's the Protestant Reformed Churches: walking in lies and perverting the word of the Lord. Synod 2018 treated several sermons. Here are the lies, the tricky false doctrines that prophets in Jerusalem spoke and defended. Prophets in Jerusalem spoke and defended these lies. Quote, "We do good works so that we can *have our prayers answered*," end quote. Quote, "We do good works so that we can receive God's grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness. So that we can consciously and with awareness receive the grace and Holy Spirit of God," end quote. Quote, "There are requirements for him to fellowship, to approaching unto God, coming to the Father. Godliness...is the requirement according to Scripture for our prayers to be heard by God," end quote. Quote again, "We truly ask and are heard, and God receives our prayer and gives us—*because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight*," end quote. Quote, "Yet perhaps one would say, 'Well, how much, how little ought I meet these requirements? Do I need to meet these requirements perfectly before God will hear? Do I meet these requirements somewhat, or but a little, just a tiny bit and then God will hear my prayer?' The answer really is very simple. Very simple. If we but meet these requirements a little bit, by the grace of God, of course, and by God's grace working them in us—if we meet these requirements but a little, then we will enjoy a little of God's fellowship. That's the truth. If we meet these requirements a lot, then we will enjoy much of God's fellowship," end quote. Quote, "We look at our good works in the same way. Never of any value to make me be declared righteous before God, but always of help in finding and maintaining assurance that God has justified me through Christ and Christ alone," end quote.

Rev. Lanning does well to remind his congregation of the seriousness of these issues and how wicked it was that this theology was taught and defended. The devil, as a roaring lion, "having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12:12), seeks by any means possible to introduce false doctrine into the church of Christ. Rev. Lanning, as watchman (Ezek. 33), was duty-bound to warn the people and call them to repentance.

That's the devil's theology. The devil's theology. That theology came to Classis East in January and February 2018. Some of you might have been there, in Hudsonville Church. There must have been 200 people in the audience, watching and listening as this devil's theology was judged. The whole classis rose up and excused it. Excused it. The whole classis rose up and rejected the protest or the appeal that condemned the devil's theology.

This is fact. The whole classis did excuse it. However, and far worse, the classis went further than just excusing this lie of false doctrine. They did use the label "heresy," but they used it against the truth that was being defended by the appellant ("By arbitrarily imposing her own heretical meaning on these statements," 2018 Acts of Synod, 58). This calls to mind the fearful judgment called upon those who "call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20). The only response is to repent.

Do we know how much God hates that theology? Do we know? He tells us how much he hates it, these lies. This much: "they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and as the inhabitants of Gomorrah." Sodom and Gomorrah! Sodom and Gomorrah, which were famous then—or infamous them—and infamous now for homosexual adultery, so that even today a homosexual man is a sodomite. That's the name, Sodom, that's given him. That's how much God hates the devil's theology, how much he hates those lies and the corruption of his word. Do we know that?! How are we gonna get that?! How will that live in our consciousness, that God hates it?!

Imagine this, that at that February classis in 2018 at Hudsonville Church, if the appeal came to the floor to condemn the devil's theology, and the chairman called for the vote—"All in favor say, 'Aye,'"—and all of those stately ministers and elders stood up from their chairs, took off their clothes, made themselves naked, and committed homosexual fornication right there before the eyes of God and man, in front of all 200 viewers. What would the response have been to that? We would have been outraged! Outraged! The people sitting there would have been scandalized and angry! Angry! And word of that would have *flown* through the denomination in ten minutes, probably less. What else would have been the response? This: every consistory of Classis East that sent its delegates to that classis would have been waiting by the door for those delegates to come home and would have said to those delegates, "We heard what happened at classis. Were you part of that? Were you part of that?" And if those delegates were part of that, the consistory would have deposed them on the spot and demanded repentance, lest they be excommunicated from the church of Christ. We can understand that. We can get that, how bad that is. Do we understand how much God hates the corrupting of his word in those false doctrines?

The point being made here in the sermon is *how God views false doctrine*. When a church corrupts the truth of the word of God and the truth of God's own name, God himself says he views those who teach such lies "as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah" (Jer. 23:14). This is further confirmed in Lamentation 4:6: "For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom."

The point is made, faithfully from the text, that God abhors false doctrine, and the comparison to the abhorrent sin of sodomy is made to drive this point home to us. Jesus makes this comparison when he contrasts the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah to that city that will not receive the preaching of God's word: "Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:15).

Based on the objections to the sermon, we question whether we yet understand how abhorrent and wicked false doctrine is. The fact that many of us winked at the sins we committed, and the fact that we continue to minimize the error, impresses upon us as officebearers the importance of more sermons just like this one.

But that's done, right? That's all finished, right? Listen to what else the prophets in Jerusalem did: "they commit adultery, and walk in lies: *they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness*." Not only do these prophets teach false doctrine, but they *minimize* it when it's exposed, when it's shown as wicked. Then they say, "No, nooo, no, no, let's not go *that* far! Devil's theology? Can't go that far. Heresy? Not that, not that." Minimizing that hateful corruption of the word of God, which is strengthening the hand of the evildoers so that everyone who ought to be shocked and dismayed at that sin and that false doctrine instead continues in it or doesn't understand how serious it is. And that's where we are right now. That's the work being done right now. That's the work that we are *laboring at* as churches right now, to *minimize* it.

How does it get minimized? Verse 17: "They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace." There's nothing wrong here. There's peace here. "And they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you." No need to repent; no need to be sorry. The hands of the evildoers are strengthened, so that none turns from his way.

You know how you can tell when the prophets stand in the counsel of the Lord? You can tell the prophets stand in the counsel of the Lord, verse 22, to “cause my people to hear my words, then they should have *turned them* from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.” The people *turn* from that sin; they *hate* it; they *repudiate* it; they *damn* it and *condemn* it when the counsel of the Lord has been brought to them. Do you see that in the churches? Is that what’s going on?

Here Rev. Lanning is issuing a denominational rebuke, a rebuke that included Byron Center PRC. This type of rebuke must come from the pulpit and must be directed against ourselves. “For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand” (Ezek. 3:5–6). “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isa. 58:1). The result of this preaching will reveal if the response of the PRC will be the same as it was for Israel: “But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted” (Ezek. 3:7).

Rev. Lanning is not here making a specific charge of sin against any one individual (“That’s the work that we are *laboring at* as churches right now, to *minimize* it”). But he is making a charge, as he is called to do. A rebuke must contain a charge if it is to have any power. Paul, in issuing his rebuke to the Galatians, made a charge against them: “who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth” (Gal. 3:1). Likewise, he rebuked the church of Corinth by charging them with corrupting the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34). Again, to the Corinthians, he is very specific in charging them with being carnal: “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, as walk as men?” (1 Cor. 3:3). Where there is error, there must be a charge to show the necessity of the rebuke.

Just as a minister must warn against sins of drunkenness, adultery, theft, and covetousness, *and even a tendency toward those sins*, he must warn against doctrinal error. Indeed, he must warn sharply against the first signs of the toleration of error or the minimizing of error or even a lack of love for the truth, lest God send a strong delusion that the people should believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:11).

Here Rev. Lanning is faithful to his vow made in the Form for Ordination of Ministers of God’s Word to “faithfully explain to [his] flock the Word of the Lord, revealed by the writings of the prophets and the apostles,” and he is faithful to his vow to “apply the same as well in general as in particular to the edification of the hearers; *instructing, admonishing, comforting, and reproving*, according to every one’s need; preaching repentance towards God and reconciliation with Him through faith in Christ; and refuting with the Holy Scriptures all schisms and heresies which are repugnant to the pure doctrine.”

Here’s what’s going on. This is from the *Standard Bearer* immediately after Synod 2018, in June of 2018, exposed the devil’s theology and condemned it. This is what the *Standard Bearer* had to say:

Let this be clear. Anyone who, from this date on, concerning the minister, consistory, committee to assist the consistory, or Classis East, anyone, I say, who alleges that those individuals or ecclesiastical bodies taught heresy, or justification by faith and works, or Federal Vision, or a conditional covenant, is guilty of slander. Such a one must be rebuked. Slander against officebearers, such serious slander, is the devil’s tool to divide

the church of Jesus Christ. This is the sin of schism, a sin so serious that officebearers are deposed for it. And members excommunicated for it.

You know what we were waiting at the door to do? Not to say to every officebearer who had ever defended that devil's lie, "You're deposed"; but we were waiting by the door to say to anyone who would say, "That was heresy or the devil's theology," to say to *him*, "You're deposed. And excommunicated too." That's minimizing the sin of that false doctrine.

More covering up: the *Standard Bearer* a couple of months later: "Nevertheless, the statements did not explicitly contradict the confessions." *Those statements that are from Satan do not contradict the confessions?! How's anyone going to repent*, if that's what we're hearing and that's our view of those doctrines? No one will repent! No one will. If the prophets would stand in the counsel of Jehovah and bring his word against those lies, the fruit would be the people's repentance.

In drawing our attention to this public document, Rev. Lanning is warning the people, as is his calling as a watchman ("give them warning from my mouth," Ezek. 3:17). Rev. Lanning took a vow that he would give that warning and admonition "as well in general as in particular" (Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word). By referring to this article in *The Standard Bearer*, he gives a particular warning to the people, so they can be informed and aware. Rev. Lanning warns the people that such statements as these, whether intended by the author or done inadvertently ("Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart," Ps. 44:21), serve to minimize the sin of the false doctrine we as churches tolerated and defended. Had Rev. Lanning not provided specific proof, history has shown the response would be, "Show us! Show us where that is happening!" In obedience to his vow, Rev. Lanning shows us where that minimization is taking place.

Rev. Lanning is also faithful to the Church Order, Article 55, which states, "To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting." The faithful pastor and elder must use "the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition" to warn about errors outside the denomination but, most importantly, about errors and weaknesses *within the denomination*.

Here's what we're doing. This is a letter from a consistory in the Protestant Reformed Churches to its congregation in response to a holy publication, a godly work, which is no thanks to the editor or the editors; thanks only to God. But here's what a consistory wrote in response to a holy publication:

We are also concerned that the magazine is stating that there is a controversy between a "works principle" and a "grace principle" doctrine. They contend that the controversy has "been between an error out of hell, and God's own truth from heaven"...They state that the magazine's desire is to engage in this doctrinal controversy. Our consistory does not believe there is a controversy that exists between these two principles in our churches. Our consistory believes that only the grace principle is preached in our churches and is part of our doctrine.

The calling of faithful officebearers is to call out *to the people of God* their sins and transgressions. The purpose of this call is so the people will repent, turn from their idols, and turn to the God of their salvation and in Him find forgiveness and cleansing ("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). The question Rev. Lanning

poses next is penetrating: how will anyone repent when we expend all of our energy assuring the people that there is no controversy between the truth and the lie? Instead of calling their flock to awake out of slumber (Rom. 13:11), this consistory lulls its congregation back to its soul-endangering sleep.

Rev. Lanning must preach this word to Byron Center PRC and to the denomination at large. The PRC has not yet rent its garments, yet God commands us to rend our hearts (Joel 2:13). Godly repentance, not to be repented of, is clear to all. "This disposition also, is attendant on sacred sorrow—that the sinner is indignant against his vices, and even against himself, as also all that are actuated by a right zeal are indignant, as often as they see that God is offended. This disposition, however, is more intense than sorrow. For the first step is, that evil is displeasing to us. The second is, that, being inflamed with anger, we press hard upon ourselves so that our consciences may be touched to the quick" (John Calvin on 2 Cor. 7:10–11).

Elders must judge whether or not repentance is genuine. It is the judgment of the undersigned, officebearers in the church of Christ, that such repentance has not taken place in the PRC, and therefore this sermon, and many others like it, must be preached. They must be preached until the people repent or until they silence the prophet bringing the rebuke.

How is anyone going to repent if we're told there is no controversy and no works principle? How?

Here's another consistory to its congregation a month later:

Secondly, although the magazine purports the development of the Reformed truth, statements made within the publication, rather than promoting the unity of believers in that truth, promote disunity and schism. This is evident when it describes the current controversy within the PRC as being "between the truth and the lie."

Here we see a consistory in Classis East doing exactly the thing for which Rev. Lanning is falsely charged—namely, making public charges of sin. This consistory charges Rev. Lanning and the other men involved in *Sword & Shield* with *promoting disunity and schism*. Promoting disunity and schism is sin. Instead of going the way of Matthew 18 or the way of protest and appeal (Church Order Art. 31), this consistory makes public charges of sin against the publishers, writers, and supporters of *Sword & Shield*, exactly the sin which is charged against Rev. Lanning.

How is anyone going to repent if we *cannot even acknowledge the lie*? "They strengthen the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness."

This is strong language, but it is faithful to the text. Nowhere does Rev. Lanning make a charge of sin against ministers, officebearers, and churches. Rather, as a watchman, he gives warning against our continued minimization of doctrinal error and continued tacit support of those who preached and defended the lie.

And how else is that done? How else are the hands of the evildoers strengthened so that none returns from his wickedness? "They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD." That's insightful. That takes us to one of the causes of this covering up and of this minimizing of the lie. "They speak a vision of their own heart." What's in their heart they speak out. Well, what's in our hearts? What do we want? Well, I can tell you what I want. *I want us to all be one!* Everyone! I want us all to be one! I want us to confess the same thing, the same thing. I want that *so badly*, and I know you

do too. But that may not become our prophecy! That's what's happened. "We're all one! We're all one! We all confess the same thing. There's no lie here. There's no problem here. We're all one." It's not true. It's not true. We're not all one. We're not. We're not united as a denomination.

You know how you can tell when there's unity in a denomination and in a congregation? You can tell because we confess the same truth together. We confess the same truth. *And we condemn the same lie together.* Those two things—and I didn't make that up. Every one of us who confessed our faith in the Protestant Reformed Churches has said, "I adhere to this doctrine of the confessions and the word of God, and I reject all heresies repugnant thereto." There's our unity. Is that happening? Do you hear that? When's the last time you heard someone read from the *Acts of Synod 2018* publicly? I can think of only one incident in the last few months, and before that nothing. Do you hear rejection of this lie? I am asked so many times, "Rev. Lanning, show us the lie. Where is it today? We're done with it! Synod 2018 finished it. Show us where the lie is today." I've done that. I've done that publicly in writing. I've done that now in the pulpit. But let me ask you a question. You want to know from me: where is the lie? I want to know from you: where is the rejection of the lie today? Where do you hear condemnation of the devil's theology as the devil's theology? Is that the message you hear pouring out of the Protestant Reformed Churches today? Is that what you read in letters from consistories to congregations, warning against a magazine? Is that what you hear: rejection of the lie? I don't hear it. I don't hear it, except in one place consistently, one magazine.

Those who object to the statements made above have a simple way to proceed: show us where we can find public condemnation of the lie that was taught, tolerated, and defended. Rather than condemnation pouring forth from the denomination, we, the undersigned, see the lie continuing to pour forth from the denomination. This can be proven from preaching and writing that continues to this day. Rev. Lanning, the other editors of *Sword & Shield*, and the supporters of the magazine do not wish to be the only ones condemning the lie. Our response to such a criticism is, "Join them!" Raise your voices with theirs to drive the lie from the PRC so thoroughly that it would take many generations before the error would again dare to raise its ugly head.

I'm not united with a prophet who says, "That wasn't heresy." I'm not united with a prophet who says, "That does not contradict the confessions." I am united with those who say, "Salvation by grace alone and not by the work of man" and with those who condemn the devil's lie as the devil's lie.

There's also this: as an attempt to minimize the lie and the false doctrine so that no one repents—verses 33 and following: "And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD?"—Sometimes the prophets called their message "the burden of the LORD." Jeremiah did that; Isaiah did that. "This is the burden of the LORD." And they used the word "burden" to indicate the weightiness of that word that they were bringing; and they used the word "burden" also to indicate the rebuke that that word often brought. "The burden of the LORD." And the people took that and turned it into a mockery. They turned it into a mocking question. It was another way of dismissing the truth. It was another way of disdaining it and minimizing it. They would see Jeremiah coming, and they would say to him, "Hey, Jeremiah, what's the burden of the LORD today? You got a burden of the LORD today?"

And we're saying that. We're saying that. We're saying that when we say, "It seems like in the preaching at Byron Center, Rev. Lanning's got an agenda." The word of the Lord, which is salvation through Jesus Christ, is *not* an individual man's agenda! How dare you?! How dare you sully the word of the Lord by calling it a man's agenda? If every sermon proclaims salvation by grace, if every sermon condemns the

works principle, *that's the word of the Lord*. Or this: "Oh, *Sword and Shield's* in the mail again. I bet we're gonna hear about the controversy. Bet we're gonna hear about fighting. Bet we're gonna hear how bad things are." "Hey Jeremiah, what's the burden of the LORD?"

If you say that, God will forsake you, and he'll forsake your house. "And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house...Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence." You might have a church left. You might. But you won't have the word of the Lord there. You'll have a perversion of it. And you'll love it. You'll think it tastes good. You'll eat it up. And you'll choke to death on it, and your children and your grandchildren will choke to death on it.

"I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah."

Who can stand now? What hope is there for me and for you, whose form is the way it's always been but who have *so much doctrinal trouble* inside? The only hope for the church of Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. God makes a *marvelous* promise of the coming of the Savior toward the beginning of chapter 23. "Behold, the days come, said the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*."

Do we understand the beauty of that name?! As clearly as we understand how much God hates the lie, we must understand the beauty of the name of our Savior: The Lord *Our* Righteousness. That name could have been this: The Lord, Jehovah's Righteousness. The Lord, His Own Righteousness. But the name is The Lord Our Righteousness.

Here is the heart of the sermon and the blessed word of comfort for the people of God who have committed such unrighteousness. Having the heart of a shepherd, Rev. Lanning is gentle with the flock, imparting unto us the gospel of God (1 Thess. 2:7–9). The admonitions (Canons 3–4.17) and threatenings (Canons 5.15) of the gospel were heard in the sharp rebuke, and now, having been emptied of ourselves, Rev. Lanning shows his pastor's heart by filling our hearts with Christ. What joy! What comfort! What blessed hope for those in whom there is no hope!

The Lord Jesus Christ took what was the equivalent of sodomite sex in our perversion of the word on himself and took it to the cross and bore that away, so that this word that blows through us as a fire and strikes us as a hammer does not condemn us who are in the Lord. He's The Lord *Our* Righteousness. And that's why your prayers are answered—not because of your good works or mine but because of The Lord Our Righteousness. And that's why we have the Spirit—not because of your works or mine but because of The Lord Our Righteousness. And that's why we enjoy fellowship with God—not because of your works or mine but because of The Lord Our Righteousness. The Lord Our Righteousness is our salvation from our sin and our perversion of the word.

And God gives men to teach us this. He says, "I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD." "*I will set up shepherds over them.*" God in his mercy sends men to teach us Jesus Christ our righteousness! God

sends men to cry to you, “*Watch out!* for that lie. It’ll kill you!” *God* sends men. That’s feeding them. That’s what feeding is by a shepherd: it’s the feeding of the word of the Lord, the feeding of the scriptures, which is essentially feeding us with Jesus Christ in all of his glory and suffering no man and no teaching to impinge on that glory in the slightest. That’s feeding! That’s feeding. That’s the food that will nourish you. That’s the food that will build your faith so that when you fear for your own sin and I for mine, you will remember that food that is the gospel, and you will believe in Jesus Christ that all your sins are forgiven for his sake, and you won’t be afraid.

And this is the word that will keep you from being dismayed. Being dismayed is being broken up inside. Being dismayed is that severe emotional state, looking around, not being able to see what is good and if there is good and if there is hope. This word that’s fed to you by the shepherds the Lord sets over you will feed your soul so that you’re not dismayed anymore because you see your Savior! And though you may not be able to understand everything going on, you’ll know that the Lord Jesus Christ is for you.

“Neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.” They’ll be missing nothing. Are we missing something as a church now? Is something missing? Are we not getting something or having something that we need as a church now? God says, “When my shepherds feed you this word, there will be nothing lacking,” because you’ll have Christ, because you’ll have his gospel.

Now do you care? Is that what you want? There are many who don’t want that. They don’t want it. They need something else, they think. They want something else. They want the form. “Stop with the controversy; stop with these rebukes; stop with the calls of repentance for false doctrine. We’ve got what we need: we’ve got the form; we can go to church; we’ve got our families; we’ve got our friends.” God will give that to you, if that’s what you want. He’ll give it to you. And this is what it will look like: verse 15: “Behold, I will feed the prophets with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall.” Wormwood and gall are poison, and whatever the prophet drinks he speaks. Whatever the prophet eats he speaks. If God feeds the prophets with poison, you’ll get poison, and you’ll have your form. But you’ll be dead.

Beloved congregation, do we want our watchman to be silent? Shall he keep silent because the officebearers are showing themselves to be unfaithful and untrue? God forbid! We thank God that Rev. Lanning was able to speak a faithful word in spite of the persistent opposition of his consistory, opposition that sought to make Rev. Lanning unfaithful to his vow to keep the church free from doctrinal error (Formula of Subscription) and make him unfaithful to the biblical command to contend for the faith (Jude 1:3).

Our only hope, beloved, is the Lord Jesus Christ, that God be merciful to us in him and that he feed us—he feed us—in his mercy and grace with the food of his word, the gospel of salvation, that all of this wickedness that I’ve found in my own heart as I preached this sermon, all of the wickedness of wanting to cover up and not caring too much about a corruption of the word, all of that wickedness is covered in our Savior’s blood. That’s the food I want. That’s the gospel I want. That’s the food and the gospel this church needs. God be merciful and feed us. Amen.

Declarations:

1. We, the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church, declare this sermon, including its doctrine and application, to be sound (2 Tim. 4:3), fully in harmony with the word of God and the Three Forms of Unity, and therefore declare that Rev. Andrew Lanning was faithful before God in fulfilling his Formula of Subscription vow "diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine" and the vow made at his ordination to "faithfully explain to [the] flock the Word of the Lord."
2. Further, we declare that, in bringing this rebuke to the congregation of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Rev. Lanning was faithful to the apostolic command in 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."
3. Rev. Lanning, by the grace of God, showed himself to be faithful to the command of God in 1 Timothy 3:15 by declaring to the congregation and to the denomination the seriousness of false doctrine, and how we are to behave ourselves in the house of God, "which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."
4. We declare the sermon "Shepherds to Feed You" to be the "words of God" (John 3:34), which taught "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21) "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14) and accomplished that which God pleased and prospered in the thing whereto God sent it (Isa. 55:11), and therefore pleased God, who trieth the hearts (1 Thess. 2:4).
5. We further admonish those whose hearts were prepared by Holy Spirit to receive this word and respond with the blessed fruit of repentance to humble themselves before God and man and to give fervent thanks to God, for this was not their work, but God's, for so it seemed good in His sight (Luke 10:21).

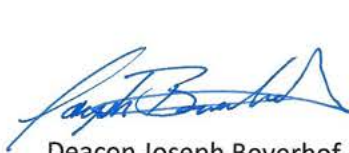
Humbly submitted,



Elder Dewey Engelsma



Elder Bryan Van Baren



Deacon Joseph Boverhof



Deacon Keith Gritters



Deacon Tyler Ophoff