

1/11/21

Dear Brothers,

Now that the final vote approaches, I want to make one more plea to you to reconsider your path.

I write this because of my love for you. Please believe when I write this that the desire of my heart is to save you with fear and to pull you out of the fire (Jude 1:23). My conscience will not allow me yet to say, "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27), so I submit to you this letter.

You men have set yourself on a path that will lead to destruction. It will mean destruction for you and your generations. It will mean the destruction of the PRC. And you men will be ultimately to blame; not the church visitors, although they are culpable; not Trinity, although they will answer for what they have done; and not Classis East, although they are without excuse. You men are responsible.

I know you have mentioned that this matter is out of your hands now and in the hands of Classis. You may not comfort yourself with this. You may not find solace in the fact that more voices and more people are involved, so you alone will not bear the blame, or think that you are not alone responsible for what decision is ultimately made. There can be no washing your hands of this matter (Matt. 27:24).

You have put the church visitors, and now Classis East, in a terrible position. You knew what their verdict would be. I think that even you men were shocked by how swift and brutally they operated. Within one day of being asked to help, they had advice to take Rev. Lanning off of the pulpit. This advice was so bad, and it so badly twisted the church order, that we could not even bring it to the floor for a vote. They also gave advice to relieve Bryan and me of our duties, advice which you later had to repent for adopting. Think of that; two of the three pieces of advice they gave was evil advice. And the advice that you took and which will now be used to depose Rev. Lanning is the most evil of all.

But you called them in knowing what their advice would be. We know the work they did at Hope and Wingham. We know the men who comprise the church visitors. We knew that just like Jeremiah, the command would go out; "Let this man be put to death" and we knew that same advice would be given here. And it was. Rev. Lanning must die.

And we know what Classis will do. We are now asking the men who have strengthened the hands of the evildoers and who have made unrighteous judgments for the last three or four years to stand in judgment of the one prophet who is calling them, and us, to repentance. I had conversations with you men about this body and we were in full agreement about the terrible decisions they had made. About how toxic an environment it was to even be at Classis. And now you bind up Rev. Lanning and send him to that same body and ask for "righteous judgments."

This is history re-writing itself: Hope Church deposing a righteous man, calling in and finding unanimous support from a neighboring church, which was then supported completely by Classis East. There is no excuse for this. We have done it, and his blood is on our hands. Others will be consenting to his death, but we are responsible.

Men, we know we did not do our work. Most grievously, we abdicated our office. We abandoned it. We cast aside the word of God and turned instead to human counsellors. The sermon was preached Sunday morning and there were five or six elders who met in the narthex of church after the evening service and decided to call in the church visitors. I was never a part of that and neither was Elder Van Baren. At

that meeting it was decided to call in the church visitors and an elder was tasked with drafting the motion. That elder, before this matter of calling in the church visitors was ever brought up or discussed at the consistory, talked to a church visitor on his own. Was it at that secret meeting where he said he was going to call the church visitor as well?

Within days we agreed to bring in the church visitors without ever having assigned a committee to bring advice. We would not decide to restripe the parking lot in the time that we decided to suspend and depose our minister. We refused to pick up the Bible, but we were eager to pick up the phone.

We have acted quickly, but God promises to act quickly as well. "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:5).

Not only did we not do our work, but we are also men that waver. I remind us that immediately after the Jeremiah sermon was preached, an elder called for an emergency meeting because he was so repentant after hearing the sermon. With tears he expressed that he had never understood the seriousness of the issues as clearly as he did now. Yet that very evening, he was engaged in drafting a motion to call in the church visitors. A few days later he was furiously angry about the sermon. That man wavered.

The elder who closed the emergency meeting with prayer, prayed that God would "speed" the sermon throughout the denomination. Yet only a few days later that same elder was asking if it was wise to take the sermon off SermonAudio and if we should reevaluate how quickly sermons went up on SermonAudio. That man wavered.

And we have wavered as a consistory.

People who have seen the agenda have asked me how it was possible for a consistory to change so drastically from the time when the response letters were sent to the editors and the time when we pressed our own charges. We all know that is because in that time period the consistory changed over and new men came on, but it is especially because we as a consistory constantly wavered.

James 1 describes men who waver. They are "like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed" (v6). The problem for a church comes when men who waver are in leadership positions. If "that man" who wavers cannot expect to "receive any thing of the Lord" (v7), how much less should the church expect when led by such men?

We are not men that understand the controversy. An elder stated in a meeting that "the only lie is to say there was a lie." Comments and discussion revealed how little we understood of the controversy. This happened over and over again. The words of Jesus to Nicodemus came to mind repeatedly, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" (John 3:10).

We have not loved the flock. When a man said about the new members from Hope, "I don't want them here! This is a hostile takeover!" no one rebuked him. Think of the agonizing discussions that went on each time we would receive the clean papers of members from Hope. We did not want them, and we did not love them. We despised the flock for whom Christ gave his life (John 10:11).

Think of how wickedly we have behaved! It is not possible that our actions could bring the blessing of God. And it hasn't. Byron PRC is in absolute chaos because of the rash, foolish, and utterly hasty actions we have taken. How shameful that we would never, ever run our businesses this way, yet we have no

problem treating the bride of Christ in this manner. We have disgraced the name of Jesus Christ. Christ gave his blood for this church, and we treat her like a whorish woman.

We are the only ones who know exactly what happened in that consistory room over the last number of months. How honorably Rev. Lanning behaved himself, and how dishonorably we behaved ourselves. But we aren't the only ones who know.

But there is a path forward. It is not an easy path, but it is a simple path. It will not preserve our names and reputations, but it will preserve our souls. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15).

We must turn and repent. We must.

We know Rev. Lanning is a righteous man. He is one of the most humble and meek men that we have met, and we all know it. He is unflinching when it comes to the truth and to his vows, but he is as righteous a man as any of us have met. We know it, better than anyone else. As John Calvin wrote about Moses and how Moses reacted after the Israelites committed idolatry, so this describes Lanning: "This is the sin (of idolatry), for the sake of which Moses, a man of an otherwise gentle character, inflamed by the Spirit of God, commanded the Levites to run in different directions throughout the camp and consecrate the hands of their brothers with blood (Ex. 32:27)." Rev. Lanning is a man with a gentle character. When we despise him now and cast him out, we are despising and casting out the Spirit of God who is in him.

We know that the charges are unrighteous. We can see this because no one will pray for his repentance! Is it true an elder would call ministers that were coming to preach and tell them or suggest to them that they not pray for Rev. Lanning's repentance? What kind of behavior is this? We put a man under discipline and then we do not pray for his repentance! We had two prayers at the congregational meeting by the two leading elders on the consistory and neither of them prayed for Rev. Lanning's repentance. We know the charge of sin is wrong and unjust. God has given us a strong delusion that we should behave this way. We must turn and repent.

How we turn and repent is to take up the sword against ourselves at Classis. Tell the delegates that we acted hastily. Ask Classis to allow us time so we can start doing our work. We plead with them to not treat this material for the sake of our souls and the souls of our children. The consistory of BCPRC must do its work.

However, that will not be our work to do.

We have proven that we are not fit for the office.

Having been given more time by Classis, our first action will be to repent to Rev. Lanning and restore him to his rightful office. We will ask him to help us. That help will come from the pulpit. It will be painful as our flesh is destroyed, but our souls will be saved. There is precedent for this. John Calvin was exiled by the city council of Geneva for insisting on a disciplined church. The church then received a letter from Cardinal Sadoletto trying to persuade them to abandon their Reformational practices and views. The rulers knew that only Calvin could write such a defense. So the very ones who had exiled Calvin, called on him to defend them. And defend them he did. Rev. Lanning will defend us, too. Not with smooth words that leave us in our sin. But he will defend us by tearing down the altars of our heart

and calling us to repentance which will save our spirits in the day of our Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). And we know the man. He will do it with genuine, self-sacrificing love. Unlike what we see in so many others, he is not a man of malice or evil intent. He loves us, and we know it.

We will then call a special congregational meeting to elect new office-bearers. These names will come from the floor, as we must not be trusted even to put together a slate of new names. This is orderly. "New office-bearers may be elected by a Church, a body of believers, if at any time their present office-bearers become unfaithful and untrue" (MVD on CO 29). Once the new office bearers are elected, we will resign as a body. Whether or not we are disciplined will be for the new consistory to decide.

Dear brothers, I plead with you. Turn from your course. We as a congregation have taken on the marks of a false church according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. We will not "submit to the yoke of Christ" by doing our work and neither will we submit to Christ by humbling ourselves before the word of God preached. We have "relied more upon men than upon Christ." Christ says "rule my church by the word of God." We said, "No, we will not do that, but we will turn to human counsellors." And we are drowning in it. This became so clear to me at the meeting on Monday night. When the simple and mundane question came up as to what we should say if we are asked a particular question, the response was, ask a minister what we should say. When the question came up about us speaking at Classis, the response was, call Rev. Griess and ask him. And then we took a decision to call in additional human counselors to help with the government of the church. We are not able even to handle the most minor of matters on our own, because we forsook Christ and his word. We "rely more upon men than upon Christ." We are drowning in human counsellors, and now we ask for more. God is giving us over to it.

And most clearly, we are persecuting those who rebuked us for our errors. We heard a rebuke from the pulpit, and we are now killing the prophet who dared bring that rebuke.

The argument is made, "He militated against his consistory!" Rev. Lanning did not militate against us, but if ever there was a consistory to militate against, it was this consistory. We drove him to his sermons and actions, and now we kill him for it.

I submit this recognizing the human impossibility of this coming to pass. But I must bring it. With God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26). Please men, turn. Repent.

With deep and sincere love,

Elder Dewey Engelsma