



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Letters Edition

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,
and who is the sword of thy excellency!
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

Deuteronomy 33:29

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FINALLY, BRETHERN, FAREWELL!

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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With gratitude to God we present to you another Letters Edition of *Sword and Shield*. Thank you to all of our correspondents, whose questions, comments, criticisms, observations, arguments, accusations, and advice have given us opportunity to consider and address these important matters. As editors and respondents, we have profited from your correspondence, and we pray that the readership will likewise profit. All of the letters that we print are intended by their writers for publication.

We invite our readers to continue sending in your letters and emails for publication in *Sword and Shield*. The doctrines and issues being addressed are of utmost importance and are worthy of lively discussion among believers. We have heard from many that they immensely enjoyed the last Letters Edition because they liked reading what their fellow believers were thinking. As editors, we agree,

and we look forward to more letters by which we can sharpen each other in God's word.

A few notes about our responses. First, like last time, we judged that not every letter needs a response. Some letters are not asking for anything and are meant to speak for themselves. Second, the editors divided up among ourselves the letters that were addressed to the editor-in-chief. If a letter specifically addressed a particular writer's article, that writer responded. For the rest, we shared the opportunity to respond. Third, we ran out of space to publish all of the letters in this special edition. There is one letter that will be published in the February issue of *Sword and Shield*.

Now, dear readers, read on. And write on!

May God speed the truths written herein to your heart, and the next issue into your hands.

—AL

LETTERS: SWORD AND SHIELD

Rev. Lanning,

Your editorials and articles in *Sword and Shield* grieve me, because in them you take upon yourself judgments that belong to the Lord. When Samuel was sent to anoint a king from Jesse's sons, he was puzzled that the Lord indicated David; God told him that Samuel was focusing on the external, but God saw the heart. Taken another way, we have limited insight into the inner being of others, so we should tread carefully when speaking of another, particularly a nodding acquaintance and when speaking of the thoughts of others and what they mean. I consider myself a mere guesser at thoughts, knowing that I am not always sure of what I am thinking at any moment. What about you and other RBP members? That you say you are equipped and have the right to judge the attitudes (*inner life*) of others is beyond the pale.

This magazine sends a conflicting witness out to the world about our churches and increases our difficulty in reaching out. We should, to an extent, listen to criticism of others, as we, like others, have a tendency to be self-congratulatory and blind to our weaknesses. I appreciate the preaching I hear and the standards I receive, but I would like to be able to interact with people outside of our churches without their fearing I will metaphorically bite their heads off.

This magazine mentions that it is not under the authority of the Protestant Reformed Churches. You, however, are and as such, have limits placed on when and what you express in regards to what is going on in the churches. These limits are set in place in our church order and formula of

subscription. You promised to work within the structure and limits when you took your oath of office, embodying the concept of the humble servant. Because your writing in this magazine is not in submission to those structures we are called to respect, it seems that it is more a vehicle for airing of personal grievance and ego stroking rather than edification of others, sowing discord among brethren.

I am concerned that you have on staff a minister who has denied that Noah had to lift a finger to build the ark. Have you no concern for your own discernment? Also, this magazine takes a good amount of time to put together. Are you sure that there is enough time to do justice to your pastoral duties and this publication? Your congregation, not this, should be your focus.

The golden rule says that we are to treat others as we would like to be treated. You have heaped upon other officebearers the ultimate insult of judging what you say their attitudes and intentions are and yet have the nerve to complain multiple times in public about how ecclesiastical assemblies have shortchanged you and others by criticizing your actions. You have no business in expecting generosity in judgment when you refuse to extend it yourself. Our relationships with each other are to a certain extent conditional; you cannot behave poorly indefinitely and expect infinite patience in return, no matter how highly you regard your cause. You will receive your measure back, so you need to scoop with more awareness and less volume.

Sincerely,

Lydia Rau

REPLY

You are grieved by me and my work in *Sword and Shield*, and you air those grievances for the readers of the magazine to see and to judge.

Fair enough. Let the reader judge. The Reformed believer has the word of God in his hand and has received the unction of the Holy One, so that he knows all the things that are freely given to him of God and judges all things, including articles in magazines and letters to magazines. Let the reader “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Let the reader listen to what scripture teaches “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13). With the word and by the Spirit, the spiritual reader may judge, can judge, and must judge me and my work in *Sword and Shield*. With the word and by the Spirit, the spiritual reader also may judge, can judge, and must judge criticism of me and my work in *Sword and Shield*.

While the readers are busy judging these things, let me reply to a few of the specifics in your letter. First, it appears that you are personally offended by my editorials and articles in *Sword and Shield*. I think you are not alone in this personal offense. I am truly sorry to hear of this offense, since my work in *Sword and Shield* is done for the benefit of you and the other members of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and beyond. I bear no ill will toward you personally or toward the Protestant Reformed Churches. On the contrary, I love the PRC and am set for the defense of the gospel in her midst. In love for the churches and with the desire that the gospel be preserved among us, I have made this solemn vow regarding the doctrine of the Reformed confessions:

We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing.

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors. (Formula of Subscription, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 326)

My writing in *Sword and Shield* is part of fulfilling this vow. In perfect harmony with my vow is the purpose of Reformed Believers Publishing: “To promote, defend, and develop the Reformed faith... To expose and

condemn all lies repugnant to this truth” (Constitution of Reformed Believers Publishing, Article II). Perhaps it would help lessen the personal affront that you now feel if you were to reconsider my articles and editorials in light of my vow and the purpose of RBP.

Second, you are grieved that in my first editorial I claimed the right to judge the attitudes of the PRC. Not only I, but also every officebearer and member of the PRC, claim that right. An attitude is “a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person’s behavior” (Oxford Languages). Behavior is revealing. The word of God judges our behavior as churches and points us to the springs of that behavior in our hearts. We as members can and must judge ourselves in the light of that word. For example, Paul heard of the behavior of the Corinthians in failing to discipline an impenitent sinner in their midst. That behavior revealed an attitude of pride, and Paul judged the Corinthians to be puffed up (1 Cor. 5:2). So also we as churches are called to examine ourselves in the light of scripture, to judge ourselves according to God’s word, and to receive the rebukes of scripture for any unrighteous attitudes we may have. When we do this, we are not elevating ourselves to God’s place or usurping God’s right to judge our hearts, but we are properly applying the judgment of his word to ourselves. “For the word of God is 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” (Heb. 4:12).

I write this next part with utmost gentleness. Sister, are you holding yourself to the same standard to which you hold me? Do not you in your letter judge my attitude? You write that “it seems that [*Sword and Shield*] is more a vehicle for airing of personal grievance and ego stroking rather than edification of others, dividing the brethren.” You observe my behavior as you understand it, and you judge that my motive is ego-stroking. Is not this the kind of judging of attitudes that you would consider to be “beyond the pale”? Take another look and see that the standard that you allow yourself is also rightly the standard to which you should hold me.

Third, you are concerned that *Sword and Shield* “sends a conflicting witness out to the world about our churches and increases our difficulty in reaching out.” You “would like to be able to interact with people outside of our churches without their fearing I will metaphorically bite their heads off.” The purpose of RBP explains the witness that *Sword and Shield* is making. From the constitution: “To give a theological and antithetical witness to

the Reformed church world and beyond.” The purpose of *Sword and Shield* is not to present the PRC in a certain light. The purpose of *Sword and Shield* is not to make nice with any particular denomination. Rather, the purpose of *Sword and Shield* is to give a theological and antithetical witness to the Reformed church world and beyond.

Inevitably, a theological and an antithetical witness will step on toes, both within the PRC and without. This is because not all who go by the name *Reformed* are actually Reformed, just as not all who go by the name *Protestant Reformed* are actually Protestant Reformed. Nobody need bite anyone’s head off, but toes will necessarily be stepped on. A theological and an antithetical witness to the Reformed faith exposes and angers those who have no real love for the Reformed faith. God being gracious, a theological and an antithetical witness to the Reformed faith also instructs and corrects us as his people, so that we believe and love the Reformed faith. Therefore, regardless of whether people like a theological and an antithetical witness or not, the purpose of *Sword and Shield* is to make such a witness.

This theological and antithetical witness also serves our reaching out to others, for it alerts people to where we stand as Reformed believers. A theological and an antithetical witness is part of our confessing the name of Jesus before men (Matt. 10:32), even before an audience that may be violently hostile to our confession (vv. 16–42). A theological and an antithetical witness is part of our giving an answer to those who persecute us and speak evil of us and yet ask us a reason of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:14–18).

Fourth, you mention the Church Order and the Formula of Subscription. Since the time that you wrote your letter, Rev. Nathan Langerak has explained how both of these relate to *Sword and Shield*. I refer you to his articles in the October and November issues of the magazine.

Fifth, you state your concern with an editor of *Sword and Shield* “who has denied that Noah had to lift a finger to build the ark.” The readers of *Sword and Shield* may not be familiar with that controversy, since it occurred in other publications and in pulpits. Another letter and the reply elsewhere in this issue contain a little more information. To your point, I consider the other editors of *Sword and Shield* to be sound in doctrine and faithful in walk. I count it a privilege to serve with them in the cause of publishing the truth. I have learned much from them, and I count them both to be among my spiritual teachers in the faith. Give me ten of them any day.

I write this next part with utmost gentleness. Sister, are you holding yourself to the same standard to which you hold me about what I may write? You inform me: “You...have limits placed on when and what you express in regards to what is going on in the churches.” In the very next paragraph of your letter, you publicly express

your concern against a minister in the PRC. Is not this the kind of expression that you would consider to be “not in submission to those structures we are called to respect”? As you consider this question, I once again recommend Rev. N. Langerak’s Understanding the Times articles in the October and November issues of *Sword and Shield*. I think you will find material in there that will help you as you work your way through what may be written publicly, whether in editorials or in letters to the editors. I also think that will help you see that the standard that you allow yourself is also rightly the standard to which you should hold me.

Sixth, you instruct me to focus on my pastoral duties in my congregation and not on the publication of *Sword and Shield*. Your instruction to me to focus on my pastoral duties in my congregation is sound, biblical instruction, and I take it to heart. You are doing what Paul instructed the Colossians to do regarding one of their ministers, Archippus: “Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (Col. 4:17).

However, I disagree with you that my work in *Sword and Shield* is somehow different from, or even in conflict with, my pastoral duties. My pastoral duty as a minister of the gospel is to feed the sheep with Jesus Christ by feeding them the word of God. This calling of the prophet / minister is found throughout scripture.

9. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.
17. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.” (Jer. 1:9, 17)
1. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;
2. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” (2 Tim. 4:1–2)

This calling of the prophet / minister is also found throughout our Reformed confessions.

We believe that this true church must be governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord hath taught us in His Word, namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church; that by these means the true religion may be preserved and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise

transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means. (Belgic Confession 30, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 64–65)

It is evident that the office of pastors and ministers of God's word is:

First. That they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of the Lord, revealed by the writings of the prophets and the apostles; and 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. (Form of Ordination [or Installation] of Ministers of God's Word, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 284–85)

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. (Church Order 55, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 397)

Such are my pastoral duties in my congregation as a minister of the gospel. My work in *Sword and Shield* is in perfect harmony with my duties and is an aspect of fulfilling my pastoral duties. It is through *Sword and Shield*, in part, that I heed your admonition to me: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. 4:17).

Seventh, and most importantly, and written with utmost gentleness, scripture does not teach your assertion: "Our relationships with each other are to a certain extent conditional; you cannot behave poorly indefinitely and expect infinite patience in return, no matter how highly you regard your cause." Dear sister, this view of our relationships is an evil fruit of the false doctrine that has plagued the Protestant Reformed Churches. The false doctrine is that our relationship with God is "to a certain extent conditional." The false doctrine is that our experience of God's favor and our enjoyment of God's fellowship depend on our performing the good works that he has commanded us to do. The false doctrine is expressed clearly and concisely in this quotation from a Protestant Reformed sermon that, at the time of this writing, is being appealed to Classis East:

"If any man will hear my voice" . . . he is talking about not the condition to establish a union, but he is establishing a condition that deals with

communion. Not union, that's grace, it's all grace, only grace, but communion, fellowship. . . In the way of that repentance and daily turning conversion, that's when we enjoy or are aware of that blessed fellowship, that consciousness that God is with us and will never forsake us. (Agenda for Classis East, January 13, 2021, 13)

The evil fruit of that conditional theology regarding communion with God is that our relationships with each other are also "to a certain extent conditional." The conditional view of our relationships is that "poor behavior" must not be met with "infinite patience." It is the view that we must render an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in our relationships. This view is contrary to Jesus' instruction about our relationships, which is that they are unconditional.

38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.
41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. (Matt. 5:38–42)

If there is indeed "poor behavior" in our relationships, that must be met with true love, which rebukes and disciplines the sinner for his advantage and correction. By God's grace, it is this true love that has motivated the writing in *Sword and Shield*. The Protestant Reformed Churches are in danger; the PRC are practicing the "poor behavior" in our present controversy of tolerating and minimizing the lie; in true love for the churches, the editors of *Sword and Shield* are crying out to the churches to take heed to her way. May God grant that the churches yet take heed. And may God graciously banish from our hearts both the evil root of conditional covenant fellowship along with its evil fruit of conditional personal relationships.

I see that I have written a long response to your relatively brief letter. I think I will not try to edit my reply down, though, because you have expressed publicly the concerns and accusations that several others have expressed privately. Your letter is a good opportunity for me to give an answer to many at once.

Finally, grieved sister, take another look at *Sword and Shield*. Its cause is the cause of the truth of the word, which cause is of infinite worth. With another look, you may yet come to help us scoop not only with more awareness but also with even more volume.

—AL



Dear Sword & Shield readers,

I am from PRCA sister church, and am very keen to learn what bible really teaches regarding the place of good works in our salvation, so I had been reading up SB, 2018 Synod's decision, researching in the internet, etc. After Synod 2018, there were editorials in the SB that contained slightly different views, and there were subsequent letters that point out the erroneous views. But the letters and editorials on this topic stopped without any conclusion on what is SB's stand on this vitally important doctrinal issue. Thus, I appreciate very much that another magazine has been started to educate God's people, even across the globe, on this important doctrinal issue. If PRCA members do not want to read Sword & Shield, please let it survive for we from afar learnt alot from it and we do not have as many wholesome spiritual food as you all...

I noted from PRCA Facebook group that there were comments about the secretive nature of this magazine, its organisation and its editor's motives which put people off from reading its contents. I could not resist to join in

the discussions, though I normally do not like to post my comments in FB. This letter is a sharing of my comments in PRCA Facebook group. Also, to avoid any misunderstanding of how I got to know about Sword & Shield, it's not through any recommendations from any of the editors; it's through the same PRCA Facebook group where the adverse comments were started. We know the editor as a godly man of integrity who ministered to us in Singapore for 5 years; and some of his remarks stuck with me, like "Our life is not about us, it's about God". He is very God-centered, and I don't think he has any personal agenda in this magazine. I opine that God has laid this burden in his heart, and he writes with no other motives than the love for God and His people. I don't think there is anything secretive about this magazine and the organisation. I am not a member, yet I could attend online from across the globe their annual meeting in an open-air car park. And the speeches at the meeting were very edifying, no man-centred agendas, it's all about God and His truth.

Yours sincerely in Christ,
Sister See Leh Wah

LETTERS: OUR PRESENT CONTROVERSY

Rev. Lanning,

As I am reading the Q / A edition of the Sword and Shield the two questions I have been asking my wife keep coming to mind. They are 2 simple questions that I hope you would be willing to share and answer for the audience of the Sword and Shield.

This whole controversy is over the how we gain the assurance of our salvation and experience fellowship with God.

What is the definition of the Covenant of Grace?

The answer is simple "Friendship and FELLOWSHIP with God"

My second question is: how can it be then if we believe

in an unconditional covenant of grace, then how is it possible that we do not merit anything in our salvation, but we can merit our assurance and fellowship with God?

This answer is also simple. These 2 cannot exist together.

This is where I draw my line in this controversy. It is that simple. The assurance of salvation and fellowship with God is by Grace and nothing but Grace!!

However I would appreciate if you could expound on these 2 questions for the audience of the Sword and Shield.

In Christ,
Matt Hanko

REPLY

In your two questions and answers, you have distilled the controversy down to its simplest essence. In your two questions and answers, you have also shown the blessed simplicity of the doctrine of the unconditional covenant. Your two questions and answers are compelling. If we would take them to heart without qualification, the controversy would be settled: The doctrine of the uncon-

ditional covenant is the doctrine of unconditional fellowship with God and unconditional assurance.

I agree with what you have written in your letter, and I cannot improve upon it. However, since you ask for me to expound on these two questions, let me only add a few quotations to demonstrate that your doctrine of unconditional fellowship is Protestant Reformed. Let me

also add an observation about a sermon coming to Classis East that is not Protestant Reformed.

Question One

Q: What is the definition of the Covenant of Grace?

A: Friendship and FELLOWSHIP with God.

What is the covenant?

It is the gracious relation of living fellowship and friendship between God and His people in Christ, wherein He is their God and they are His people. Genesis 17:7; Psalm 16:5; 33:22. (*Essentials of Reformed Doctrine*, lesson 18)

The covenant is the relation of the most intimate communion of friendship, in which God reflects his own covenant life in his relation to the creature, gives to that creature life, and causes him to taste and acknowledge the highest good and the overflowing fountain of all good. (Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* [Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004], 459–60)

Wilt Thou also bless them as Thou hast blessed the believing fathers, Thy friends and faithful servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; in order that they, as co-heirs of the covenant which Thou hast established with these fathers, may bring up their children which Thou wilt be pleased to give them, in the fear of the Lord, to the honor of Thy holy name, to the edification of Thy church, and to the extension of the holy gospel. (Form for the Confirmation of Marriage before the Church, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 309)

Question Two

Q: How can it be then if we believe in an unconditional covenant of grace, then how is it possible that we do not merit anything in our salvation, but we can merit our assurance and fellowship with God?

A: These two cannot exist together. This is where I draw my line in this controversy. It is that simple. The assurance of salvation and fellowship with God is by Grace and nothing but Grace!!

How does God establish His covenant?

God establishes His covenant by His own work of grace, whereby He takes His people into His own covenant fellowship. Ephesians 2:8. (*Essentials of Reformed Doctrine*, lesson 18)

[The Protestant Reformed Churches] teach on the basis of the same confessions:

A. That election, which is the unconditional and unchangeable decree of God to redeem in

Christ a certain number of persons, is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation, whence flow all the gifts of grace, including faith...

C. That faith is not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, but a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ. (Declaration of Principles, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 416–17, 423)

The true doctrine concerning *Election* and *Rejection* having been explained, the Synod *rejects* the errors of those...

Who teach that there is in this life no fruit and no consciousness of the unchangeable election to glory, nor any certainty, except that which depends on a changeable and uncertain condition.

Rejection: For not only is it absurd to speak of an uncertain certainty, but also contrary to the experience of the saints, who by virtue of the consciousness of their election rejoice with the apostle and praise this favor of God (Eph. 1); who according to Christ's admonition rejoice with His disciples that their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20); who also place the consciousness of their election over against the fiery darts of the devil, asking: *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?* (Rom. 8:33). (Canons of Dordt 1, error and rejection 7, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 159–62)

Observation

You have drawn your line in this controversy according to the truth. It is a good line. It is the old line of the old paths. It is the Reformed line. It is the Protestant Reformed line. You were right to draw your line there. Now stand fast on that line, because that line is under assault within the Protestant Reformed Churches themselves.

At the time of this writing, there is an appeal against a sermon coming to Classis East in January. The sermon was preached in a Protestant Reformed pulpit, but it was not a Protestant Reformed sermon. The sermon taught:

“If any man will hear my voice”...he is talking about not the condition to establish a union, but he is establishing a condition that deals with communion. Not union, that's grace, it's all grace, only grace, but communion, fellowship... In the way of that repentance and daily turning conversion, that's when we enjoy or are aware of that blessed fellowship, that consciousness that God is with us and will never forsake us. (Agenda for Classis East, January 13, 2021, 13)

Your line is unconditional fellowship.

The sermon's line is conditional fellowship.

Only one of those lines is Protestant Reformed. We shall see what Classis East judges regarding the sermon. Classis East's judgment will reveal which line the churches of classis shall follow. Will classis follow the Protestant Reformed line of unconditional fellowship? Or will classis find room for the heretical line of conditional fellowship? If classis does anything less than declare the sermon to be heretical, then classis will have found room for the unreformed line of conditional fellowship. And then you

can be sure that it will not be long before the line of conditions pushes out the line of grace.

These are interesting days in the PRC. These are days when the denomination is deciding whether it will be Reformed or not. Let us pay attention, and let us try the spirits.

You have drawn the Protestant Reformed line. God be praised!

Now, will the Protestant Reformed Churches draw the Protestant Reformed line with you?

—AL



Dear Editor,

I really appreciated the special letters edition of *Sword and Shield*. I found both the letters and the responses to be instructive. I am thankful the *Sword and Shield* has provided this opportunity for us as fellow members of the body of Christ to discuss the truths of God's Word. May God grant that, through these endeavors to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," we may together grow up into Christ our head (Ephesians 4:3, 15). After reading the letters issue, I have just a few follow-up questions:

1. How are we to understand Canons 5 article 10? Are all three elements mentioned in article 10 related to our assurance of salvation in the same way? After reading Hoeksema's explanation of Canons 5.10 in "Voice of our Fathers," I am still a little confused as to how godliness is the fruit of assurance and yet assurance springs from godliness.
2. In the September 15 Letters Edition of *Sword and Shield*, we find 3 exegesis' of Psalm 32. The

first is found in the last paragraph on page 5, the second in the first paragraph on page 9, and the third begins on the bottom of page 20. Could you explain how the third exegesis of Psalm 32 is different than the first and the same as the second?

3. In connection with the previous question, are the following 2 statements mutually exclusive?
 - David repented by faith.
 - God did not give David the experience of the forgiveness of his sins until God brought David to repentance.

I appreciate your help in understanding these truths and thank you for your labors of love for God's people in explaining the controversy in our churches and distinguishing the truth from the lie. May God use these labors for the strengthening of our faith, so that it grows deeper and deeper into Jesus Christ, who is our firm foundation, that we as churches may not be moved.

Respectfully in Christ,
Sara Doezema

REPLY

It may be helpful to give the quotation of H. C. Hoeksema in *Voice of our Fathers* in light of its context:

His [the Holy Spirit's] work is such that its inevitable fruit is the production of a sanctified and holy child of God, a saint. And now His work and His testimony, His sanctification and His assurance, cannot be separated. He does not assure children of the devil, who are and remain children of the devil, that they are children of God. But He changes children of the devil into children of the living God; and to those children of the living God, and to them only, He gives the

assurance that they are God's children and heirs. Hence, it is not because sanctification is the condition of assurance, but because sanctification is the sure fruit of the operation of the Spirit of adoption, that assurance springs from an earnest and holy exercise of a good conscience and of good works. The child of God who by faith clears his conscience of the accusation of guilt by fleeing to God for forgiveness, the child of God who fights against and forsakes sin and has an earnest desire to walk in all good works—that child of God, under the preaching of the promise, and by the

testimony of the Holy Spirit with his spirit, has the assurance of certain perseverance.*

Worthy of notice and heartfelt reflection is the sentence that follows this paragraph and closes the chapter on Canons 5.10: “Hence, it is the old and ever wonderful gospel: all of God, nothing of us! *Soli Deo gloria!*”

The narrow question the sister asks is to clear up confusion about “how godliness is the fruit of assurance and yet assurance springs from godliness.”

The best way to clear up confusion is to distinguish these two propositions by the mode of each. First, then, “how godliness is the fruit of assurance.” The mode of this proposition is gratitude. Assurance is the gracious application by the Holy Spirit of the testimony of the gospel to the believer’s heart. This work of the Holy Spirit is the gift of assurance in the consciousness of the believer. This assurance results in the further work of the Spirit giving gratitude in the believer’s heart, the gratitude that supplies the motivation for a life of good works, namely, godliness. In this organic way, faith as assurance produces godliness.

The second proposition, “assurance springs from godliness,” is a different mode than gratitude. Godliness is not a motive. Neither is godliness the work of the believer. If godliness is the work of the believer, it must revert back to the condition that Professor Hoeksema wholeheartedly rejects in the above quotation. The reason godliness as the work of the believer must be rejected is because it could not possibly in that case produce any assurance. Since godliness is the work of the Holy Spirit, assurance can and does spring from it as a fruit. The mode therefore is organic, the gracious development of grace for grace (John 1:16–17).

Hoeksema’s rejection that the second proposition expresses a condition cannot be overemphasized. Neither may the line be blurred or confused to suppose that there is a third possibility. No, we will not have a condition. All terms such as *dependence* or *cause* will be rejected. But neither may we allow merely or only fruit of the Holy Spirit or only fruit of the operation of grace. Suppose we are told we must have the activity of man or his deed in addition to the operation of the Holy Spirit. Then this activity or deed of the believer is somehow related to assurance as a subsequent or a consequent following. Grace may be said to be fundamental or even necessary for man’s activity or deed, but the real point is the activity or deed as accomplished by the believer. There must be *something* for him to do and not only what is the result of the Spirit’s work.

This third possibility must be rejected just as sharply and strenuously as if it carried the label *condition*.

Stripping away the label does not make the proposition unconditional any less than taking the label off a can of beans means it is no longer a can of beans. The result is exactly the same. Only God’s gifts as God’s gifts, and only fruits of the Spirit’s operations as fruits of the Spirit’s operations, can produce assurance. If I look at my godliness, either my good works or the desire to do good works, I see it as polluted by my sins and depravity. My assurance is subsequently torn to shreds and must be carried away with the wind. However, when I am made to understand by the word of God that all my holiness is only by the work of the Holy Spirit and my good works are only the fruit of grace working in me, then assurance is the fruit.

Now to the sister’s broad question about Canons 5.10: “Are all three elements mentioned in Article 10 related to our assurance of salvation in the same way?”

The main answer to this question, setting aside the great differences in each of the elements in their operations, is that *they are related in the same way*.

Certainly their relationship to assurance is clear from the way the article reads, especially in the Latin original, which is different from the English translation from the Dutch found in our psalters. The three elements are governed by the same words that define the relationship to assurance. It may be helpful to elide some of the words so that we can read the article this way: “This assurance... springs from faith...from the testimony of the Holy Spirit...and lastly, from a serious and holy desire.” To hew more closely to the original Latin, we can read, “Therefore this assurance...out of faith...out of the testimony of the Holy Spirit...and finally out of a serious and holy desire of a good conscience and of good works.” These are three different elements. They are listed as they are found in scripture: independently of one another.

Article 10 emphasizes that all of these sources of assurance are related by “the Word of God.” Their source in God’s word makes them sources of assurance. That is the point of this article when it establishes the word of God as the source of all assurance of perseverance and explicitly rejects everything that is not found in the word of God. Moreover, in that same word of God, all of these sources of assurance are declared to be gifts of God. They are his promises. He is the one who gives faith in his promises (Eph. 2:8). He has promised to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to his elect, the Spirit who bears witness with their spirits that they are the children of God (Rom. 8:16; see also vv. 11, 26). He has promised to give this serious and earnest zeal of a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:5) and of good

* Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers: An Exposition of the Canons of Dordrecht* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 715; emphasis added.

works (Eph. 2:10). All three are of grace alone. They are the free gifts of God, based on the merits of Jesus Christ alone.

It is worth repeating: If our believing the promises of God's word becomes our activity rather than the free gift of God by the Holy Spirit, assurance cannot spring out of it. If the Spirit's bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God becomes ours when we do good works, or becomes greater in us when we do more good works, assurance cannot spring out of it. If our zeal for a good conscience and for good works is by our efforts or labors, assurance cannot spring out of it. That assurance is broken altogether by our weaknesses and infirmities.

How important that we preserve the gospel as exclaimed by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema: "Hence, it is the old and ever wonderful gospel: all of God, nothing of us! *Soli Deo gloria!*"

The sister brings up three different exegeses of Psalm 32 that were expressed in the last Letters Edition of *Sword and Shield*. The first instance is on page 5:

Just look at David as a case in point. Wasn't David's fellowship with God reduced or taken away when he sinned (Psalms 32:3 "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me"), and tried to cover up his sin? Didn't David experience (Psalms 32:10 "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.") a renewed or restored experience of fellowship after he confessed his sin and returned to a way or walk of obedience? Did God's grace bring him back? Certainly. Did God bring him back to experience covenant fellowship before(?), or after(?) David did something? After David did something. What was that physical and mental activity (the definition of work) that David did? He confessed his sin and returned to a walk of obedience, he trusted in God.

The second instance is on page 9:

The truth is that Psalm 32 teaches justification by faith alone and the experience of salvation by faith alone. David's evil works interrupted his experience of fellowship with God, but his good works did not restore his experience of fellowship with God. What restored his experience was entirely God's mercy, received by faith alone. David himself says this: "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about" (v. 10). "Trusteth in the LORD"! That is not working but believing. That is not works but grace. It is the grace principle of

salvation and the grace principle alone. Or, if you prefer, it is by grace and by grace alone.

What of David's working and obedience? Good works are the fruit of faith. Good works always accompany faith. But man's salvation and man's experience of salvation do not come by those works, are not obtained by those works, do not depend on those works. Salvation and the experience of salvation are by faith alone in Christ alone because of grace alone.

The third instance is on page 20:

We read David's experience of that work of God, in his inspired words in Psalm 32. He begins with the wonderful confession of experiencing and knowing God's blessing upon him. Then in verses 3 and 4 he records the misery he had when living in sin and outside of the experience of fellowship with God. In verse 5 by inspiration he shows us that when he acknowledged and confessed his sin, he experienced forgiveness. In verse 7 David gives us the beautiful end of his God-worked repentance—God is his hiding place, his preserver, and his surrounding joy. This is how we understand the truth that can be so beautifully expressed in the words 'in the way of'. David's fellowship with God did not depend on his good work of repentance, nor did God's fellowship come on the condition of his good works. It was all of grace by faith.

Does this fit your principle of works? Do we fit into your 'certain group'? If so, please explain how. If not, do you know, personally, others in our denomination who believe differently than this? And how would they then explain Psalm 32?

The sister's first question is for an explanation of the difference between the first and the third exegeses of Psalm 32. I confess I need to make an assumption about the connection made by the first letter writer, namely, that he intends to make a wholly affirmative connection between his questions and his answers. He makes three things that David did—confession of his sin, return to a walk of obedience, and trusting in God—"work." That "work" was David's mental and physical activity. The third exegesis did not identify those things as David's work. It spoke deliberately of David's "God-worked repentance."

One other point of difference between the first and the third is that the first emphasizes a time relationship between David's "work" of confessing, returning, and trusting and "a renewed or restored experience of fellowship." That relationship is that the latter came after the former. Although the third exegesis directly identifies a time relationship to support the use of the phrase "in the

way of,” it denies a relationship of dependence or conditionality, affirming instead, “It was all of grace by faith.”

However, the above difference between these two exegeses of Psalm 32 exists in a historical connection. Exegesis, both in general principles as a science and in application of those principles to particular texts, such as Psalm 32, follows a pattern of distinction between doctrinal systems. Let it suffice to say that there is an Arminian exegesis of Romans 7 and a Reformed exegesis. There is a federal vision exegesis of Romans 2:6–10 and a Reformed exegesis. Applied to Psalm 32 the question is, who will agree with what exegesis? Why would some agree with the first but not the third? Why would a Pelagian agree with the first exegesis but not the third? Why would a conditional covenant theologian agree with the first but not the third?

The second question is why the third exegesis is the same as the second. They are the same in affirming grace by faith, the second going farther with the addition of the word “alone.” They are the same in bringing grace to bear on David’s repentance. Again, from a broader historical perspective, they present a distinctively Reformed exegesis of Psalm 32.

The sister then asks an additional, related question. She inquires whether these two statements are mutually exclusive: “David repented by faith” and “God did not give David the experience of the forgiveness of his sins until God brought David to repentance.”

The two statements are not mutually exclusive. So far from being mutually exclusive, they are coordinate. Repentance and faith, while each is to be distinguished in its own character and nature, may not be so separated as to become independent from each other, let alone exclusive to each other. Faith and repentance can be distinguished in that repentance has respect to sin and self as sinful, while faith has respect to God, his word, and Christ, the proper object of faith as the Son of God and him in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen to his glory. But faith must also be present in the heart for the heart’s repentance to be true repentance.

One aspect of the Holy Spirit’s working true repentance is his gift of faith in the heart and mind of the believer. By faith alone is all access to God, including the access of coming before God in true repentance (see Heb. 11:6). For the sake of true repentance, faith must *first* apprehend the mercy of God in Jesus Christ as a *reason* for coming to God in sorrow or shame. Faith must rely on the promise of God to forgive sin *in order to come to him seeking that forgiveness*. Without that faith one can only bitterly oppose God in lawlessness, deny sin and try to appease God with the fig-leaves of self-righteousness, or make repentance into a token work of self-righteousness in order to obtain favor from God. Godly repentance *needs* faith for it to be godly.

The role of faith is present in Canons 5.7.

In these falls He [God] preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing, or being totally lost; and again, by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

I cannot conceive of this certain and effectual renewal to repentance worked by God “by His Word and Spirit” without faith being present in its willing and activity, worked by the Holy Spirit as well.

The character of faith is receptive, receptive to the grace of God in all the workings of that grace, including the gracious gift of repentance. It is impossible to believe that repentance is something that proceeds from the believer himself. Repentance is the repentance of a sinner, who can claim nothing good of himself! Repentance cannot say, “I did this good work of repenting and believing, and now God will have respect to the good thing I did and restore me to his fellowship.” Repentance must say, “I am not worthy.” We might well then suppose that the prodigal son should think in his heart, “This I will say to my father, ‘I am not worthy,’ so then my father will make me his son again.” Faith is eager to find all good from God, denying repentance as being of self and giving all glory to God.

Proper Reformed, biblical exegesis recognizes the authority of such creeds and confessions as our three forms of unity. In subscription to these three forms (via the Formula of Subscription), the Reformed preacher will submit to these creeds and confessions in his exegesis and in his preaching. As he has vowed to maintain and defend the doctrines of these creeds, he will exegete the scriptures accordingly. He will not allow himself to go only so deep in the exegesis of Psalm 32 as to secure agreement with the doctrines of Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, and Unitarianism. He will not go in his exegesis of that psalm only so far that the only conclusion he will draw is that David did his work of repentance and confession and then God did his following work of restoring to David the consciousness of his favor and grace. The Reformed exegete must go farther to demonstrate from the passage the truth of grace for grace. He will show how Psalm 32 in its particulars does demonstrate the truth of scripture explained in the fifth head of doctrine, especially articles 7 and 10.

Let us suppose a Reformed preacher is going to preach a sermon on Psalm 32, presenting and applying the exegesis of that psalm. What will make that sermon a Reformed sermon? Will it be a Reformed sermon because

he has been trained in a Reformed seminary or because he has been ordained in a Reformed church or because he is preaching in a Reformed church? Will it be a Reformed sermon because the preacher says somewhere, “It is all by grace”? Will it be a Reformed sermon because the preacher will say, “God restored David to his fellowship and friendship by grace alone after David did his work of repenting, obeying, and trusting”? Will it be a Reformed sermon because the preacher will say, “Only after David

did his work of repentance would God and did God show him grace by restoring him to his fellowship”? It might still be a Roman Catholic homily or an Arminian sermon for all that. For a Reformed sermon to be a Reformed sermon, it must emphasize that David’s repentance was not his work but God’s gift. A Reformed sermon will demonstrate through Psalm 32 the wonder of grace for grace. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of scripture.

—MVW



Good Morning Rev. Lanning,

I’ve been struggling with a few things related to the controversy in our churches. It would be helpful if you could address the below topics in an upcoming issue. You do not need to publish the below as a letter, but you may if you see fit. Also, if you would like to talk about this input more, I would be delighted to do so. My number is mobile is xxx-xxx-xxxx.

I believe there are two areas lacking in your offense against the error exposed by the decisions of Synod 2018.

First, there ought to be a complete evaluation of the error from the perspective of corporate responsibility. From my various conversations with fellow saints, it appears to be little understood that we as a denomination are corporately responsible for error as it arises in our denomination. This is true regardless of whether it is actively being embraced (Dan. 9:5ff). Our proper response to our

guilt over this error is described by Professor Hanko in the book *When You Pray*: “We must confess our own responsibility for [corporate] sins, keep ourselves from them...” (70).

Second, turning the sword deeper inward, we must individually see how this error finds its way into our heart. It is easy for all of us to point to error outside of us. However, we have heard in the preaching that we will and must struggle all our lives against the inner Pelagian and the inner Arminian—how much more must we fight the error that creeps into our heart far more subtly and tells us that we, by our work, can achieve greater assurance of our salvation? What are the implications of this error as it distorts our relationship with God, fellow saints, spouse and children?

In Christ,
Mike Vermeer

REPLY

Although this letter was addressed to Reverend Lanning, I have been tasked with answering the letter. Michael is correct regarding the issue of corporate responsibility. If denominational unity means anything at all, it means that the error exposed in sermons and a doctrinal statement is a problem for all the churches. The fact that it took a synodical decision to settle the matter especially makes it a denominational issue. We as a denomination went in a certain way, and the way that we went was erroneous. We went a certain way according to certain, definite doctrinal convictions.

I think it is a fair question to ask, what became of those convictions and of that theology? Were they simply abandoned? Does everyone agree that the faith of the synod is their faith? Does everyone reject those doctrinal convictions as seriously false and erroneous?

I am especially interested in the question, do we all agree that the protestants in this case were not antinomian in their criticisms of the doctrinal error? When

the sermon on John 14:6 was preached and an elder, according to his calling and vow of subscription, rightly criticized that sermon as wrong, he was charged as an antinomian and unjustly lost his office. Is the gospel of grace in its critique of the particular form of the false doctrine that appeared in our churches antinomian?

We went through a doctrinal controversy, and at the end of it almost no one can explain what actually happened or what synod decided. It seems to be assumed by some that everyone just reads through a 300-page *Acts of Synod* (and there were multiple 300-page *Acts of Synod*). Why was there no attempt to explain the doctrinal decisions for the benefit of the people, many of whom will never read the *Acts of Synod*? How can we take responsibility for something we do not even know about?

And should there not be a pretty serious level of denominational reflection and humility in light of the fact that for several years we as a denomination got it

wrong about the covenant (!) and justification (!)? Covenant and justification are Protestant Reformed “bread and butter,” and we got it wrong. That should humble us deeply and make us think and make us ask, “Why did we get it wrong?” Should not there be some honest and candid reflection and discussion as members and officebearers of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) about what happened, what actually was decided, what we believe, and what we reject as false?

In this regard, I would also add that the synod of the PRC has settled the matter. The issue, then, is not to settle the matter as if it could still be an open question in the PRC. Rather, the issue is whether we are going to receive that decision or not, whether we are going to accept the conclusions or not, and whether we are going to live by that decision or not, or whether we are going to undermine the decision by twisting its conclusions, castigating those who persisted in their protests to the end, minimizing the seriousness of the errors involved, or putting an editorial spin on the words of the decision.

To Michael’s second admonition, I give a hearty amen and amen. I am of the conviction that the doctrinal error that was exposed in sermons and a doctrinal statement has widespread effects upon all relationships in the church. The logic is clear: if one’s relationship with the holy God is such that his good works gain and obtain God’s favor and grace—that is, he is favorable to that person and hears his prayers because he is a holy or a more holy person by means of his works—then such a proud individual will demand payment of what is owed him and beat his fellow servants. He does not understand and, therefore, does not live out of the reality that a mountain of debt has been forgiven him, and thus does not live graciously in the church either. Is that not the point of Christ’s words to Simon?

44. And he [Jesus] turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.
45. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.
46. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.
47. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.
48. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.
49. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?
50. And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. (Luke 7:44–50)

True love, which is the essence of the Christian life, arises inexorably out of justifying faith and the consciousness of the free forgiveness of sins. But he who loves little—which is to say not at all—knows nothing of the free forgiveness of sins. Faithlessly, the same person also consequently lives by works in marriage, home, office, church, and school. The truth—of sovereign and particular grace concentrating on the gracious pardon of sins—is essential for right living in the church. Wrong doctrine inevitably leads to and is to blame for destructive relationships in the church. Our relationship with God is one of grace and unconditional love, and our relationship with one another is one of grace and unconditional love.

—NJL



Dear Editors,

Are good works always and only the fruit of salvation? Are there any exceptions? Can they ever be properly explained as ‘not fruit’? If no, why not? If yes, then what are

they if they are not fruit? Can good works be a means of grace and at the same time only fruit?

In Christ,
Annette Kuiper

REPLY

Good works are fruits, only fruits. There are no exceptions. They can never be explained as anything other than fruits without corrupting the Reformed biblical revelation concerning good works. This also answers the question, “Can good works be a means of grace and at the same time only fruit?” By means of grace, I understand you to mean an instrument to obtain grace. The sole instru-

ment by which the believer receives grace is faith. Faith keeps us in communion with Christ and all his benefits. In communion with Christ, that is, out of Christ and out of faith, a faith that works by love, the believer surely and inevitably produces good works as a branch of the vine, Jesus Christ.

The Reformed creeds describe good works as fruits.

But doth not this doctrine [of justification by faith alone] make men careless and profane?

By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness. (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 64, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 107)

Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ. (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 86, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 120)

He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions. (Canons of Dordt 3-4.11, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 168)

Error 7: Who teach that the faith of those who believe for a time does not differ from justifying and saving faith except only in duration.

Rejection: For Christ Himself, in Matt. 13:20, Luke 8:13, and in other places, evidently notes, besides this duration, a threefold difference between those who believe only for a time and true believers, when He declares that the former receive the seed in stony ground, but the latter in the good ground or heart; that the former are without root, but the latter have a firm root; that the former are without fruit, but that the latter bring forth their fruit in various measure with constancy and steadfastness. (Canons of Dordt 5, error and rejection 7, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 178)

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true that this

justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary, without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture *a faith that worketh by love*, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word.

These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace; howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good. (Belgic Confession 24, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 52-54)

The creeds describe good works as fruits on the basis of scripture's revelation that good works are fruits.

The entire Old Testament law bears witness to this. Israel's worship of God was through the fruits of the land. Especially the feast of Pentecost is instructive in this regard. "Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD... And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest" (Lev. 23:17, 20). The loaves are called "wave loaves" in the King James Version. They were intended to be heaved back and forth before the Lord in the temple. It symbolized the consecration of the whole life given to them in the land and all the fruits to God in worship. The heaving of the wave loaves is typical of New Testament Pentecost. This is the great work of Christ's Pentecost Spirit. Christ poured out his Spirit on his church and indwells the church and each individual believer, in order that as God's inheritance the church and believer bring forth fruit in a holy life consecrated wholly unto God.

John the Baptist calls the people to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8). So repentance is the inward and invisible gift of grace and bears its fruits in a holy life.

Christ teaches in John 15:5: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." That the fruit that Christ is talking about consists of obedience is made clear in verse 10: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have

kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." So the sure mark of the believer in Christ is that he brings forth the fruits of keeping Christ's commands.

The apostle Paul prays that the Philippians will be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11). Righteousness is the tree. Good works the fruits.

So they are truly deceived who say that good works are the cause of righteousness. Good works can *only* be fruits.

Good works are fruits, only fruits.

Describing good works as fruits does no injury to the reality of good works, but rather magnifies the grace of God by which those fruits are produced in and through the believer. It is an astounding thing and the realization of God's purpose with man that he brings forth fruits.

God created Adam good and upright and in the image of God. The purpose of this creation was that Adam as king of creation would consecrate the whole earthly creation to God in his heart and produce fruit in his whole life to the glory of God his creator. Adam fell in order that this purpose would be realized in Christ in a far higher way. "Who [Christ] gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

The whole purpose of God's election, Christ's redemption, forgiveness, and the renewal of the believer is realized in the life of good works. After explaining that salvation is by grace and not of works, lest any man should boast, the apostle Paul states the proper explanation of the origin of works when he says, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Salvation is not of works; salvation is not by works; salvation is not because of works. Salvation is unto good works. There is the proper place of works.

Man was created a working creature. The natural man works still, but all his works are evil.

The believer saved by grace works too. He is created by grace unto good works. He is God's workmanship created unto good works ordained for him from before the foundation of the world.

Besides, describing works as fruits is the only way that the life of holiness can be worship. Every work done for any other reason than the glory of God alone is evil and turns our relationship with God and our worship of God in all our lives into a mercantile or mercenary endeavor.

—NJL



I would like to offer some thoughts about our present controversy that have helped clarify things in my mind.

One of the points of confusion, I think, is that "salvation" can have two meanings and we use both meanings without making the distinction. The narrower meaning refers to the *obtaining* of new life through faith in Christ (regeneration and justification). The broader meaning also includes the *manifestation* of that new life (sanctification and glorification). In a sense, salvation is complete once we are reborn. If you would ask any Christian whether he is saved, the answer would be a simple "yes"; the answer is not "I am in the process of being saved." But yet we include sanctification and glorification under the term "salvation."

Sanctification begins after we have already received Christ's life and righteousness (perfectly and completely) by being grafted into him. So, what is left to be accomplished? Manifesting the new life does not mean improving it, completing it, or adding to it. The new life lacks nothing, but it is revealed only a small bit in this world. Like a man possessed by a demon, our mind and body are still controlled by our old sinful self. Sanctification is the work of the spirit of Christ in us, casting out that old man so the new life begins to "reign" in us (Rom 6:12–14).

The new life that we receive through faith is just as

complete as the life Jesus gave to Lazarus. Jesus did not say to Lazarus "now if you will start breathing you will experience life"—the desire to breathe is part of life and it would not be complete without it. Jesus gave him the whole package of life and Lazarus lived it, or manifested it, "in the way of" moving and breathing. We have received new spiritual life, and that life is manifested in the way of joy, assurance, repentance, humility, obedience, thankfulness, good works... All these things occur together because they all come from the same source—the life of Christ that we received through faith. Like breathing, eating, and sleeping, they all come as one package.

"Good works" must also be defined carefully. Fundamental is the fact that they "proceed from a true faith" (HC Q&A 91). Once we have obtained the new life through faith, we have an old self and a new self. Good works are the works of that new man. They themselves are not filthy rags—a good work is a clean white cloth; the filthiness comes from our old man. The works of my new self are the works of the spirit of Christ in me—"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13). The life of the root becomes the life of the grafted branch. Living a covenant life of good works is not something that my old self must take

up and do, but it is the activity of the new life itself.

So, are good works the result of salvation or part of the process? And how about the experience / enjoyment / assurance of salvation? The answer depends on which definition of salvation you are using. All these things are both a result of the salvation already obtained but also part of the process of sanctification. We cannot separate the working of Christ's spirit in us from sanctification—these good works and experiences are part of the manifesting (but not the obtaining) of spiritual life. Life is manifested by living.

Another question at the heart of our controversy is “why should we do good works?” Scripture shows us that we experience many personal blessings in the way of living a covenant life. Should we promote the goals of assurance, enjoyment, or subjective experience as motivation for good works? The answer is no.

A work that is done for a personal goal, even an honorable goal like assurance of salvation, is not a good work at all. A wife may increase her enjoyment of the marriage by serving her husband, but she does it out of love for him. The reason for a good work is always love—thankful love for God which extends to love for his people as well. Love is the expression of the Spirit of Christ in us and it is the basis for the entire law that guides our works (Matt 22:36–40). To suggest that someone should do good works for himself is to give works “a place and function that is out of harmony with the reformed confessions.”

Some would point out how David was chastised for his sin (Ps. 32)—God withheld his personal joy and peace until he acknowledged and repented of his sin. But his

repentance was a sincere sorrow for his sin against God and his neighbor; it was not just something he did so he could sleep at night. David's ultimate motivation was not the restoring of his personal enjoyment. If our children only learn how to avoid spankings when we discipline them, then they did not learn the right lesson. Chastisement turns us away from sin, but it is not the motivation for good works.

Trying to give Christians a motivation to do good works is like telling Lazarus to breathe. It implies a wrong understanding of both salvation and good works. The desire is already there. Our new man is the life of Christ in us—it is already 100 percent motivated to do only good.

Of course, encouragement is a good thing—tell the loyal but battle-weary soldier that all is not lost, that the victory is ours, that this fight is a good fight, to not be weary in well doing... But do not talk to him about how much he will get paid if he keeps fighting. He is fighting for king and country, not for himself.

Do I obtain my new life (or any part of it) by good works? No! Are my good works (works of Christ's spirit in me) normally accompanied by all the other blessings of covenant life? Yes! Is my enjoyment of those blessings the reason I do good works? No!

The ultimate good work was done on the cross where Christ purposely severed the enjoyment and experience of fellowship that he had with the Father. I am eternally thankful that Christ did not put his own enjoyment of fellowship above his love for us.

Doug Wassink



Dear Editor Rev. Lanning,

Having recently listened to a sermon by Rev. Andrew Lanning and reading articles from the Sword and Shield (9-15-20), may I humbly offer my thoughts as a Christian brother. I have not been raised in the PRC, but am closely affiliated with it in my background as part of a larger family of relatives whose roots go back to its very beginning. We enjoy good relationships!

I am finding it hard to wrap my mind around the issue that is being discussed in the PRC. So much of what I read and heard from the above writers and speaker, I can agree with. This just doesn't seem to me to be a definitive enough issue to cause a division in the PRC. All true Christ followers hold as truth Ephesians 2:8–10. “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created

in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Salvation is in Christ—Alone! Our involvement in accepting Christ as our Savior is something that can be compared to the obedience of Noah in building of the Ark. Both acts of obedience were responses done by faith which are gifts of God. To God belongs all the glory!

Ultimately, Noah didn't build the Ark. God did. Ultimately, I didn't choose to follow Christ. God chose me. As God had to give Noah life, a mind and physical strength, material and other helpers to build the Ark, so God also gives His children the gift of a heart of flesh after which we respond in thankfulness resulting in good works. In human terms, however, Noah built the Ark. In human terms, as a builder, I built my house. In human terms, mankind has built an amazing world of things. In reality, unless God gave man life, materials and the ability to create new things, needless

to say, we would have done nothing. In fact, we wouldn't have even existed. We didn't accept Christ as our Savior, it also was all of God. But God speaks to us in human terms, terms that we can understand, terms that motivated Noah to build the Ark and terms that motivates the body of Jesus Christ to build His Kingdom. That is why He calls us to "Go into the world and preach the Gospel, teaching them to observe all the things He has commanded us". Noah built the Ark by the power of the Spirit and we are called to build the Kingdom of God by that same Spirit.

Until the Covid Virus, my brother and I had the privilege of teaching a couple of Bible classes in the Cook County Jail, Division 10 Maximum Security. Many of these inmates have limited knowledge of the Bible. So we start in Genesis with Creation, The Fall of Adam and Eve resulting in death, death in body and in Spirit. This caused separation from each other and ultimately from God. We ask the men, "Can a dead man do anything to come alive?" They will immediately say, "No." From the communities that they mainly come from and the reasons that they are incarcerated, they know what death is all about. We then, using this illustration, explain to them that this is exactly the way it is Spiritually as well. We usually ask them what brings them to our Bible study and they give a variety of reasons. We point out to them that this desire, to know more about the Bible having the central focus of the coming of Jesus Christ, is from God. He is changing a "Dead Heart of Stone" into a "Heart of Flesh," creating a new man who is born again. We explain, that when this New Creation is born and this New Man recognizes himself as a sinner and in Christ Jesus finds that all his sins are forgiven,

this New Man with his new heart of Flesh is going to be so grateful for such an undeserved gift that his mouth will not be able to hold back the transforming power of his Savior, Jesus Christ! His life as well will begin to radiate the love and lifestyle of his Great Savior. This is exactly what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches by asking, "What three things must we know to enjoy this comfort?" (A close relationship with Jesus). The acceptance of this Good News by men whose eyes are being opened, is beautiful to behold. To see the light and joy radiate in the inmates' eyes when they come to faith in Jesus Christ, brings us great joy! Did Noah build the Ark to save mankind? Yes. Did we bring these men to Christ to save them? Yes. But only as obedient (tools) being wielded and used by our Gracious and Loving Heavenly Father, doing what He created us to do!

May I, as an outsider of the PRC, strongly encourage you to get on with the work of Christ and get out and into a dark world bringing the Gospel to the "least of these," many who are part of the Eternal Covenant Elect of God. Please—don't "fiddle," with endless arguments that benefit very few—"as Rome is burning." I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul's passion when he said, "I'll be all things to all men in order to gain some." Did Paul claim any credit for himself? No. He was just doing what his heart of flesh was burning to do—to tell the world of his Great Savior, Jesus Christ! May our hearts be hearts of flesh and may you as leaders and all of us in God's Holy Catholic Church identify with Paul's heart of flesh for those yet in darkness. Christ's coming again is near!

Humbly Submitted,
Carl R. Smits

REPLY

Welcome to the pages of *Sword and Shield*. It is always interesting and instructive to see how an "outsider of the PRC," as you identify yourself, views the controversy within the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). We are glad to have your perspective on these pages.

Before getting to the main point of your letter, let me comment on your reference to a recent sermon by the undersigned. Since you also refer in your letter to Noah building or not building the ark, I am assuming that you are referring to my sermon on Hebrews 11:7, "By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark." That sermon was part of a larger debate in the PRC about who built the ark. Because that material has not appeared in the pages of *Sword and Shield*, readers may be unfamiliar with it. The debate was over the meaning of "by faith" in Hebrews 11:7. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not

seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Does "by faith" mean that the building of the ark was God's work or man's work? Is it appropriate to say, "Inasmuch as Noah built the ark by faith, man did not build the ark; God built the ark"? Or even, "Inasmuch as Noah built the ark by faith, Noah did not build the ark; God built the ark"? Interested readers can pursue this debate further as it unfolded in the following places:

1. Protestant Reformed young people's convention speech by Rev. Nathan Langerak, printed in the November 2019 *Beacon Lights*
2. Letters regarding that speech in the February 2020 and April 2020 *Beacon Lights*

3. Sermon by Rev. A. Lanning:
<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=920201526251139>
4. Unpublished email article by Prof. David J. Engelsma

That aside, the main controversy in the PRC is whether fellowship with God is by grace or by works. That controversy featured prominently in the issue of *Sword and Shield* that you also referred to in your letter: the September 15, 2020, Letters Edition of *Sword and Shield*.

I take the main point of your letter to be that the present controversy in the PRC “just doesn’t seem to me to be a definitive enough issue to cause a division in the PRC.” You exhort the churches: “May I, as an outsider of the PRC, strongly encourage you to get on with the work of Christ and get out and into a dark world bringing the Gospel to the ‘least of these,’ many who are part of the Eternal Covenant Elect of God. Please—don’t ‘fiddle,’ with endless arguments that benefit very few—as Rome is burning.”

Your letter confronts members of the Protestant Reformed Churches with an important question: Is our present controversy truly necessary? Or is our present controversy much ado about nothing, so that it is distracting us from the real work of Christ of bringing the gospel to the world?

Our present controversy in the PRC is whether covenant fellowship with God is by works or by grace. Our controversy is whether the child of God obtains the conscious experience of salvation by his works of obedience to God’s law or whether he obtains it by faith as a free gift of God’s grace in Christ. Therefore, the controversy is over the gospel, the perfect work of Christ, justification by faith alone, and the unconditional covenant of grace. The controversy is over the place and function of good works as that place and function are defined in the Reformed confessions. The controversy is over an error out of hell on the one hand and God’s revealed truth on the other.

Yes, our present controversy is truly necessary. It is not much ado about nothing. It is not fiddling with endless

and profitless arguments. In this controversy the PRC are deciding whether they will be Reformed according to the Reformed confessions or not. In this controversy the PRC are deciding whether they will be a denomination of true churches or a denomination of false churches. This controversy must be pressed and pursued. And it is “a definitive enough issue to cause a division in the PRC.” If the PRC do not take the doctrinal decisions of Synod 2018 and run with them, but if they instead drive out those who do, then the PRC will have divided its own denomination over nothing less than the gospel of grace.

Pursuing this controversy is not a distraction. In fact, pursuing this controversy does not even distract the church from bringing the gospel of Christ to the world. The gospel of Christ is always antithetical. The truth always stands opposed to the lie. When the church contends for the faith over against the lie, that is a positive witness to the world that the truth is light and the lie is darkness.

The believers who publish *Sword and Shield* and who pursue the controversy in this magazine can witness to anyone and everyone through this magazine. As you have encouraged me to get on with the work of Christ, let me so encourage you. In these days of lockdown, you are not able personally to get into the Cook County Jail to teach Bible classes. But a magazine may be able to get into the jail. If you would provide me with an address and the names of the men you have worked with in your Bible classes, Reformed Believers Publishing would be happy to provide each of them with a subscription to the magazine free of charge. I believe I speak for the other members of Reformed Believers Publishing when I say that we are eager through this magazine “to get on with the work of Christ and get out and into a dark world bringing the Gospel to the ‘least of these.’” Indeed, this is part of our stated purpose in our constitution: “To give a theological and antithetical witness to the Reformed church world and beyond by broadcasting this distinctive Reformed truth to the people of God wherever they are found.”

—AL

LETTER: BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Dear Editors,

I write this letter to address a recent contribution to the *Sword & Shield* magazine regarding the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling (IRBC). In this article Samuel Vasquez brings three charges against the IRBC:

1. It is “unbiblical.”

2. It is “not Reformed.”
3. It is “very deceptive.”

Having taken the basic training course offered by IRBC, I can confidently say that all of these charges are untrue in their representation of the organization. Mr. Vasquez has judged rashly based on a series of false

premises and a misunderstanding of what IRBC actually seeks to do in the sphere of biblical counseling. If this topic is indeed “ripe for some lively discussion and some biblical examination,” at the very least it ought to be based on correct information.

With regard to the charge that the IRBC is “unbiblical,” Mr. Vasquez errs in his broad and generalized characterization of biblical counseling. Though he may be correct in his description of the organized movement that began in the 1970’s, he misses the important fact that this movement has since morphed into many different parachurch organizations with divergent purposes and practices. To characterize Biblical counseling as a single movement and assume that the IRBC subscribes to the various statements and practices he criticizes is unfounded. For instance, the “integrationist” approach that accepts and uses secular science alongside the Bible in an uncritical fashion is one that IRBC explicitly rejects. The IRBC in its training makes very clear that the Bible is sufficient and the source to which all believers—including Christian counselors—must turn for their wisdom and advice. The role that the IRBC actually assumes is to show believers *how* and *where* the Bible speaks to various sins and afflictions that impact the life of God’s children. Its purpose is not in any way to subvert the Bible or replace it with secular psychology and philosophy. This charge is false regardless of whether one agrees with the application or interpretation of specific Bible passages promoted by the IRBC for counseling.

In his charge that the IRBC is “unbiblical,” Mr. Vasquez also takes issue with the statement, “*All truth is God’s truth.*” In all reality, the statement is a basic Christian truism that cannot be controverted. If something is genuinely true, then it has its basis in God’s being, for Truth is one of the attributes of God. That being said, I understand Mr. Vasquez’s discomfort with this statement because it has been so badly abused by theistic evolutionists and others who desire to elevate the findings of secular science alongside of or above Scripture. This includes some—but certainly not *all*—forms of Biblical counseling. But the IRBC does not intend this error by quoting the statement. It is committed to the primacy and authority of Scripture as the ultimate source of truth and the only standard by which any science or philosophy can be tested. To suggest that the IRBC sees psychology or any “wisdom of man” as an equal to Scripture is simply untrue. Anyone who questions this contention is encouraged to obtain the syllabus for the basic training course or speak with the organization’s director.

With regard to the charge that the IRBC is “not Reformed,” Mr. Vasquez bases his entire argument on an anachronistic view of history and God’s providence. The

argument is that since the practice of biblical counseling “in its present format” was not present during the Protestant Reformation or in any of the creeds or church order, it must not be Reformed. This argument is deeply flawed because it neglects the providential development of biblical learning that has occurred since the Reformation. Every one of the “seven steps” identified on the IRBC website has its basis in Scripture, notably from the book of Proverbs. That these biblical principles are organized and restated in a systematic fashion for *practical* use in counseling is no different than the development of systematic theology to explain and defend the various *theological* truths of Scripture. The church since the Protestant Reformation has continued, by the guidance of the Spirit, to develop doctrine according to biblical principles for the glory of God. So too, the Spirit has guided the church in development of biblical counseling practices to correct and comfort believers of every era who have been sinned against or are struggling with their own sins. To suggest the application of these principles during the Reformation should look exactly the same as it does today is to neglect the parallel development of sin and evil in this world since the time of Calvin and Luther. A careful, systematic and thorough development of biblical practices to help believers has always been a concern for Reformed churches throughout history.

The third charge Mr. Vasquez makes, that the IRBC is “very deceptive,” demonstrates his lack of understanding about the organization and operation of IRBC. The primary misunderstanding is that the IRBC is itself a counseling organization, which is incorrect. In fact, the IRBC functions as a vehicle for training counselors and disseminating written materials on Biblical counseling but does not directly oversee counseling. Instead, it has helped various Reformed congregations to organize individual *The Shepherd’s Way* counseling centers that are directly overseen by the consistory of each church. In that way the specific doctrines and practical positions that are espoused by each congregation can be implemented through ecclesiastical oversight of counselors. This explains why denomination-specific doctrinal and practical issues, such as divorce and remarriage or Federal Vision theology, are not mentioned on the IRBC website. What the IRBC fundamentally requires is a belief in the sufficiency and authority of Scripture and adherence to either the Reformed or Presbyterian confessions. Specific positions derived from or taken in addition to these confessions are directed by the consistories that oversee *The Shepherd’s Way* counseling centers. This is not deceptive, nor is it improperly ecumenical. No one is required to compromise their beliefs or those of their denomination by taking the IRBC training class or receiving counseling

from an IRBC-certified center. It is possible that the IRBC website is not sufficiently clear on this distinction, but that does not rise to the level of deception, which implies intent to mislead and is not at all proven by Mr. Vasquez.

Mr. Vasquez believes that the Bible is sufficient. In this he agrees completely with IRBC. This is a Reformed perspective. But Mr. Vasquez does not seem to think that the application of Scripture through the practice of biblical counseling belongs to anyone outside the special offices of the church. While it is certainly true that pastors and elders are specifically called to counsel other believers,

Scripture makes absolutely clear that all those who are spiritually minded are called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1, 2). When biblical counseling is done correctly, this is its purpose. Such is the goal of IRBC—training believers *how* to bear one another's burdens through the reproofs, rebukes, exhortations and encouragements of Scripture. This belongs to the office of believer in the PRC and any other Reformed denomination. If that is our calling, ought we not learn how to do it well?

With respect,
Brendan Looyenga

REPLY

I would like to respond to the letter from Mr. Looyenga in three ways. First, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Looyenga for taking the time to read my article and write a follow-up letter. Second, I would like to address some of his concerns with my position against the IRBC. And third, I would like to challenge Mr. Looyenga to broaden his perspective concerning the dangers of the biblical counseling movement, Christian psychology, and philosophy within the Protestant Reformed Churches.

I would like to begin this discussion with a quote from a letter by Paul the apostle to the saints who were at Ephesus. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:1–2). This is our calling from the inspired, infallible, and inerrant word of God, which I hope would guide our writing on this controversial topic. We can be clear, concise, and precise, but we can also speak the truth in love. We can also at times be bold and blunt, as Luther was, but it must be for the edification of the body of Christ and for God's glory. With that being said, I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the letter by Mr. Looyenga, and I hope to respond with some clarifications and a few challenges in this process.

In order to address the areas of concern with the IRBC, I made a concerted effort to present both sides of the issue by extensively quoting from the IRBC website. I appreciate the support I received for the inclusion of the footnotes for reference purposes. I have prayed, read scripture, and done extensive research on this matter. I do not promote the idea that I am an expert in this field or that I have more knowledge than most on this research topic. I purposely recommended Martin and Deidre Bobgan because I do consider them to be experts in these fields of study and for the research data presented.

Mr. Looyenga made the recommendation to speak to the director of the IRBC. I sat down and had lunch

with Dr. Jeff Doll for almost two hours, and he gave me a manual that the IRBC uses for training elders. My concern with the IRBC is that it promotes the same philosophy that Prof. Richard Mouw holds to concerning his promotion of common grace. The IRBC on its website states that "all truth is God's truth," but then it goes on to explain that this truth can be found in unregenerate, profane authors; this truth is given by the Holy Spirit to unbelievers, and if we despise this truth wherever it can be found, we despise the Spirit of God. The IRBC promotes the notion that we study these profane authors using the lens of scripture. The problem here is that this type of philosophy has implications that must be taken to their logical conclusions. When one begins to study the methods of psychotherapy, Christian psychology, and biblical counseling, then one goes back to the study of scripture using a different type of lens.

Dr. Richard Mouw promoted his theory of common grace in his book *He Shines in All That's Fair* and in a debate with Prof. David Engelsma. He used the example of a counselor helping someone overcome his alcoholism and a therapist helping a couple reconcile from marital unfaithfulness. Neither case resulted in the conversion of the counselee, but Dr. Mouw used these two examples as a powerful display of God's grace. He referred to them as common grace ministries. Abraham Kuyper also promoted the false teaching of common grace and explained that philosophy was the fruit of common grace. Herman Bavinck came to the point in his life where he began to doubt holy scripture, in part due to his love for the wisdom of the world, including psychology.

Let me make some needed clarifications. The problem is not the study of psychology as a field of research; the problem is using the methodologies of psychotherapy to replace or supplement the preaching, teaching, and counsel from scripture. According to the Bobgans, the methods implemented within the biblical counseling movement do

not produce different results than secular or Christian psychotherapy. Secular psychotherapy is not based on science. Biblical counseling is not based on science. There are no brain scans that can diagnose a particular supposed mental health disorder. There are no blood tests or X-rays or any medical tests that are used specifically to diagnose, treat, or prescribe psychiatric drugs. In other words, there is no medical pathology that comes with the file of a mental health patient specifically regarding his supposed mental illness. These theoretical methods are not only unscientific, but also they are ultimately both man-centered and problem-centered. These methods are not Christ-centered or unto the glory of God, as they purport to be. In the field of psychotherapy there are over five hundred forms of therapy, the latest being cognitive behavioral therapy for depression. There is a plethora of theories and authors concerning Christian psychology and Christian psychiatry. As I mentioned in my article, there is the biblical counseling movement. This term does not refer to a single organization or a single entity but includes the nouthetic counseling movement, the Biblical Counseling Coalition, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, and the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling.

In contrast to the development of orthodoxy found in the essentials of the historic Christian faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Creed of Chalcedon, and the Reformed three forms of unity, philosophy, psychotherapy, Christian psychology, the nouthetic counseling movement, and the biblical counseling movement have produced contradiction, confusion, conflict, and chaos. The creeds and confessions are a summary of the fundamental truth of scripture. They are founded and grounded in Holy Writ. The methodologies used in nouthetic-biblical counseling are theories of man concerning scripture and using scripture for proof-text purposes. Today there is controversy among the nouthetic counselors and the biblical counselors. Nouthetic counseling and the supposed scriptural teachings of Jay Adams are being highly criticized for attributing everything to sin and for the counseling method of confrontation. Jay Adams' methods have caused great damage to the body of Christ, and they have caused more harm than good, according to some in the opposing camp. Biblical counselor Dr. Heath Lambert has gone on the attack against Christian psychology and its interpretation of scripture. Biblical counselor Paul David Tripp has gone public on YouTube concerning his opposition to calling a man on two legs a homosexual. He stated specifically, "I want homosexuals in my church." He also publicly announced his new membership in Epiphany Fellowship Church, otherwise known as Woke Church. He promotes the racial justice movement as a gospel issue. He recommends everyone read the book by his new pastor,

Dr. Eric Mason, titled *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*. The social justice movement promotes the philosophies of cultural Marxism, critical race theory, and intersectionality. This amalgamation of psychoanalysis and philosophy is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I would like to recommend to Mr. Looyenga that he broaden his scope of reading and study the development of the philosophy/psychology/Christian psychology/biblical counseling. I also recommend studying the history and impact on society, mental health, the school system, the judicial system, marital relationships, family relationships, and especially the church. These systems and theories of man have failed in every aspect of our culture. They have failed in the world, and they are failing in the church. We must be very careful with the diverse contradictory theories of the biblical counseling movement. I recommend Mr. Looyenga study how ministers within our Protestant Reformed Churches give confusing and contradictory messages in their lectures, pamphlets, and journals. Some recommend Christian psychology and Christian psychiatry found at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health. Some recommend only biblical counseling. Some recommend secular psychologists and psychiatrists and their books. Some promote a Reformed or Christian self-esteem. Today, our Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary has made the unprecedented decision that all potential students for the ministry must take a psychological test. This is a tragedy in the history of Protestant Reformed Churches in America. May God be merciful to us and grant us grace to see the danger of the biblical counseling movement as the deceitful wisdom of man and turn us back to the sufficiency of scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I conclude this discussion, as I began, with scripture.

32. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barack, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:
33. Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,
34. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.
35. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:
36. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;
38. (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:
40. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (Heb. 11:32–40)

By grace alone, in Christ alone, according to scripture alone, for the sake of the truth,
Samuel Vasquez

LETTER: BOOK REVIEW

Dear Sirs,

I enjoyed your magazine. It reminded me of hymns like He owns the cattle on a thousand hills with The Greatest King and Take it to the Lord in prayer for Enmity of Covenant Grace.

My problem is with the book review. Did Peter in Acts 2 give a free will offer of the Gospel or a general call? I say he gave a free offer of the Gospel but only 3000 were saved. Wasn't the crowd bigger? Wouldn't that prove limited atonement? Caiaphas and Annas talked to Jesus. Did

they accept Jesus as the Messiah? Another proof of limited atonement. The purpose of missions and every pastor is to preach the gospel. The Holy Spirit brings the believer to hear the word and repent in his heart. If not for the Holy Spirit, you will be putting people to sleep. It is a gift of the Spirit to be able who will be saved and who will be not? I know I can't tell That is why Waldron should have picked Matthew 28:19. That is the crux of the free offer of the Gospel.

Darryl Kooy

REPLY

Dear Mr. Kooy,

Your objection to my book review concerns my condemnation of what you call the “free offer” of the gospel and could more accurately be called the well-meant offer of the gospel. In his book, author Sam Waldron defends the well-meant offer. This is the doctrine that in the preaching of the gospel, as for instance the preaching of Peter in Acts 2, God has a desire to save all who hear the preaching, out of a (would-be saving) love that he has for all in the audience alike. This implies that Christ Jesus died for all humans without exception (universal atonement) and that the salvation of sinners depends upon their acceptance of God's gracious offer to all.

This teaching of the preaching of the gospel as a well-meant offer to all is the heresy of Arminianism. It is the false doctrine that the Reformed confession, the Canons of Dordt, condemns as the raising again of the heresy of Pelagianism out of hell. This is the doctrine that Sam Waldron defends in the book I reviewed, to which review you object, at least in part. It is the error of making salvation depend upon the will of the sinner rather than upon the sovereign will of God in election. The truth is that God sincerely desires the salvation only of the elect in the audiences of preachers and missionaries. He does

not well-meaningly offer Christ and salvation to all in the audience. But by the preaching of the gospel he efficaciously draws the elect in the audience unto Jesus Christ (John 6:44; Acts 13:48; Canons of Dordt, 3–4.14). God is gracious only to his elect, for whom Christ died (see Romans 8–9 and the Canons of Dordt).

In order to accomplish this drawing of the elect unto Christ, God has the gospel preached to many humans, including those whom he has reprobated unto eternal damnation. In the preaching, God certainly does seriously call all who hear, with what the Reformed faith calls the external call, to repent and believe, adding the promise that all who do believe will be saved. But this call is not a well-meant offer to all, or what you call a “free offer.” To the elect it is a gracious call, irresistibly bringing them to the Savior. To the rest it is a serious command that leaves them without excuse.

The grace of God in the preaching of the gospel is particular, not universal or general. It depends for its saving of sinners upon God's election, not upon the will (acceptance) of the sinner. And this truth of salvation is not a minor matter; it is fundamental.

Cordially in Christ,
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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.—2 Corinthians 13:11

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings.—1 Thessalonians 5:19–20

Quenching the Spirit. Terrible iniquity. Certain spiritual death. Ecclesiastical suicide. The Spirit is the Spirit of the risen and exalted Jesus Christ whom he poured out on the church. By the Spirit, Christ, and his Father too, comes to the church. Through the Spirit they take up their abode in the church and in the hearts and lives of believers. By the work of the Spirit, Christ blesses the church with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. The Spirit is the fire by which the church is warmed and filled with Jesus Christ and all the riches of salvation. The Spirit comforts, edifies, and preserves the church with Christ.

Christ ministers his Spirit in the church and works miracles in her. Oh, yes! Mighty wonders of his grace!

The Spirit regenerates dead sinners and opens their hearts, so that they attend unto the Word. The Spirit makes effectual the mighty call of the Word in the hearts of sinners, pricks them, turns them, and draws them effectually to Christ, so that they come unto him. The Spirit works faith in their hearts by the preaching of Christ. The Spirit justifies sinners under the preaching of the gospel, so that they go home justified. He purifies hearts by the preaching of the truth, sanctifying and cleansing them from sin, and consecrates them to God, so that they love him and fear, honor, and glorify him alone. We are his workmanship! Mighty, irresistible, gracious work of the Spirit to warm and to fill the church with Christ and the fullness of his salvation.

Quench not the Spirit. Do not pour water on the fire of the Spirit. Do not kick sand on the Spirit to smother him. How is that possible?

Despise not prophesyings. Not merely the prophesyings that accompanied the work and labor of the apostles. Christ did for a time give some prophets in the apostolic age. But he calls the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ *prophesying*. So the Spirit does his work in the church through prophesying. This is nothing new for the Spirit. So he did all his work in the Old Testament church. He created the prophet. He sent the prophet. He gave the prophet his message. He moved the prophet to speak that message. He effectually worked by means of that prophesying his own sovereign work to save and to harden. So he also continues to work through the preaching of the Word of God in the scriptures. This Word he causes to be spoken in the preaching of his truth.

Do not despise prophesying; set at naught; cast aside; treat with contempt and mockery; make of no account. For then you quench the Spirit, who is the only one who warms and fills the church. Such unbelieving men always do with the Spirit. They mocked the messengers of God and despised his words and misused his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, until there was no remedy. This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. They struck Jesus on the face and asked him, saying, “Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?” And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads and saying, “Ah, thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself and come down from the cross.”

And they quenched the Spirit.

Behold, Jerusalem, your house is left unto you desolate, a synagogue of Satan. For the church either has prophesyings and the Spirit, or she despises prophesyings and has the devil.

—NJL