

Act of Separation

“And that this may be the more effectually observed, 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 hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.”

—Confession of Faith, Article 28

“We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church.”

—Confession of Faith, Article 29

With astonishment and grief, we have observed the apostatizing of the Protestant Reformed Churches by the denomination’s corrupting the marks of the true church and manifesting the marks of the false church, as those marks are set forth in our Confession of Faith, Article 29. The glorious gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone has not been preached purely but has been polluted with the filth of conditional theology, while the defense of the pure gospel of sovereign grace has been declared to be schismatic and sinful. False doctrines and errors multiply exceedingly through heretical writings. Church discipline has not been exercised faithfully, especially in the punishment of false doctrine. Teachers and defenders of error are exonerated and protected by the church, while discipline is wrongly applied against faithful watchmen. The denomination zealously guards the empty honor of men but allows the majesty of Jehovah and his truth to be trampled underfoot by the idolatry, false worship, and blasphemy of false doctrine in God’s house. The sacraments cannot be administered purely as Christ has appointed in his Word but have been stolen away from Christ’s sheep who cannot affirm their unity with an apostatizing congregation and denomination. The Word of God as the rule according to which all things are to be managed in the church has been ignored and disdained, and the will of men prevails. The Church Order and the biblical principles of Reformed church government have not been applied faithfully or righteously but have been ignored, applied only selectively and unevenly, and twisted by the earthly wisdom of men. The church ascribes more power and authority to the ordinances of her ecclesiastical decisions than to the Word of God. She turns to man for wisdom and relies more upon him than upon Christ. She will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ in the reproofs and rebukes of his Word. She slanders and reviles those who love the truth and confess it, hate the lie and repudiate it, rebuke her for her errors, and live holily according to the Word of God. “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment” (Isa. 59:14–15).

The denomination shrewdly retains the name of the church and a certain form of the church, deceiving the unwary. Nevertheless, she departs from the pure Word of God in her teaching and her government. Though she yet confesses Jesus Christ in name, by her deeds she does not acknowledge him to be the only Head of the church (Isa. 29:13).

As God by his Spirit has graciously shown us our iniquities and pricked our hearts with grief for our transgressions, we have labored quietly and peaceably before his face and among his people to amend our ways and our doings. Through the antithetical preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by our pastor,

through our cries for God's mercy and grace to turn us, through our protests and appeals to the assemblies, through our publishing and writing, through our speaking often one to another in the fear of the Lord, and through our membership in his church, we have sought the old paths, God strengthening us. The response has been a growing storm of slander, opposition, and false charges against God's Word and against us, along with a bolder strengthening of the hands of the evildoers that none doth turn from his way. "For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:13–14).

The denomination's opposition to the Word of God has now become plainly evident to all in the unjust and ungodly suspension and deposition of our pastor for his public testimony against the church's sin of false doctrine and for his public rebuke against her toleration of error. In their charge of schism against him, the assemblies have painstakingly avoided an evaluation of our pastor's sermons in light of his sound doctrine and in light of the truth of the Word of God, which would have shown his sermons to be faithful and true. Rather, the princes of the church elevated their own will and men's honor above the plain Word of God. Judging the sermon to be sound doctrine but condemning it as evil anyway, they fulfilled the apostle's prophecy: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:3–4). Adding sin to sin, the judges of our pastor willfully ignored and then twisted the Word of God to suit their purposes, lied before God's face to God's people, and exempted themselves from the same charges that they brought against our pastor.

The unjust suspension and deposition of our pastor is a particularly stark and obvious mark of the false church, which "persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry" (Confession of Faith, Article 29). The false church has always been known and identified by her persecution of God's prophets. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10–12; see also 21:33–46; 23:34–39; Acts 7:51–53).

We desired to continue in fellowship with the denomination for as long as God gave us a place, trusting our heavenly Father to make our calling clear. By the church's expulsion of our pastor, she has made our place impossible and has effectively cast us out, for the church has shown that she will no longer hear the Word of the Lord. "To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it" (Jer. 6:10).

For this reason, the undersigned, officebearers of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, now flee from the coming destruction, according to the solemn warnings of the Word of God. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction" (Jer. 5:30–6:1; see also 6:10–12). "Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will

bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it" (Jer. 6:17-19).

According to the Word of God and the holy duty of believers, we separate ourselves from this untoward generation and come out from among them and will have no more ecclesiastical fellowship with the Protestant Reformed Churches until such time as God may be pleased to restore them to the true service of the Lord (Acts 2:40; Isa. 52:11; II Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4; II Chron. 7:14; Confession of Faith, Article 28). In the meantime, the Son of God has gathered us by his Word and Spirit as living members of his body and has joined us to his church in this place (I Cor. 1:2; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21). We declare at the same time our desire to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed members and to unite ourselves with every gathering founded on God's infallible Word, in whatever place God has also united the same (Eph. 4:1-6; Confession of Faith, Article 28).

Hereby we testify that in all things we hold to God's holy Word and to the Three Forms of Unity founded upon that Word, namely, the Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ, we hold to the Church Order, studiously taking care in its implementation that we do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted (Confession of Faith, Article 32).

Finally, we officebearers and members of Christ's church hereby declare that we do not recognize the unjust suspension and deposition of our minister but continue to recognize him as our pastor and teacher, according to the ordinance of Christ, who calls his servants through his church (Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 4:14).

Done this day, the 19th of January, 2021
Byron Center, Michigan



Elder Bryan Van Baren



Elder Dewey Engelsma



Deacon Joseph Boverhof



Deacon Keith Gritters



Deacon Tyler Ophoff