



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*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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Editor-in-chief
Rev. Andrew W. Lanning

Contributing editors
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
Rev. Martin VanderWal

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325 84th St SW, Suite 102
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Email: office@reformedbelieverspub.org

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And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. — Luke 1:76–79

Light out of darkness. Such is always the work of God and always the way of his working.

He is the God of light. In him is pure light. Absolute goodness. Absolute perfection. Absolute holiness. In him is no darkness at all.

He caused the light to stand out of the darkness in the beginning as his first work in creation. He discovers deep things out of darkness and brings out into light the shadow of death. He causes the light to stand out of the darkness in us too: God has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Heaven will have no night and, indeed, no need of light; for the Son of God will be the light of it.

And the Light has come.

Out of darkness. It was a dark time in the church. The precious promises of the mercy and grace of the God of salvation were suppressed by the terrible theology of works. Those who sat in Moses' seat oppressed the people with their theology of doing—though they themselves did not do. There was no light in that: no hope, joy, or happiness. There was only darkness, for man never could and never can do enough to bring joy, happiness, and salvation. That teaching of doing bound the people in the chains of their sinfulness and guilt or exalted them in their abominable pride that they—of all men—had done or could do what God required. They never experienced the blessed light, peace, joy, and happiness of God's forgiveness of sins.

That false theology was the cause of terrible oppression that reigned in the church. As the leaders taught how God treated his people—the doer, the strong, and the mighty were blessed and saved—so the leaders acted toward one another and the people. “Do what I want, and I will like you, and you can be my friend; but if you do not do, I will hate you.”

The leaders of the church were oppressors. So Jesus told the people not to do what those leaders did. He called them what they were: a generation of vipers and white-washed sepulchers full of dead men's bones. The fatherless and the widow they oppressed, the poor and needy they ignored, and the true children of God they despised. The

good they called evil, and the evil they called good. They tithed of anise and mint and cumin and of everything they possessed. They had their scripture verses, their laws, and their procedures; but they neglected the weighty matters of the law, such as justice, mercy, and judgment. There was no justice and mercy in the church among the people because they rejected the truth of God's justice and mercy in salvation. When men instead of God are lords in the church, everyone suffers and suffers terribly under the oppressive headship of such wicked men.

The people sat in darkness.

It is always darkest before dawn!

Now the Dayspring!

On the horizon of time and history, a first faint finger of light shot into the darkness. And John the Baptist would be his herald, the herald of the Day. John's whole purpose and task would be to point to that first, faint finger of light as the hope, joy, and happiness of the people of God. The Day was coming to drive away their night.

Dayspring is the moment early in the morning in which the first light of the rising sun kisses the eastern horizon, and the first red and purple beams of light from that rising sun pierce the darkness and begin to drive away the night. The dayspring is the moment that separates night from day. The watchmen look for the break of day.

Only a man who is sick because the sun is a killing power to him or one whose wickedness is done in the night is exposed by the sun regrets the coming of the day.

Dayspring is also the beginning of the unstoppable advance of day. From dayspring to rosy-fingered dawn, the sun runs on higher and higher into the sky as a strong man to run a race and as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. Everything is bathed in the glorious light of day and refreshed with the sun's life-giving rays. With the dayspring life begins anew. Birds begin to sing and roosters to crow. Animals come out of their dens for another day. Man arises and begins his day of work.

The coming of the day is a sign of God's faithfulness to his creation. He upholds that creation and governs it by his almighty power every day and has for thousands of years. The coming of the day is a sign of God's faithfulness to his covenant promise, so that as little as the sun

can fail to rise for a new day, so little can the covenant promise of God fail. God's mercies are new every morning because his faithfulness is great.

When Zacharias prophesied of the Dayspring from on high, he prophesied of Jesus Christ. He is light out of darkness. He is the day, and his coming is the coming of the new day. When he appears, morning has broken upon the world. As God is faithful to bring the new day every day, and as God is faithful to give new mercies to his people every day, so God is faithful at last to bring the one whose name is Day and who is light to those who sit in darkness.

Before his coming, all sat in darkness.

Darkness is symbolic of moral corruption, hatred, and enmity against God. Darkness is the corruption of our natures, the crookedness of our thoughts and desires, and our insane hatred of God and man. Darkness is unrighteousness. Man himself, the world of sin, and all who oppose God are called darkness. The kingdom of Satan is a kingdom of darkness in which all are held in terrible bondage to sin. Darkness is the world of unrighteous people and all their unrighteous deeds. The false church—having departed from the truth—as a synagogue of Satan is all darkness, and in it there is no light at all. In the whole world there is no light! Men stumble around in their corruption and enmity against God and the neighbor and march inextricably toward the darkness of hell.

It was not always dark in the world. Once, the sun shone brightly in Eden. Man awoke to each new day to serve his God and to press all creation into the service of God. At the close of each day, man walked with his God in the garden in the cool of the day.

But man loved darkness. He departed from God. With the sin of that one man, terrible darkness came into Eden and cast its pall upon the world. God had said that in the day man ate of the tree he would surely die, and that just judgment God brought upon all men.

That darkness is deep, damning darkness. It is total darkness. It is not merely the darkness of a moonless night. The darkness of which Zacharias spoke is the darkness of the shadow of death. It is the darkness that comes over a man when death looms over him on his deathbed. It is the darkness of the light going out of the eyes. It is the darkness of the coffin lid closing at last. It is the darkness of the grave, with the door of dirt or stone sealing a

man in. It is the outer darkness of hell, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

The terror of that darkness is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Death is men's wages. In his perfect justice the holy God pays sinners what they deserve.

In that darkness men sit. They are in bondage, prisoners of the kingdom of Satan, chained in his dungeon, under his power, doing his will, fulfilling all their lusts, and advancing on the broad way to hell. There is no good in that darkness but only evil. There is no life in that darkness but only death. There all men sit as men trapped in a cave deep in the bowels of the earth.

In that darkness the Dayspring appears. The sun has kissed the eastern horizon and throws up its beam of purple and red to herald a new day and to drive away the night.

God calls him the Dayspring, for it is God who brings him. Does man bring the rising of the sun? Does man command the sun to get up and run its course again for another day? Does man have the power to control the sun and by means of the sun to energize all the creation for another day? To bring the Dayspring is a divine work.

A divine work in his mercy. God's tender mercies are over all

his works! Why does he preserve the world fallen in sin and lying under the curse of death? Why does he cause the sun to rise every day to give life to the world? Because of his mercy. Because he willed that this world, fallen in sin and lying under the curse, see a new day—a new day in which redemption comes, a new day in which that world is lifted to the height of heavenly glory and blessedness.

So the Dayspring is a work of God's mercy, and the Dayspring's coming is a work of God's mercy to bring that new day.

At the heart of the creation that God loves are his people—chosen in Christ and precious and dear to him—who also sit in darkness. He willed to call them out of that darkness into his marvelous light. And the very darkness serves the revelation of God's grace in the Dayspring. For in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God so that in the wisdom of God his people might know him in Christ. At the heart of that world stands God's elect church, upon whom he had mercy and whom he eternally appointed to salvation. And at the head of that world and bringing the new day of joy, peace, righteousness, and salvation is the Dayspring from on high,

As God is faithful to bring the new day every day, and as God is faithful to give new mercies to his people every day, so God is faithful at last to bring the one whose name is Day and who is light to those who sit in darkness.

who comes and in whose coming the new day of joy, peace, and righteousness breaks upon the world.

The Dayspring comes through the tender mercy of God. His coming is a wholly divine work of mercy in order to fulfill the gracious will of God for the salvation of his people and the glorification of the entire creation.

Thus he is also the Dayspring from on high. He comes from God. He comes through the work of God. He comes to perform the work of God.

The Dayspring comes as God. As light himself, as the one who has light and who gives light, he comes and, thus, he comes as God. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. God's Word is light. And as God has light in himself, so he gave to the Dayspring to have light in himself and to give light to whomsoever God willed.

With the Dayspring's coming the first new day has begun, and that day rises ever clearer and brighter until the coming of the everlasting day, when there shall be no night any longer.

And John would be his forerunner, the herald of the dawn. No father has ever laid so weighty a task on his infant son as Zacharias laid on the shoulders of John. Being a prophet, Zacharias spoke of God's will for the child.

Already before his father spoke and, indeed, with his father unable to speak because of his unbelief at the wonderful word of the angel Gabriel, John had begun his work of heralding the coming of the Dayspring by a tremendous leap in the womb of his mother Elisabeth at the presence of the Lord in the womb of his mother Mary. That joyful leap in the womb of John's mother would become a weighty ministry of the word just before the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As the herald of the dawn, John was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. He was the greatest because while all the other prophets heralded the coming of the new day, they did so from afar. Abel and Enoch and Noah spoke of Christ. Abraham saw Christ's day and was glad. David, being a prophet, declared God's word concerning the savior. The ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah and all the rest of the prophets were concerned with nothing else than declaring the coming of the Christ. But John received the privilege of pointing out the Christ, seeing him with his own eyes, touching him, indeed, of baptizing him in the Jordan River!

John himself was a child of wonder. John means grace, and John was a wonder of grace in the womb of Elisabeth, his aged mother. The womb of Elisabeth was proverbially and reproachfully barren. A sign of the incapability of God's people themselves to produce anything spiritual or good, and her enemies proudly mocked and reproached her for her barrenness. In that dead and barren womb, the power of John's conception was the grace of Jehovah God.

A child of wonder, yet not *the* child of wonder but his herald. In the wonder of grace that begat John, there was the heralding already of a far more glorious wonder of grace, when God would send the Dayspring from on high. And that child John would be the Dayspring's forerunner to go before his face, to make ready a people prepared for the day of the Lord that would break on Israel.

A glorious day!

The remission of sins. That is the most piercing beam of this Sun. He comes from heaven to give the remission of sins. God sent him to give the remission of sins.

All our sin is an unpayable, ever-increasing, abiding, and a terrible debt with God. Men—all men by nature—are trapped in darkness because they stand guilty before God for sin: the sin of Adam plus all their actual sins. Because of their debt, by right they are the subjects of the kingdom of darkness. The sinner does not have the right to sit in the light of the knowledge of God, to know God, or to love God. Because of the sinner's guilt, he only has the right to sit in darkness. In God's perfect justice he subjected the world and the whole human race to darkness because of guilt. In the darkness sinners do not ultimately have to do with man, Satan, sin, or death but with God, who punishes sin.

Through his tender mercy God forgives that debt of his people. His mercy is God's deep and tender pity toward his people and his will to save them from their sins and to bring them to heavenly glory.

He remits our sins by his mercy, so that the remission of sins and eternal life are not because of any works of ours but only because he had pity on us and willed to deliver us from our sins and make us blessed forever in covenant fellowship with him.

God does that in his mercy because in his mercy he sent the Dayspring from on high to enter our night and to take on himself all the debt of our sins and to pay that debt by satisfying the justice of God for our sins. When the Dayspring came, he came first to descend into our night, to take our sins upon himself, to suffer the terrible darkness of the cross, and to be plunged into hell on the tree of the cross that we might have light and life through the forgiveness of our sins.

In that way he gives the knowledge of salvation. Zacharias spoke of that and connected those two things. To have the remission of sins by faith in Jesus Christ *is* to have the knowledge of your salvation.

Our salvation consists in the remission of our sins. The knowledge of our salvation—the assurance of it—*consists* in the forgiveness of sins.

The knowledge of it is faith: faith alone—not works and faith. Oh, beloved, if you want to have the knowledge of your salvation, do not look to your works. To give to

you the knowledge of your salvation, God does not condescend to use your works to assure you. He condescends as the Dayspring, and as the Dayspring he works all the perfect work of the Dayspring on account of which your sins are remitted. By the works of the Dayspring, you have forgiveness and with forgiveness the assurance of your salvation. To know your salvation is to know the Dayspring and his perfect work and complete righteousness. To know your salvation is to have the assurance of salvation.

You have that by faith. Believing in him as the Dayspring sent from God and as God come to give light to you, you have this forgiveness, this precious remittance of your debt, and then you have escaped the punishment of your sins and are blessed by God.

If you know that your sins are forgiven, you know your salvation. Then you know the attitude of God's heart toward you. You know that he is not angry with you but full of tender pity toward you. Then you know that he does not will to curse you but to bless you in all things.

Then you know that the day that has broken in your heart will shine ever brighter and brighter to the coming of the fullness of that day in the coming of Jesus Christ, when the Sun shall stand in the heavens and declare himself judge of the world and when he will make all things new, so that there will be no night there.

Then the coming of the Lord is a blessed gospel.

Unless a man knows his salvation, the coming of the Lord is a terrible event for him. For the one who comes is the God of light, in whom there is no darkness at all. The God of spotless purity and perfection. The God who is holy and just and a just judge.

If I tell you only that the Lord is coming, you and I must be terrified because of our sins. Then the Lord is coming to perfect the darkness and to cast men into outer darkness.

But if I tell you that the Lord is coming and that you are saved because the Lord who is coming remits all your sins through his tender pity, does not hold you accountable for them, and will not judge you because of them, the coming of the Lord is truly a bright and glorious event. Then, like the rising of the sun on a new day, the rising of the Sun of Righteousness will cheer your heart and make you unspeakably glad, for the day of salvation comes in his coming.

Then the gospel of the Dayspring from on high gives blessed peace. That is the effect of his coming. In those who have him—believers only—he works an amazing change. In their hearts he gives peace. That is what the angels sang at Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to men of his pleasure."

He comes not only to establish a peace hidden in God, but he also comes to establish such a peace that we walk

in that way, so that every day and all the days of our lives we have peace with God.

Man's problem is that he is at war with the living God. Man's heart is full of hatred and enmity against God. That explains all the trouble in the world. Man is at war with God; in all man does and in all he plans, he attempts to execute this terrible counsel: "Let us cast his yoke from us!" Such war with the living God is the most terrible thing ever. If you fight with men, you can defend yourself, but who can defend himself when God comes against him?

But peace with God? That is the most blessed thing in the universe. It means you are one with the living God. Your heart is like his heart, your love is his love, your hatred his hatred. It means that God is for you; and if God is for you, nothing in heaven above, in the earth beneath, or in hell itself can be against you. To have peace with God means that God is on your side and loves you.

He guides his people in the way of peace. That is the change he works in those to whom he comes and in whose hearts he shines with his light of the remission of sins. Where he gives peace, they who sat in darkness now walk in the light of his peace. To walk in the way of peace means that in their whole lives and in their hearts this truth reigns: they are at peace with the living God.

That is the way of knowing that God is merciful toward you and loves you because he sent Christ to die for you. That is the way of knowing that though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. That is the way of knowing, no matter your outward circumstances, that he works your good and everlasting blessedness in heaven. That peace is knowing that you are saved because God forgave your sins. That peace is understanding that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That peace is believing that he works all things for your advantage and salvation. That peace passes all understanding and keeps your heart and mind.

That peace no unbeliever knows. He sits in the darkness of sin, terrified of death.

That peace is the gift of God in his mercy to his people through the Dayspring from on high by the forgiveness of sins.

In that way he guides us. He takes us by the hand and lifts us up from our darkness and takes us along by the hand to confess our sins and to believe in him for the remission of our sins.

Thanks be to God, who remembered his promise and sent the Dayspring from on high to guide us in the way of peace.

Hallelujah!

Glory to God in the highest!

—NJL

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL AS DEMAND OF THE COVENANT (3)

Introduction

The burden of these editorials has been that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. The covenant of God with believers and their seed requires that believers work together in a Christian school for the covenantal rearing and education of their children. The form of the Christian school may vary according to time and circumstances, but there must be a Christian school in which parents labor together, and whatever school is formed must rest upon the biblical principles of covenant education. In those places where it is yet impossible to establish a full school, let the parents and other believers nevertheless band together to seek ways and means for the Christian education of their covenant seed. In those places where a good Christian school exists, let the parents and other believers be vigilant in using the school and in maintaining covenantal instruction and rearing in the school.

The position that these editorials have taken is that of the Reformed confessions and Church Order. The position is clearly and succinctly expressed in article 21 of the Church Order. “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 387). In this article of the Church Order, “the demands of the covenant” refer not only to “instructed” but also to “good Christian schools.” The demands of the covenant are not only that covenant children must receive covenant instruction, which is true. But the demands of the covenant are also that there be good Christian schools and that the parents have their children instructed in these schools. Not only Christian education but also the Christian school is a demand of the covenant.

The burden of the present editorial is that the Reformed Protestant Churches must recover this principle that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. This principle was abandoned and denied by our mother church in her classical and synodical decisions of 2006–09. Those classes and synods decided that the Christian school was not a demand of the covenant and that article 21 only made Christian instruction a demand of the covenant. The assemblies made the Christian school a good

option, and even the best option, and even an option that the consistories were to urge the parents to use. But for all that, the assemblies decided that the Christian school itself was not a demand of the covenant.

Most of us who are now members of the Reformed Protestant Churches lived under that decision for more than a decade when we were members of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). Some of us may have even been involved in the making of those decisions and the teaching of those decisions when we were officebearers in the Protestant Reformed Churches. For all of us, it is possible and even likely that the decisions of our mother church have sunk deeply into our thinking by now and have become part of our own view of the Christian school. It is to be expected that our thinking regarding the Christian school has been shaped by the decisions of our mother. It is even possible that we think the Christian school may not be demanded of us and that the consistory must leave us alone in the matter of the establishment and use of the Christian school. However understandable that thinking may be, it is not Reformed or covenantal. That thinking is a departure from the biblical principles expressed in article 21 of the Church Order: “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.”

Therefore, as we stand in these early years of our churches and as we labor to establish school associations and schools in our various locations, let us also recover the glorious Reformed heritage of the Christian school as a demand of the covenant. The reformation that God is working among us is far-reaching and includes not only the recovery of the gospel of unconditional covenant fellowship, the recovery of the office of believer, and the recovery of the pulpit, but also the recovery of the Christian school as a demand of the covenant.

The Denial of the Demand

The Protestant Reformed Churches were convulsed by a controversy from 2006 to 2009 regarding article 21 of the Church Order. The controversy began with a Protestant Reformed minister who withdrew his children from

a Protestant Reformed school in order to homeschool them. Members of the congregation protested and appealed to consistory, classis, and synod. The decisions of the assemblies became the occasion for further protests and appeals. All of this came to Synod 2009, which was the denomination's last word on the matter. The details of the case need not concern us now, and the interested reader can pursue the matter in the respective *Acts of Synod* of the PRC. What does concern us now is the PRC's interpretation of the phrase "according to the demands of the covenant" in article 21 of the Church Order.

The pertinent decision is found in the *Acts of Synod 2009*, articles 80–82, and reads as follows:

That synod uphold Synod 2008 and Classis East in their contention that the phrase "according to the demands of the covenant" in Article 21 modifies "instructed" and not "the good Christian schools." Thus, according to Article 21, what the covenant *demand*s is Christian instruction; but the covenant does not demand the particular form this instruction takes, namely, the Christian day schools. (72–73)

This decision makes it settled and binding in the PRC that the Christian school is not a demand of the covenant. According to Synod 2009, the only thing that the covenant demands is Christian instruction. The Christian school is relegated to being a mere option in the covenant. Perhaps a good option, and maybe even a wise option, and probably the best option; but merely an option for all that.

The grounds for synod's decision were weak and contradictory. In support of its decision that the covenant demands Christian instruction but does not demand the Christian school, synod's first ground was the following:

a. This is the natural reading of Article 21. According to rules of sentence structure, the concluding phrase "according to the demands of the covenant" modifies "instructed," not "good Christian schools." (73)

My comment on ground a: The natural reading of article 21 does not at all limit the demands to "instructed." One only has to read the article to see that the article is about Christian schools. "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant." The article is not suggesting the school as an *option* for how parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant; rather, the

article is setting forth the school as the *requirement* for how parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant. Why else, according to the article, are the consistories to see to it that there are good Christian schools, if not that this is a demand of the covenant? Why else, according to the article, are the consistories to see to it that parents have their children instructed in these good Christian schools, if not that this is a demand of the covenant? The natural reading of article 21 makes the good Christian school a demand of the covenant.

Synod's second ground was the following:

b. The third question of the Form for Baptism asked of parents at baptism and which summarizes the demand of the covenant for the instruction of covenant children makes no mention of the calling of parents to provide this instruction in the Christian day school. (73)

My comment on ground b: The third question asked of parents at baptism is, "Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion (whereof you are either parent or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 260). Perhaps it is true, as synod argued, that this question makes no mention of the Christian day school. In our circumstances today we might assume that "help or cause them to be instructed therein" refers to the Christian school, in which parents cause their children to be instructed. However, it seems that the phrase actually refers to the old and now discredited practice of having a godparent present a child for baptism, so that the godparent promises to see to it that the child is soundly instructed.¹ Nevertheless, it makes no difference for article 21 whether the third baptism question refers to the Christian school or not. Article 21 does not depend on the third baptism question but on the principles of scripture. According to those principles, article 21 teaches that the good Christian school is a demand of the covenant.

Synod's third ground was the following:

c. While the organic nature of both election and the covenant certainly urges upon parents the wisdom of fulfilling their covenantal calling by educating their children together, it does not demand that parents necessarily educate their covenant children together in all circumstances (cf. *Acts 2008*, Article 47, B, 3, a, 2, p. 41). (73)

1 See B. Wielenga, *The Reformed Baptism Form: A Commentary* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association), 269–74, 344–46.

My comment on ground c: This ground is the heart of synod's error. The essence of the Christian school is parents' laboring together in the covenantal education of their children. The togetherness of the endeavor is indeed rooted in the organic nature of both election and the covenant. The organic nature of election and the covenant does not allow for independentism in the matter of child-rearing. Here synod saw the principle: "the organic nature of both election and the covenant certainly urges upon parents the wisdom of fulfilling their covenantal calling by educating their children together." But seeing the principle, synod contradicted it: "it does not demand that parents necessarily educate their covenant children together."

Synod confused the issue by adding "in all circumstances." Throughout its dealings with article 21, synod consistently tripped itself up by trying to make the demand depend on "all circumstances." Synod reasoned that if the demand of the covenant that there be good Christian schools could not hold for every single child of the covenant, then it must not be a demand of the covenant after all. Synod could not imagine that there could be an exception to the rule and that there could still be the rule. The fact is that God himself might very well make an exception to his rule without abrogating his rule. God himself might make it impossible for some to educate their children together, whether because of a child's special need or because of the small size of a community of Reformed believers or because of any number of factors. The fact that there is an exception to the demand does not overthrow the demand. This would come out in ground d as well.

d. The position of Prof. Hanko and Mr. Kamps [who had protests at Synod 2009] makes all those who cannot establish a Christian day school guilty of failing to fulfill the demands of the covenant. A "demand" of the covenant, if words have any meaning, is a requirement, which allows for no exceptions. (73; emphasis is synod's)

My comment on ground d: Here again, synod's reasoning was backward. Synod began with the fact of exceptions and reasoned backward that therefore there could be no demand. But since when do exceptions destroy the demand? The demand of the fourth commandment to keep the sabbath day holy is that I "diligently frequent the church of God" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 103, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 128). But there are those aged or sick saints who cannot frequent the church of God on the Sabbath because of their infirmities. The fact that there are exceptions to the demand to frequent the church of God does not mean that we abrogate the

demand to frequent the church of God. So also the fact that there may be some who cannot labor together in the education of their children for reasons that belong to the good pleasure and providence of God does not mean that we abrogate the demand that parents have their children instructed in the good Christian school.

With this decision the PRC made it settled and binding among the churches that the Christian school is not a demand of the covenant.

The Decline of the Christian School

The denial that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant will lead to the decline of the Christian school. It may very well be that a Christian school always exists, but the support for the school, the use of the school, and the covenant character of the school must necessarily decline. As soon as the school is seen as merely an option—even if it is urged as the best option or the wisest option—then the vital connection between the covenant and the school is severed. Either the covenant of God with believers and their seed is the foundation and necessity of the school, or the covenant is not. If the covenant of God with believers and their seed is the foundation and necessity of the school, then the school is founded upon God himself and can stand. If the covenant of God with believers and their seed is not the foundation and necessity of the school, then the school must stand on some foundation of man that will only crumble.

If the Christian school is not a demand of the covenant, then why have a Christian school and why use a Christian school? Someone will say, "Because the complexity of modern society means that parents are not equipped to teach their children all that they must know today." But today there is a plethora of comprehensive homeschool materials and curricula complete with textbooks, video lectures, homework assignments, and even institutions that will grade the homework. Yes, modern society is complex, but a parent has all of the resources at hand to give a sound education that will prepare his child for his calling. Someone else will say, "Because it is wise that we work together in the education of our children." But wise according to whose standard? Apparently, not according to the standard of the scriptures, for it has already been argued that the principles of scripture do not demand the Christian school. It must be wise, then, according to the standard of man. The problem with the standard of man is that it is constantly changing. Any group of men can convince themselves that anything is wise, so that what is wise for them today is not wise for them tomorrow.

Only if the school arises out of the covenant of God with believers and their seed and is made necessary

by the covenant of God with believers and their seed will the school endure. If the school merely arises as a good option and is made necessary as a good option, the school will necessarily decline. In a denomination like the Protestant Reformed Churches, the school may remain relatively strong for a long time after the connection between the covenant and the school is cut. Denominations like our mother, the PRC; and our grandmother, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), can coast along for a long time on the strength of their tradition and form. It takes a generation or two for the principles to work through. But principles always work through, so that there comes a day when the Christian school finds itself in steep decline, its vital connection to the covenant severed.

This can be illustrated in the case of our grandmother, the CRC. In 1955 the CRC received a report from one of its committees regarding the principles of education. The report throughout is characterized by strong support for Christian schools and even uses the language of obligation and duty with regard to these schools. However, the report does not ground the Christian school in the demands of the covenant but in the complexity of modern life.

The family and the church are institutions called into being by divine mandate. This cannot be said of the modern school. It is a product of human civilization, and therefore a social institution. Formal schooling as we know it today has become a necessity in the complex society, of the modern day. Parents cannot fulfill their God-given mandate in our culture and civilization without calling upon others to assist them in their task. This is recognized in the Form for the Baptism of Infants in these words, "...and cause them to be instructed therein." (CRC *Acts of Synod* 1955, 199)

At the key point in the report where the foundation and necessity of the Christian school is set forth, that foundation is not the covenant of God with believers and their seed. That foundation is not even the family and home, of which the school is an extension. Rather, that foundation is said to be the complexity of society, so that the school is a social institution. The rest of the report, which the Synod of 1955 adopted, is obviously very supportive of the Christian school. The report urges a Christian character for the education in the school. It even speaks of the church's obligation.

The church is obligated to see to it that parents as members of the church fulfill their promise made at the baptism of their children. Since the Christian school is the only agency that can provide a Christian education for the youth of the church, the church is duty bound to encourage and assist in the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools. (CRC *Acts of Synod* 1955, 199)

However, without a foundation in the demands of the covenant, the Christian school must decline. By 2005, the CRC found a sharp drop in the use of the Christian school.

What we can say with confidence, therefore, is that the churches report that only one-half of their children attend a Christian day school. Furthermore, of the churches that report that their children attend a Christian school, 31 percent report that none of their children attend a Reformed Christian school. (CRC synod agenda 2005, 417)

The reasons that the CRC synod proposed for this decline are many. There is no doubt that the challenges to the school may be different from denomination to denomination and from place to place. I propose that what is at the root of the decline is cutting the Christian school loose from the demand of the covenant. If the school does not arise out of necessity from the covenant of God with believers and their seed, then the school will fall to all of the challenges that it faces.

Recovering the School as a Demand of the Covenant

In the Reformed Protestant Churches, we must recover the truth of article 21 of the Church Order that the good Christian school is a demand of the covenant. There is no specific action that we must take, whether overture or protest or study paper or the like. We have article 21, as well as the other references in the first editorial in this series.² Recovering the school as a demand of the covenant does not involve making a formal decision but living up to the confessions and Church Order as we already have them.

The only way to live up to those confessions and Church Order is to be gripped with what it truly means that the Christian school is a "demand of the covenant."

Next time, Lord willing.

—AL

² Andrew Lanning, "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 9–14.

With thanksgiving to God we present to you another issue of *Sword and Shield*. The writers in this issue are all familiar to you by now. In addition to the three regular editors, we again welcome Rev. Stuart Pastine to our pages.

We are planning one more issue of the magazine this calendar year. On or around December 15, we will publish a special issue commemorating the annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing. We believe that the publication of the speeches from that evening, along with some photos of the event, will make for a sound and

edifying issue. If you find yourself with any extra time over the holidays, we hope the extra issue will help you fill it profitably.

A hearty thank you to those who have submitted letters. We plan to have a special letters edition in the next couple of months. Keep the letters coming, and thank you for your patience as we compile them into a special issue.

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

—AL

SOUND DOCTRINE

Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.—Titus 2:1

CHEATING GRACE

Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.—John 1:16

If by grace, then is it no more of works.—Romans 11:6

How foolish! How absurd! As foolish and absurd as it is, church history bears witness of the attempt made time after time. Each theology attempted to present itself as something new. Each theology attempted to condemn the old theology as heretical, but in truth it was the same theology all over again.

First it was Pelagianism. Then it was semi-Pelagianism. Then it was Arminianism. Then it was conditional covenant theology. Then it was federal vision theology. Now it is “sequential” theology: It is significant for the doctrine of salvation that *first* we believe, and *then* we receive assurance of salvation. It is significant for the doctrine of salvation that *first* we do good works, and *then* we receive additional assurance and additional blessings. *First do, and then... First, and only then.*

In the above paragraph names were named. Those names indicate heresies, doctrines identified and declared false by ecclesiastical assemblies—heresies such as Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, conditional covenant theology, and federal vision theology.

Then there is “sequential” theology. No capital letter.

No condemnation by a deliberative assembly. Not listed on the register of Heresies with a capital *H*. The purveyors of sequential theology readily point that out. They will deny all the Heresies with a capital *H*. They will refuse to find any relationship whatever with those other Heresies. Sequential theology cannot be a Heresy, therefore.

Such reasoning is set before the judgment of church history and found wanting. Try it with Arminianism prior to the Synod of Dordt. Arminius and his followers used exactly the same reasoning. They claimed to be orthodox and publicly spoke orthodox language when their views were questioned. They stated publicly that they never taught anything that contradicted the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. They publicly subscribed to those confessions of the Reformation. They also promised that they would never teach anything that contradicted those Reformed confessions. Right along with their “brethren” in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, Arminius and his followers condemned the heresies of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. Thus they argued for their influential places in the churches and universities, as well as in the state. When they argued for their particular

points of doctrine, they strenuously maintained that those doctrinal points were most certainly and definitely neither Pelagian nor semi-Pelagian. They maintained those doctrinal points as being well within the Reformed standards (while arguing for the revision of those standards).

What would have happened if the orthodox in the Netherlands had yielded to such arguments? “The doctrine cannot be condemned because it is different. The doctrine cannot be condemned because its promoters are our colleagues in the ministry, the university, and the state. The unity and peace of these institutions may not be disturbed, much less sacrificed, for any division caused by doctrinal arguments.” What would have happened to the cause of the faith? What would have happened to the clear witness to the truth?

What did happen?

The fathers at the Synod of Dordt were not afraid to condemn with the strongest language the Remonstrants and their doctrine. The fathers at Dordt did not mince words or adjust their language and tone out of respect for officebearers in their churches. The fathers did not feel any need to soften their tone or grant concessions, lest some in the church be offended.

But the synod said regarding the Remonstrants and their doctrine,

This savors of the teaching of Pelagius, and is opposed to the doctrine of the apostle.

These adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ...and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error.

These...seek to instill into the people the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors.

This is altogether Pelagian and contrary to the whole Scripture.

This idea contains an outspoken Pelagianism.¹

Indeed, the Remonstrants had carefully crafted their doctrinal statements. No, not about works but only about faith. No, not even about faith without grace. Grace (and grace alone) removes the hindrances and obstacles to true, saving faith. Grace (and grace alone) is the gospel that is preached to persuade and to call men to believe. Grace (and grace alone) gives to those who hear the gospel the ability freely to exercise the will to believe. All grace! All grace alone!

The orthodox did not listen. The orthodox did not concede but said, “These...bring again out of hell the Pelagian error.”

Why is Pelagianism the same error as Arminianism? Why is Arminianism—then and now, classical and evangelical—the Pelagian error out of hell?

Because they both cheat grace. They both cheat grace in the same way.

Let us move from the past to the present. As Dordt skipped over semi-Pelagianism, let us feel free to skip over conditional covenant theology and federal vision theology to what we can call “sequential” theology.

No buzzwords have yet been invented, such as *Remonstrants* or *Arminianism*. No name, such as *federal vision*, has been given. However, there are mantras: “In the way of.” “See what grace can make of a man.” “What God’s grace can do to a man.” However, a doctrinal system is

being built and presented. As with Pelagian Arminianism, this sequential doctrinal system demands doctrinal justice for man’s activities—the working of his will and his responsibility to obey God’s commandments. As with Pelagian Arminianism, this sequential doctrinal system is based on the commandments of God’s word, the language of

scripture that expresses God’s promises in conditional language, and the recorded experiences of God’s children.

All the purveyors of this sequential theology demand recognition as orthodox. They subscribe to the Reformed creeds, and they promise to teach and defend nothing outside of the creeds.

Then, let us not merely skip, but let us leap. Let us leap from sequential theology to Pelagianism. Let us make this leap because, just as the leap from Arminianism to Pelagianism, sequential theology cheats grace. Just as Pelagianism and Arminianism, sequential theology pretends grace. Grace. Grace alone. All by grace. But sequential theology is the definition of *cheating*.

Should we be naïve enough to suppose that this time around the heresy will self-identify?

In spite of all the talk about grace, there is a gap.

Sequential theology does cheat grace. The cheat is in the sequence itself of the sequential theology.

What is first? Grace is first. Some kind of grace—undeserved gifts given, gifts given to only the elect—that maintains sovereign, particular grace. But then there is what is second: man’s activity, man’s deed, man’s work.

Any breach in grace for the sake of man’s will is a breach fatal to all grace. Pelagius’ system was not a mixture of grace and works. It was a system of works.

1 Canons of Dordt 1, rejection 4; 2, rejections 3 and 6; 3–4, rejection 7; 5, rejection 2, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 160, 165–66, 172, 177.

Then there is what is third in this sequence: the grace of God that follows.

Still grace because, for a number of reasons, grace is still undeserved.

Grace to believe, then man's activity of believing, and only then the grace of salvation in the assurance of salvation.

Grace to do good works, to obey God's law; then man's actual doing good works of obedience; and only then the grace of increased assurance and all kinds of prosperity following.

Let us freely acknowledge that we do hear a division of the voices, pens, and keyboards that are clamoring for this sequential theology. Some are bolder and freer than others. These others insist that when men do something, it is always and only by grace alone. But some go further. These bolder and freer promoters state a division. Grace indeed works, and that grace is necessary. But in one way or another, grace must acknowledge man's responsibility and the reality of what *he* does. Grace must operate in such a way as *ultimately* to leave something for man to do. Maybe grace is available, which man must *then* use. Maybe grace gives the possibility or potential, but man must *then* turn to good acts and good deeds.

Why is this sequential theology not only conditional covenant theology, not only federal vision theology, not only Arminianism, not only semi-Pelagianism? Why is it also simple Pelagianism, Pelagianism again brought out of hell?

Because it is the same ancient endeavor to cheat grace. Because, however pious and holy the appeals to grace pour forth, they spring out of the same pride that characterized the destructive poison of the Pelagian error.

Why? How?

Because grace waits for no man!

Because if grace waits for any man, it must wait forever!

Because if grace waits for any man, then salvation is not of grace but of works!

Three practical considerations make the above clear.

The first is from the doctrine of God's providence, that part of providence called "sustaining." God sustains the entire creation in its existence from beginning to end. Were God to withdraw his hand of providence, the creation would not spin out of control into chaos, but the creation would no longer exist. Providence is God's work *alone*. The same is true of God's work of salvation from beginning to end. Were grace to be withdrawn for the sake of man's activity *as man's very own*, there would be no child of God, no Christian, and no saint. There would only be the sinner enmeshed and ensnared in his total depravity by nature (Canons of Dort, 5.3, 6–8).

The second consideration is from an examination of

the doctrine of Pelagius, as that doctrine was criticized and condemned by Augustine. Pelagius did acknowledge grace. He acknowledged that grace was God's gift to man, to give to man a will that was operational and therefore free. God gave further grace to show to man in what direction he ought to turn his will—toward God and not away from him. That grace was the light of nature, which was sufficient for man to understand, to trust in God, and to worship and serve him for salvation. On another, more gracious level was the law of God revealed in scripture. God's word graciously told man what works and deeds would be pleasing to God and which works and deeds he would reward with grace and salvation. On another, even more gracious level was the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without doing what was required by the light of nature, without doing what was required of the law, man could obtain grace and salvation by merely believing on Jesus Christ. Different ways and different requirements, all graciously given by God. Man, making good use of these gracious gifts by his own free will, was always able to and actually did in many cases obtain grace and salvation from a gracious God. God's promises of grace and salvation were certain and sure. They were certain and sure by grace. But for man's will to be truly man's will and truly free, grace could not affect that will *in its operation*. The will had to remain man's will. It had to remain free.

In his response to Pelagius' doctrine, Augustine denied that Pelagius' system was gracious at all. Any breach in grace for the sake of man's will was a breach fatal to all grace. Pelagius' system was not a mixture of grace and works. It was a system of works.

The third consideration is from a particular insight that Augustine had about Pelagius' doctrine. Augustine's insight considered the very point at which salvation depended on the activity of man's free will. If man's activity was going to be decisive as part of the necessary sequence between preceding grace and following grace, that activity had to come from man's own will. Augustine's insight was that man's will, to be truly his, had to have two things true about it. The first was that man's will had to be able to choose one or the other. It had to have no constraint on it or within it from an outside source. *The operation of grace might not make that will choose*. The second was that man's will had to lead to two results. Man's will had to sometimes choose the wrong, and his will had to sometimes choose the right. In other words, free will had to carry through to decisions and activities that were bad as well as good. All grace was suspended on the decisive will of man. Grace might aim and intend. Grace might be highly persuasive. But its realization depended on man's will. Grace might be

promised and reserved, but its actual benefit depended on man's will.

How do the above points apply to this new theological system of sequence: of God's grace, then man's activity, then God's grace?

Grace must fail.

In one respect grace must fail because man remains man in this system of sequence. Man is changeable. He is a creature of time. His will may decide one thing one day and another day decide another thing. As there is faith in man, there is also unbelief. Will faith prevail one day and unbelief prevail the next? If the will of man must have its own leading place between preceding grace and following grace, then following grace is in peril.

In another respect grace must fail. Where grace must end to give man room for the proper exercise of his will—free from grace—exactly there must man fall back into the death of his depravity. Not only might he not do what he is supposed to do in order to obtain subsequent grace, but also he cannot do what he is supposed to do. His natural depravity means he must certainly do what is displeasing to God. Preceding grace cannot carry through to following grace. Its interruption by man's evil will and act prohibits any gracious gift and every gracious end. This sequence does not leave a gap for man's will to fill, but the sequence leaves a horrible, unbridgeable chasm. It leaves all subsequent and following grace completely out of reach.

Another application of this theology of sequence is that it demands for man independence from grace. Grace makes itself available for the use of man, but it is up to man in his independent condition whether he will use that grace. God graciously provides an incentive, a reward, if man but does his part, but man must be free in himself to pursue this reward if he will obtain it. Grace enables. Grace equips. It enables and equips according to the predestinating and regenerating will of God. Grace provides an incentive to help persuade man to do what he must do. But what lies between must depend on man alone to fulfill, independently of God's willing and acting.

Independence!

But grace will not be cheated.

Grace will not allow itself to be compromised.

The sentence of Romans 11:6 must sound: "If it be

of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." This judgment of scripture is why Arminianism was condemned by the Synod of Dordt as just another version of Pelagianism. This sentence of scripture is why this theology of sequence must be condemned as just another version of Pelagianism.

Grace will not tolerate any kind of attack.

The grace of God will not share the glory with the works or will of man.

Grace must wholly withdraw from the scene and leave man alone, alone in his proud desolation. Man, seeking proud independence, must find himself self-deceived, thinking his blindness is great wisdom and his inability is great strength. Man's insistence on self-doing is his undoing. All his talk of grace and what grace can make of a man and can do to a man is truly only revolt from grace and from the God of all grace.

What a mystery this is to the child of God who loves and rejoices in the grace of God that gives him all his good willing and all his good doing! He repudiates his own will as only evil for the sake of praising God's will as only good (Lord's Day 49). The child of God will claim no part of his salvation for himself but must insist that it is all the work of God in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit of Christ in him. The child of God delights to attribute all his willing and all his doing to the thorough, pervasive grace of God working in him. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Why cheat grace?

Why divide between grace and works?

How abhorrent to divide between God and man!

All must be by grace alone!

Why such a mystery?

Why must the child of God truly find so repulsive this theology that insists on a sequence that gives man a place?

Why must he heartily agree that this theology of sequence is again the Pelagian error out of hell?

Because the child of God finds the fellowship of his God in grace to be most delightful and precious. He does not want his God to provide grace, leave his child free to will or to do, and then supply grace in response. Such is no freedom to the child of God but only death. He never wants grace to leave any kind of gap for him to fill. There he sees death, the yawning chasm of his depravity. There he will not go. He must remain near to

The child of God will claim no part of his salvation for himself but must insist that it is all the work of God in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit of Christ in him.

his God, always conscious of the never-ending supply of grace to him from God's throne, where Christ sits at God's right hand.

Also because the believer wants to live always in the knowledge that his entire way to glory—every aspect of that way of salvation and every step of that way—is from the cross of his Lord Jesus Christ. The believer wants to know that it is that cross alone that ensures by its purchase all his life and all his way on the path that must lead to eternal life. Seeing it all, step by step as he experiences it, it is his great delight to give thanks to his God for it all, seeing the great price that Christ paid for it.

Further, because the child of God needs the conscious assurance that no part of his entire pathway is up to him. He needs to know that he cannot possibly fail to enter

into Zion, that the promises of God are incapable of failure. The child of God needs to know that God's strength is his by grace alone, strength given for all his weakness and all his incapability, and that strength of grace is all he needs to persevere all the way to glorious perfection, perfection promised and attained by grace alone.

For the sake of his salvation, the believer must have nothing to do with the Pelagian error. No matter what guise it may adopt in crawling out of hell with the aid of its proud assistants, it must be detected, named, and cast back in.

Grace must never be cheated but fully embraced and completely trusted.

Grace alone!

—MVW

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.—1 Chronicles 12:32

PROFESSOR SETTLED AND BINDING (3): THE CHARGE OF SCHISM

A Badge of Honor

I have been treating Professor Cammenga's shabby screed against the officebearers of Cornerstone Reformed Protestant Church, formerly officebearers of Wingham Protestant Reformed Church, who in obedience to Christ led the congregation of Wingham out of the apostatizing Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). That act of obedience to Christ, and thus the Christ who gave that command, Professor Cammenga savages in his public and nasty email.

The email is so full of shameless and un-Christian gloating, self-promotion, and self-justification that it would be unworthy of a response if it were not also so full of falsehoods about the church, the truth, and plain historical fact. In this he reveals that he belongs to the pack of slanderers against the truth against whom the apostle Paul contended and with whom the faithful church of Christ in every age has had to contend.

To those evils the professor adds the iniquitous charge of schism. He casts a wide net in his charge. So he writes,

Once again, this group and its supporters make themselves guilty of schism, which is public, gross sin. What aggravates their sin of schism is the mischaracterization, misrepresentation, and slander that have become a hallmark of this group and its leaders in their magazine, blogs, and other forms of propaganda.¹

I do not so much mind his charge of schism. Coming from Professor Cammenga with his theology, the charge of schism is a badge of honor that ought to be worn with distinction by all who come under his censure. No one in "this group and its supporters...and its leaders" should be bothered in the least that Professor Cammenga charges them with schism, false doctrine, or antinomianism.

1 Prof. R. Cammenga, "Response to Wingham's 'A History of the Controversy,'" *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 21.

They should find in his charge confirmation that they believe the truth.

However, he—more than any other minister in the PRC—is being consistent.

If the charge of schism by Professor Cammenga and the PRC against me, Rev. A. Lanning, and others is true, then, of course, we are very wicked indeed. We are not ministers. The Reformed Protestant denomination is not made up of *churches* in the acceptable sense of the term. If the charge of schism is true, then I would join with Professor Cammenga in heartily condemning us. I would say it harsher, but I would agree with the basic assessment.

I would only remind him and his churches that their argument against us must also be used against themselves. For the origins of the PRC and of the *Afscheiding* churches were in discipline. Hendrik De Cock was deposed for his supposedly un-Christian and unloving slander of two brothers in the church. The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) called Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Rev. Henry Danhof “Mr. Hoeksema” and “Mr. Danhof” in the church’s depositions of those ministers and slanderously dismissed them. I would remind Professor Cammenga and his churches that in light of those decisions of the Christian Reformed classes, the Protestant Reformed denomination is not made up of true churches of Christ either. If that argument of schism is going to be the defense of Professor Cammenga and his churches, they should apologize to the CRC for their unruly behavior over the course of many years.

I bring this up to show that simply repeating over and over that “this group and its supporters...and its leaders” are schismatics is not a sound argument. Professor Cammenga and his churches must prove the charge based on truth and righteousness. But no one is going to do that. They are righteous, and their cause is righteous. They have said so, so it must be true. Their righteousness does not need proof but only loud and repetitive assertions.

This is nothing new. It has been done before in the history of the church. And we in “this group” suffer the charge gladly for Christ’s sake.

Although I would warn Professor Cammenga and his churches that either we are very wicked, or they are very wicked. That is the whole point in bringing up the decisions of the Christian Reformed classes. Either the CRC was very wicked, or in 1924 Rev. H. Hoeksema and Rev. H. Danhof and the forming of the PRC were very wicked.

And we maintain the same thing in this case. I maintain that Professor Cammenga’s charge of schism is very wicked, and in that light his email is indescribably

wicked; for in it he lies against the cause of Christ and the truth.

I will grant him that there surely is schism involved, as I granted to him that there is antinomianism involved. He charges antinomianism but is himself the antinomian. I have established that in a previous article.² He also charges schism. But the opposite is, in fact, true. He himself, all those who agree with him, and all those who will not put him out of the ministry as a false teacher are the schismatics.

If only he will see what the proper definition of *schism* is. Leave all other considerations aside.

Schism at its most basic means *departure from the truth*. The truth is over all. The truth is everything in the church, and everything in the church must be regulated by truth. So when the church departs from the truth, there is the work of Christ either to root out the lie to preserve his truth in the church against that departure, or there is the work of Christ to reform the church in order to preserve his truth. Preservation and reformation are alike the work of Christ for his truth’s sake.

Schism is the work of the devil. Whoever is the schismatic in this case is doing the work of the devil. Whoever is doing the work of preservation and reformation is doing the work of Christ.

Many will object to my saying that Professor Cammenga’s charge of schism is wicked. But I maintain that analysis in light of the definition of schism as *departure from the truth* and the events that have transpired in recent months.

To call the work of Christ the work of the devil is extremely serious: there is nothing more serious. *Schism* was precisely the charge of the opponents of Christ in his own day, and the opponents of Christ charge the same to this day. So this matter of who is an antinomian, who is a schismatic, who has the truth, and who is lying is all very serious. It is not a rhetorical game to score points but is a matter of eternal consequence. We are locked in a life-and-death struggle. There are those, also of our own number, who believe that they can play nice and get along. But that is not possible.

There are two possibilities and only two: reformation or schism.

Departure from Christ

It is a hallmark of the lie that it charges the truth with schism. That is part of the lie of the lie. The lie presents itself as truth, and the lie charges the truth with being the lie—in this case with schism. The opposite is, in fact, true: the lie is schismatic, and the truth unites. Yet

² See Nathan J. Langerak, “Professor Settled and Binding (2): The Real Antinomian,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 9 (November 2021): 12–21.

the lie always charges the truth with schism. Usually, that is because those in the church of Christ who hold to the truth are the minority. They are a troublesome minority for the church that is hell-bent on apostasy. And I maintain that Professor Cammenga stands in that line of opponents of the truth that calls the truth schismatic.

When he speaks of schism, he should understand that schism is not division from the Reverend Professor Cammenga and his colleagues. Neither is schism separation from the PRC. Schism is the sin of dividing the church from Christ, her only head, and departure from the truth. If the Protestant Reformed denomination maintains the truth, let Professor Cammenga and his churches answer our charges that the denomination is now departing and has departed from the truth.

Let the churches show how the preaching of Prof. R. Cammenga, Rev. K. Koole, Rev. W. Bruinsma, Rev. R. Van Overloop, and the rest is true and faithful Reformed preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not. They know this.

Reverend Koole's preaching about available grace that is different from regenerating grace and his teaching that if a man would be saved there is that which he must do are Arminian false doctrine as blatant and bold as ever has appeared in a Reformed church, let alone a Protestant Reformed pulpit. He was involved in the stout defense of Reverend Overway's preaching and in the deposition of Neil Meyer; he publicly militated against Synod 2018 by writing, and thus he militated against the creeds interpreted by that synod; and he preaches false doctrine repeatedly. The blame for schism is his and his colleagues'. He will get away with a weak *mea culpa*, if even that. There will be no suspension or deposition for that false teacher, and

he will go on preaching his false doctrine in Protestant Reformed pulpits and corrupting a generation and more.

Let Professor Cammenga and his churches answer the charges of wickedness and malfeasance on the part of the assemblies, in which they departed from the law of Christ to do justice and mercy. They may scream, holler, and shout about schism; but they must prove the charge, not merely repeat it again and again and again—lecture after lecture, sermon after sermon, article after article, and email after email.

Professor Cammenga should also know that schism has always been the charge of the false church—the last refuge of scoundrels, as someone put it somewhere—against the faithful. What he must understand is that in order to charge schism, he must prove that “this group and its supporters...and its leaders” have left Christ, chiefly in doctrine. Did they leave Christ doctrinally? It is enough for the Reverend Professor Cammenga to state it, but he does not feel the need to prove it.

Rev. D. Overway departed from Christ in doctrine. Hope Protestant Reformed Church departed from Christ in doctrine and continues to do so with its current minister and

consistory.³ Rev. K. Koole departed from Christ in doctrine. Rev. R. Van Overloop grossly, repeatedly, and impenitently departed from Christ in doctrine. The list can go on. The rest of the Protestant Reformed ministers by silence and connivance are partakers of these sins.

Prof. R. Cammenga departs from Christ in doctrine. He departs from the truth of the Reformed faith as that is contained in the Heidelberg Catechism that he purports to preach but that he repeatedly mangles beyond recognition, and so also lawlessly—antinomian—violates his own oath and profanes the name of God.

Coming from Professor Cammenga with his theology, the charge of schism is a badge of honor that ought to be worn with distinction by all who come under his censure.

3 For example, see the Reformation Day sermon, “Justification *Sola Fide*,” preached by Rev. Jonathan Mahtani in Hope Protestant Reformed Church on October 31, 2021. Criticizing the theology of the Reformed Protestant members and their ministers, Reverend Mahtani says, “It is explicitly denied that faith, the instrument through which we are *justified*, is an active faith. It is said instead that that faith is completely passive or utterly passive. While that sounds like a wonderful defense of gracious justification, this is heresy.” So in the PRC at Hope, there is faith as active, that is, as man's activity, in the matter of *justification*. Reverend Mahtani rails on the idea that faith is passive as dangerous heresy. But he must also then condemn as heretical Professor Engelsma, who wrote, “The sinner *passively receives righteousness* as a gift. Indeed, the faith itself by which the sinner is justified is God's gift to the sinner” (David J. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed* [Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association], 191; emphasis added). Reverend Mahtani must also condemn John Calvin, who wrote, “For, as regards *justification*, *faith is something merely passive*, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but *receiving from Christ* that which we lack” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.13.5; emphasis added). This is the Reformation theology of the gospel, but to Hope church and her minister to deny “that justification is by an active faith” is “heresy...in direct contradiction to God's word and of the confessions,” “hyper-Calvinism,” “serious error that redefines faith,” and a “stock-and-block theology” that “leads to a form of universal salvation.” They are very far from the gospel and have learned nothing in the past five years, but they stubbornly cling to their false doctrine like dogs return to their vomit and pigs to their wallowing.

He writes that the former officebearers of Wingham aggravate their sin of schism by their mischaracterizations, and for proof of their mischaracterizations, the professor points to his sermons on Lord's Day 7 and Lord's Day 11. He defends these sermons as wonderfully orthodox. But the sermons are the proof that he departs from Christ in doctrine.

Indeed, if you want to know what is wrong with preaching in the PRC and what kind of pulpit failure the denomination is going to die with, you must examine these two sermons. They are really bad sermons, especially for a professor of theology. No Reformed man could say what Professor Cammenga says in these sermons.

In an attempt to defend his sermons, he rooted around like a pig in the writings and sermons of John Calvin and Herman Hoeksema and other Protestant Reformed ministers to search for statements to support his doctrine, and then he snorted contentedly when he happened upon something that pleased him.

However, their theology of God's absolute sovereignty in salvation completely passed the professor by.

The points he makes in the sermons solidify in my mind the direction that Professor Cammenga, the Protestant Reformed seminary, and with it the Protestant Reformed denomination are going in their rapid departure from the Reformed faith. Besides not being historically Protestant Reformed, Professor Cammenga's sermons on Lord's Days 7 and 11 are not Reformed at all. If you want to know the state of the orthodoxy of Protestant Reformed consistories, then know that after he preached those sermons, they were stoutly defended by consistories against protests.

New Doctrine of Faith

Let us take the sermon on Lord's Day 7 first.⁴ Although I never made it my business to listen to recorded sermons of other ministers, I listened to that sermon because I was asked whether what Professor Cammenga said was correct. As I was listening to the sermon, I threw my phone and could not finish because the sermon was so bad. Later I finished listening to the message—I hardly dare call it a sermon.

He can say all he wants that he preached only what Herman Hoeksema preached on 2 Peter 1:10, but any thinking individual can examine and compare Professor Cammenga's exegesis with the exegesis of Reverend Hoeksema and see that they are different. Furthermore, Herman Hoeksema preached nothing more and nothing less on 2 Peter 1:10 than what Lord's Day 32 teaches. Professor Cammenga brought a new doctrine of faith, justification, and assurance into Lord's Day 7.

First, he tells us what assurance is and describes it in glowing, even seductive, terms. Then he continues by telling us that assurance is God's will for us: "This is the assurance of the people of God according to God's own will. God wills that his people enjoy the assurance of their salvation."

He remembers shortly thereafter that he is preaching on faith, and so he makes sure to include the note that faith is God's gift:

It belongs to the distinctively Reformed view of faith that faith is the gift of God, that faith is worked in us by God and by God alone and that is not due to the work of God in cooperation with our free will. Not that, [but it is] exclusively the gift and the work of God.

And shortly afterward he tells us that faith is also assurance:

It is also the distinctively Reformed doctrine of faith that faith is assurance. Jesus Christ did not only die so that I might have faith. He did...

But that faith is assurance. Assurance distinguishes true faith from every form of false faith—hypocritical faith.

There are always unbelievers mixed in with the church. They claim to be believers, they claim to have faith. Probably for a little while, maybe even for quite a while, they are able to fool us. The hypocrite can't fool two people though. He can't fool himself, and he can't fool God. But what the hypocrite does not enjoy, in distinction from the true believer, is the assurance of faith, the assurance of faith.

Here is the transition.

It is not true that assurance alone is what distinguishes faith from hypocritical faith. Faith is two things: knowledge and confidence, or assurance. True faith is distinguished from false faith also in faith's knowledge. But in this sermon *assurance alone* is set up as that which distinguishes true faith from false faith, as though the hypocrite can have the knowledge of faith, but he cannot have the assurance of faith. Assurance is the issue in the sermon as that which distinguishes true faith from false faith.

Rightly, Professor Cammenga says that the Catechism emphasizes assurance. He points out that faith is assurance. He also says that God assures:

Not just that God chose some people unto eternal salvation, but that God assures those whom he has chosen, assures them here and now, assures

⁴ Prof. Ronald Cammenga, "Saving Faith as Assurance," sermon preached in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on March 14, 2021.

them in this life, assures personally and individually. As much as if your names were written in the pages of holy scripture, he identifies you as one of his elect. That is the personal assurance of faith.

And he points out that assurance has its source in election, is grounded in the cross, and is the work of the Holy Spirit.

From a certain, formal viewpoint, he describes assurance accurately. And everything is well in the sermon until the question, “Are you living in that assurance?” Then the train wreck begins.

I quote in full from the sermon so everyone can read it:

Scripture and the Reformed confessions teach that, though faith assures of salvation, that faith is confirmed by a life of good works.

The fruits of faith and the fruits of grace, these evidences of God’s grace in our lives, are not the basis or cause of our assurance. Faith is assured of salvation.

The problem is my faith is weak. My faith often falters, especially in the storms of life, my own falls into sin, or the distressing circumstances that God may bring into my life. My faith is weak. The doubts and fears rise up, and the devil whispers in my ear, “You’re not a child of God, not really. It is all a show.”

Then, of course, the answer is faith in Jesus Christ, believing in Jesus Christ. But in his goodness God stoops to the weakness of our faith, and God himself uses the fruits and evidences of faith and of election in order to confirm our assurance.

Where are these doctrines—faith confirmed by works, weak faith, God uses works to confirm assurance—found in any of the Reformed creeds? I know that the professor points to 2 Peter 1:10, but he mangles that text, and when criticized he shields himself by saying that this is the exegesis of Rev. H. Hoeksema. But Hoeksema did not say what Professor Cammenga says. In the quote above, Cammenga denies everything that Lord’s Day 7 teaches about faith; indeed, in the quote above, he denies the whole Reformed faith and overthrows the Reformation’s *sola fide*. I repeat what he says: “Though faith assures of salvation, that faith is confirmed by a life of good works.”

That is not Reformed doctrine at all. That is contrary to his own synod’s condemnation of a similar statement from Rev. D. Overway and Hope church:

We look at our good works in the same way. Never of any value to make me be declared righteous before God, but always of help in finding and maintaining assurance that God has justified me through Christ and Christ alone.⁵

Professor Cammenga’s own synod condemned his doctrine as contrary to the Reformed creeds, but he goes right on lawlessly teaching it.

He teaches the people that faith is a weak and pitiful thing that needs to be propped up by works. I have heard of little faith. I have heard of faithlessness. I have heard of imperfect faith. But weak faith that needs works to confirm it, I have never heard of.

Further, he casts his hearers into doubt of their salvation: “The doubts and fears rise up, and the devil whispers in my ear, ‘You’re not a child of God, not really. It is all a show.’”

If the devil is whispering doubt in my ear, then I want *the Christ* who said, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” And Satan listened.

But not Professor Cammenga! His awful pastoral counsel to doubting, troubled believers is *to point them away from Christ to look at their own works*. Listen to him:

Then, of course, the answer is faith in Jesus Christ, believing in Jesus Christ. But in his goodness God stoops to the weakness of our faith, and God himself uses the fruits and evidences of faith and of election in order to confirm our assurance.

The answer to doubt is faith in Christ, except that that is not the answer for Professor Cammenga. His answer is *works to confirm one’s assurance*. Such a faith as looks away from Christ to works is not faith at all but unbelief.

New Doctrine of Justification

Then, if faith is knowledge of and confidence of my justification before God, as Lord’s Day 7 teaches, Professor Cammenga’s version of faith does not justify alone, but it only justifies when it has works.

Remember, Professor Cammenga has the devil whispering in his hearers’ ears that they are not the children of God.

5 As quoted in *Acts of Synod 2018*, 68. Synod condemned the statement, saying, “The doctrinal error...compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ, for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced. Necessarily then, the doctrines of the unconditional covenant...and justification by faith alone are compromised” (70).

The answer of scripture and of the Reformed creeds to this attack of the devil is Christ and his righteousness, so that being justified by faith alone without works we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we stand without fear as children before the living God (Rom. 5:1–2). Justified by faith alone is the answer to all doubt!

But Professor Cammenga directs the people to their works, and then he graces this works-preaching with the name and grace of God. That is a cruel God who directs his children *away from Christ*, their only hope, when the devil is whispering in their ears and directs them *to their own works*. That is a comfortless doctrine. It is sheer federal vision theology. And it is not even very cleverly disguised. The professor just throws it out there. And who among his hearers said anything in opposition to that false doctrine by which he robbed the people of God of their comfort and caused schism in the churches from Christ?

The faith that Professor Cammenga teaches is a pitiful thing.

But Christ said that if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you can remove a mountain and cast it into the sea. That is because faith puts the believer in connection with Christ and the word of Christ and thus with the triune God and the Holy Spirit, so that, forgiving all the believer's sins, the triune God is for him and nothing can be against him. Faith does. Faith alone does. Faith alone justifies.

Faith is nothing in Professor Cammenga's sermon besides works. Faith does nothing in his sermon without works. All the grand things that he said about assurance in the first part of the sermon are nothing, they mean nothing, and you do not receive them until you work. That is not Reformed at all.

Article 24 of the Belgic Confession says, "It is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 53). I am justified before I ever do one work. That justification gives the absolute assurance of my salvation—that I am Christ's, that Christ is mine, that I am elect, and that I have righteousness before God and eternal life from him. That justification is absolutely by faith without any works at all, even before I do any works. That justification and thus the absolute assurance of salvation that justification gives, faith gives to the ungodly and to those who do not work! This is the truth of Romans 4:5: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

And do not forget that justification gives assurance of salvation. You cannot separate faith, justification, and assurance. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by

faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now what is peace with God except assurance of God's grace, of his love and favor, and of the promise of eternal life?

Then, having mangled Lord's Day 7, Professor Cammenga proceeds to mangle Canons 5.10. He says,

The Canons of Dort refer to these confirming fruits of election, of faith, and of salvation in several places.

If you are reading the *Standard Bearer*, as I hope you all are and do, you will notice that I have begun a series of articles on assurance and good works, relating them—just a beginning.

There are numerous references in our creeds. One of the most outstanding is Canons 5.10:

This assurance [the assurance of preservation in our salvation to the end, the assurance of our election, the assurance that we are the children of God—all those aspects of assurance], however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the Word of God, but springs from faith in God's promises [faith], which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit [working within us], that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16 [among other passages]); and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort, that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge or earnest of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.

Canons 5.10 does not teach what Professor Cammenga is teaching. Where in the whole article is there any reference to "confirming fruits...of faith"? It is not there at all. The article speaks of "a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 175). But that is not the good work. That is the guilelessness of faith of which David speaks in Psalm 32:2: "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." Faith is not feigned, but faith wants to live rightly. That is a whole different matter than confirming faith by works.

Then there is the fact that not only does that article not speak of "confirming fruits," but also "confirming fruits" are not found anywhere in the Canons, as he alleges, or anywhere in all the Reformed creeds, for that matter.

Still more, the doctrine of Professor Cammenga about works' confirming weak faith is nowhere to be found in the creeds either. Weak faith confirmed by works is his own false doctrine to overthrow the Reformed doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

And he continues in this vein of weak faith confirmed by works for nearly three-quarters of the entire sermon. The actual explanation of Lord's Day 7 simply disappears in a deluge of works and morbid introspection like that of the *Nadere Reformatie* and the Puritans. Just listen to him. He goes on and on directing the people to look at themselves.

Do the fruits of the death of Christ manifest themselves in my life? Do I trust in him and in him alone—not at all in my own work or works—for my standing before God? Do I repent of my sins? Sincerely repent of my sins? Do I hate them? And do I flee from them? And do I fight against them? If you do, be assured with the assurance of a true faith that you are an elect child of God and that Christ the savior has died for you, even for you.

Are you living with the fruits of the Spirit manifest in your life—observable by others around you, at school, on the job, in the congregation, in your family life? Are spiritual things your meat and your drink? Is your attitude toward spiritual things such that they take preeminence over your own pleasure—sports, entertainment? Is your attitude that you love the things of the kingdom of God? Then know, know with the assurance of a true faith, that you are a child of God.

Ask yourself, are the fruits of preserving grace evident in my life? Do I pray to God for my preservation in the faith? Do I make that prayer to God for my children and for my grandchildren? And do I make use of the means of grace for the preservation of faith? Then be assured, live in the assurance, that you are an elect child of God.

That all can be summarized this way: are you holy enough, do you repent enough, and are you spiritual enough? Then you too can be assured. The gospel of Professor Cammenga!

I remind the reader that the professor is still in point one of the sermon, and he is still defining what assurance is. It belongs to his very definition of assurance that to be assured, you have to have faith, but faith is not enough. Besides, faith is pitifully weak; so in addition to faith, you also have to be holy enough, be spiritual enough, and repent enough. Then you can have the assurance of faith, which in the end is not the truth that faith *is* assurance at all but the false doctrine of assurance and justification

by works. It is an open question in the sermon whether that weak faith also needs to be exercised by anyone, thus making faith a work too.

Professor Cammenga's doctrine is not Reformed doctrine. It is a corruption of Lord's Day 7. That Lord's Day teaches plainly that faith *is* assurance that righteousness and eternal life are the believer's. There is not a work to be found in the Lord's Day, except Christ's work. Professor Cammenga quickly breezes over Christ and gets to the believer. That is what a Christless, faithless sermon sounds like. Make an obligatory and cursory reference to Christ, explain what Christ did, but hold it from the people until they are holy enough, are spiritual enough, and repent enough.

It does not matter if he preached ninety orthodox sermons on Lord's Day 7 because this one sermon overthrows and undoes them all. If you have a delicious plate of food set in front of you and someone puts a big piece of dung on the plate, the whole meal is ruined. This sermon is Professor Cammenga's dung to ruin the beautiful Reformed theology of Lord's Day 7 and the whole Catechism and in the process to rob the people of God of their hope and comfort in the truth of faith in Christ. Instead he sends them on a fruitless, hopeless, and damning quest inside themselves for peace, for joy, and for fruits in order to know their salvation. The intolerable thing about that is they are not directed to Christ; indeed, they are directed away from Christ. So Professor Cammenga can write all he wants that this is classic Protestant Reformed preaching, but his sermon is Puritan, *Nadere Reformatie*, introspective, and a denial of the gospel.

New Doctrine of Assurance by Works

We have not even come to his second point: how assurance is worked. Then he really gets going in his separation of faith and assurance.

In the first point he said that assurance is of the essence of faith; but by halfway through the first point, he has added works to assurance.

By the second point he separates faith and assurance. Listen:

The question is, how, then, *how do I enjoy the full assurance of faith?*

What must be emphasized at the outset is that assurance is the work of grace—God's grace. We must not suppose that God gives us the gift of faith and that somehow we manufacture thereafter on our own the assurance of faith—maybe follow some steps, push some buttons, and there you have it. Presto! We have the assurance of faith, and now we will live out the rest of our days in that assurance. Not so.

God is a God of means. The God who graciously gives us and works in us faith and faith's assurance is a God of means.

Now we have "faith" and "faith's assurance." They are separated. The Lord's Day says faith *is* assurance. Professor Cammenga has "faith" and "faith's assurance," and he even has a "full assurance." So there is faith, faith's assurance, and a third level for the really holy and hardworking of faith's full assurance.

To make sure no one misunderstands that he is teaching now that you *work* for assurance, he says,

Although God works the assurance of faith under the preaching of his word, *we are active in this whole matter of the assurance of faith.*

God does not drop assurance out of the sky on us and now we have it forever and it can never be taken away from us and we have nothing to worry about as regards this matter of the assurance of our faith.

But God's people are *active, busy, in this whole matter of the assurance of their faith.* That is 2 Peter 1:10: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence [give diligence] to make your calling and election sure: for if ye *do* these things, ye shall never fall." Make our calling and election sure. *Give diligence* to make your calling and election sure. If ye *do* these things, ye shall never fall...

That's how we make our calling and election sure. What he is describing is the Christian life—the living of the Christian life. What he is describing is a life lived out of love for God and love for the neighbor. What he is describing is a life lived in obedience to God's ten commandments. *God uses that in order to confirm in us the assurance of our election and salvation.*

So how is assurance worked?

If you work, God will use your works to confirm assurance in you. Now Professor Cammenga is so far gone from the doctrine of Lord's Day 7 that he is not even making a pretense at this point of preaching the Lord's Day. He simply hangs his sermon about working for assurance on Lord's Day 7, and he is teaching entirely contrary to what Lord's Day 7 teaches.

Then he gets going on his third point.

Let's review the doctrine of this sermon that is supposed to be about *faith as assurance*. What is assurance? It is what you work for. How is assurance worked? You work some more. Then what is the fruit of the assurance that you work for? You work some more.

This assurance in the life of the child of God produces a good fruit.

It is really the assurance of salvation that establishes the whole Christian life. What is the Christian life?

The Heidelberg Catechism puts its finger on it. One of the greatest aspects of the instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism—you children know it.

What is the Christian life? It is gratitude. It is thankfulness.

But how can you be thankful, truly thankful, if you don't know that for which you should be thankful? Don't know the one who has bestowed these abundant gifts upon you, so that you can thank him? Gratitude, a whole life lived in obedience to God and

in the service of our brothers and sisters in the church, is grounded in the assurance of our election and our salvation.

So you work for assurance so you can work some more.

There is nothing Reformed about this sermon. All of the professor's use of orthodox-sounding language is nothing more than deceptive banter. It surely is not an interpretation of Lord's Day 7. It is not the Reformed doctrine of faith at all. *It is faith and works as the only way of salvation, to the denial of Christ as the only way of salvation.*

He Does Not!

Now, if it were possible, Professor Cammenga's sermon on Lord's Day 11 is worse!⁶

He defends this sermon in his email as a paragon of orthodoxy, but the sermon that is supposed to exalt the name of Jesus denigrates the name of Jesus. Professor Cammenga says in the sermon,

All the grand things that he said about assurance in the first part of the sermon are nothing, they mean nothing, and you do not receive them until you work. That is not Reformed at all.

⁶ Prof. Ronald Cammenga, "His Name Is Jesus," sermon preached in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on May 2, 2021.

The Catechism is not teaching here that Jesus accomplishes himself personally every aspect of the work of our salvation. He does not! There are other works alongside the work of Jesus.

I am quoting accurately. I have checked and rechecked the sermon. That is what he actually says.

Years ago he got the words across his lips that “it is not enough for salvation...that Jesus suffered under the wrath of God an atoning death.”⁷ Now he just comes out and says that the Catechism is “not teaching here that Jesus accomplishes himself personally every aspect of the work of our salvation.”

I will grant him that, being a human, he could err. But when the officebearers of Wingham pointed out his error in their “History of the Controversy,” he does not retract in holy horror what he said, but in his shabby screed he defends his sermon as perfectly orthodox.

Since we have been taught and the whole world has been taught from time immemorial that Christ *did* accomplish all of our salvation, the question on the minds of all who are not completely ignorant of the truth is, what are these “other works”?

Professor Cammenga answers the question:

And those other works on behalf of our salvation are the works of the Holy Spirit, the work of sanctification...

It is a slander, therefore, to allege that because someone teaches that besides the saving work of Jesus the work of the Holy Spirit, not the work of man but the work of the Holy Spirit, is necessary unto his salvation. That is the Reformed faith. That has always been the Reformed faith.

John Calvin...introduces that part of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that begins the work of the Holy Spirit with these words: “We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.” That is found in Calvin’s *Institutes*, book 3, chapter 1, paragraph 1. Calvin is emphasizing the fundamental truth that our salvation consists of the work of Christ on his cross, justification, and also the work of the Holy Spirit in us—for us and in us—that work that we call and that the scriptures call *sanctification*.

But in this Lord’s Day the Heidelberg Catechism is not contrasting the work of Jesus Christ on behalf of our salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit on behalf of our salvation. What it is contrasting is the work of Jesus Christ on behalf of our salvation and the works of man—the works of man apart from the grace of Jesus Christ as the fruit of our salvation in him. What it is denying is that our works, in any way, shape, or form, contribute to our salvation. That is the teaching of Lord’s Day 11.

There is so much wrong with that quotation, it is hard to know where to begin.

It is certainly true that the Catechism is not contrasting the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ. Only Professor Cammenga is doing that, contrary to all truth. In his quotation of John Calvin, the professor does not have a clue what Calvin is actually saying. Calvin says that *Christ accomplished all our salvation*. It is all in Christ: salvation and every benefit of salvation are in him. He personally accomplished it all. And now we must be made part of Christ and have Christ in us. Christ received the Spirit to take up his abode with us. As Calvin says,

Therefore, to share with us what he [Christ] has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us...we grow into one body with him.

To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.⁸

And Calvin goes on in this vein for some time. The work of the Spirit is the work of Christ by which Christ unites us to himself as our head, and we as his body are made partakers of his blessings.

But Professor Cammenga, against all sense, presses his quote of Calvin into the service of his false doctrine that Christ does not personally accomplish every aspect of our salvation, as though Calvin were agreeing with him.

Now from the viewpoint of accurate theology—being a professor of dogmatics, one would think he would be interested in that—to say that Jesus Christ does not personally accomplish every aspect of our salvation is patently false. There are few false teachers bold enough—or foolish enough—to say that and still insist on being taken seriously. He knows full well that the accomplishment of salvation was at the cross and that Jesus *did* accomplish all our salvation.

7 Rev. Ronald Cammenga, “Jesus’ Call to the Weary,” preparatory sermon preached in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church on October 12, 2003. The sermon text was Matthew 11:28: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

8 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.1.1, 4.

But let us suppose that the professor was speaking imprecisely and that by “accomplish” he meant *apply*. Jesus does not personally *apply* every aspect of our salvation. This too is false and grossly so.

Separating Christ and His Spirit

Then he gets worse and separates Jesus Christ and his Spirit. The professor separates the work of Jesus Christ personally from the work of the Spirit personally. Notice: that is his contrast: Jesus did not personally accomplish every aspect of our salvation. And he adds emphatically, “He does not!” That is to make sure that no one leaves the sermon thinking too much of Jesus Christ. And then, defining what he means by “accomplish,” he speaks about sanctification and ascribes that work to the Spirit, so what he is talking about is the application of salvation. And in that application of salvation, he distinguishes between the work of Christ personally and the work of the Spirit.

This is shocking.

Does he not know that the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and that “the Lord is that Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17)? Does he not know that the Spirit himself brings Christ and testifies of Christ? Does he not know that Jesus Christ, having accomplished our salvation at the cross, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high and received of God the Father the promise of the Spirit that he—Christ—shed abroad on his church and by which Spirit Jesus Christ unites us to himself and makes us partakers of his blessings? The application of salvation is *Christ’s* work. The application of salvation to Christ’s church is specifically stated in Lord’s Day 17 of the Heidelberg Catechism to be the work of Christ:

Q. 45. What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?

A. First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, *that He might make us partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death*; secondly, we are also by His power raised up to a new life; and lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 100; emphasis added)

The question is, why does the professor separate Jesus Christ and his Spirit? What purpose does that distinction serve? He says that Jesus does not accomplish—or apply—every aspect of our salvation personally, which, of course, is a plain lie. Jesus does. That is why his name is Savior. That Jesus Christ does it through the Holy Spirit is not a denial of that truth but an explanation of the fact that Jesus personally accomplishes every aspect of our salvation and personally applies all of it too. But why does Professor Cammenga feel it necessary to make that distinction? Does he want the Spirit working in man so that man can do what is necessary for salvation, which he cleverly disguises as the work of the Spirit? Then he is not only guilty of denigrating the name of Christ, which he most certainly does in that sermon, but he is also guilty of robbing the Spirit of Christ of his honor.

If anyone is wondering why the Protestant Reformed Churches will die of pulpit failure, then examine these two sermons. There are, of course, other sermons that I can point to, but remember Professor Cammenga taught dogmatics to a generation of Protestant Reformed ministers, and he taught them this theology, and it is in the pulpits already. His students do not know what the gospel is; and if they do know,

they are petrified that it will make men careless and profane. Examples can be multiplied. That false theology is there in Protestant Reformed pulpits every Sunday, and it is working every Sunday to turn hearts from the truth.

Do you want proof? He preached these sermons in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, and there was hardly a ripple. The consistory, with the input of prominent ministers of Classis East, stoutly defended the sermon on Lord’s Day 7 against a protest that was filed with the consistory against it. Professor Cammenga completely denied the truth of Lord’s Day 7, and he publicly denigrated the name of Jesus. The consistory of Hudsonville, to its shame, defended the sermons.

That is why reformation was necessary: this kind of preaching and these kinds of consistories.

It was reformation, Professor Cammenga, not schism.

You are the schismatic who, along with your colleagues, destroyed the peace of the PRC by your false doctrine.

—NJL

Christ accomplished all our salvation...salvation and every benefit of salvation are in him... And now we must be made part of Christ and have Christ in us. Christ received the Spirit to take up his abode with us.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.—Romans 12:1

WORDS OF POWER

They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. — Psalm 12:2

Politics as Usual

Candidates for federal government always make a big promise in order to garner votes. With all sincerity and claims of fidelity, the candidates make this promise over and over. This promise is guaranteed to provide lively matter for debate between the candidates, each one vowing to outdo the other to champion his cause.

The promise is to clear out corruption. Each candidate claims to be the anti-corruption candidate. Each candidate promises to drain the swamp, to clean up the mess, or to do some other metaphorical, expressive action. The candidates go further. They promise to clean up the laws and work to make them more fair. To this end the candidates take special aim at the “higher ups”—the rich and others favored by special laws that seem to be passed for their benefit and at the expense of those below them.

These promises matter to the voters. Among reasons they give for voting the way they do, the promise of cleaning up corruption is prominent. Thus candidates dedicate their campaign platforms to their promises, and some candidates are elected into office. Such promises are prominent also in inaugural speeches. The elected officials have heard the loud and clear voices of the people. The officials promise to do what they have been elected to do and to appoint and authorize persons and committees to carry out the campaign promises to the complete satisfaction of everyone.

But they all must die. All the promises and professions. All the vows and declarations.

Power will not let them quietly fade away into the background and die a slow death due to negligence. Neither will power rest content to take such promises and stab them to death in some back alley.

Power must parade the beaten and bloodied promises through the streets. Power must raise a scaffold and declare a public gathering to witness the hanging of the promises. All must know that power is power after all. All must know that power does not need to keep promises. For power to be proper and true power, it

must despise any obligation to honor what it has spoken before. Power cannot be accountable or responsible. Accountability and responsibility, power accounts as weakness.

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. (Eccl. 4:1)

This becomes evident in politics. Travel restrictions are imposed on the people, but the powerful must travel. They must travel for business, business that must continue for the sake of the people. The powerful must also travel for leisure because carrying on the important business of the people requires rest and relaxation. Health agencies that have been given legislative and enforcement powers impose masking and social distancing rules on the people. The powerful can fine and imprison the violators, but the powerful can wine and dine and party together with no masks and ignore social distancing with no compunction whatever. So the powerful carry on without fear or shame.

But some people watch and listen. They see the double standard. Some brave souls in the news media are determined not to ignore but to publish the flagrant violations and to expose the double standard. As a result there is a debate among the people, a debate that results in division. Many choose to ignore what is before their eyes or even vigorously to deny it. Some even justify it by distorting what has truly happened with an explanation that the most evident non-compliance is actually compliance! But others take it in and realize that it is all a shame that the powerful belie their rules by their actions. These others reason, “Why follow the rules if the powerful do not feel obligated to follow them?” So some follow the powerful leaders and disobey the rules too.

This division continues as those in power continue with their ongoing reckless flaunting of the rules.

Often something happens when those in power are confronted with their reckless behavior. Sometimes they do not justify their actions. They actually address their behavior. They offer apologies. They address the damage that they have caused by their actions. They speak of their regret at what they have said or done. They declare their sorrow on account of their conduct. They identify and promise some kind of change that they will undertake in order to restore the trust of the people.

Among those who hear such apologies there is further division. Some implicitly trust the apologies and are fully satisfied. What contrition and sorrow has been shown! Those who apologized will certainly change their behavior! Surely, the people have every reason to expect that trust has been completely restored! If some still do not trust their leaders, then shame on them!

But others see and hear something completely different. They see only political posturing. As they have seen the hypocrisy of the original rule-flaunting, so they see the hypocrisy of the apologies. They see the sorrow, the admission of damage, and the promises of change in the same light as the promises originally made to fight corruption. All of it means nothing. They are all expressions of the same power that must, according to its nature, speak and live as above all law.

Listen carefully. Watch closely. Listen not for what you *want* to hear. Watch not for what you *want* to see. Listen and watch not for the sake of preserving implicit trust in the power. Listen and watch not for the sake of maintaining the comfortable notion that you will be well cared for by those in power over you. Listen and watch not because you want to hear and see that the institutions you need for your sense of security are really stable. But determine to hear what has *really* been said. Determine to see what has *really* been done.

What you will so often hear and see are the same continued expressions of power.

What you will hear and see are the real works of power. Power may say, "If." "If I was misunderstood..." "If I caused any grief..." "If I did any damage..." Power must also distort what was said or done. Sometimes power will not say, "If..." Sometimes it will directly admit causing misunderstanding, grief, and damage of some kind. But what it admits is beside the point. When power speaks of correction or change, the promised correction or change is not what will truly address the original problem or its full scope. No promise is made to

repair the gash in the ship's hull through which water is pouring in. Instead, a promise is made to rearrange the deck chairs.

This is because power must show itself to be completely in charge, because power will not be beholden to the people to truly restore trust, and because power knows that it does not really need sincerity and truth presented: blind trust is its ally, while true accountability and responsibility is its enemy.

How important it is to understand this working of power! How important it is not to be captured by a society and culture so oriented to political power and to be so overwhelmed by its force as to drown in an ocean of dark fear!

In the Church

How blessed then to be part of another society and another culture that runs independently of the world's society and culture, which are so dominated by political power! How blessed to be in the church of Jesus Christ, the church that is founded on the truth (Matt. 16:18) and that is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)! In the church of Jesus Christ, the gospel is preached, the gospel of the eternal king-

dom of God, the kingdom that is dominated not by tyranny but by the love of God in Jesus Christ. In the church is the fellowship of the gospel that brings freedom to the heart, freedom from fear of death and the condemnation unto death, through the publishing of the gospel of free justification of sinners apart from their works. Through that gospel believers receive the riches of that kingdom in their salvation by the cross of Jesus Christ. In those riches are all their comfort and peace. That comfort and peace are solid and sure, no matter what tyranny they experience at the hands of all earthly power.

Or at least they should have this comfort and peace.

What cause for alarm and despair when they do not have this comfort and peace in the church! Instead they meet with the same circumstances in the church as they endure in the world. How much worse is their plight when it becomes evident that in the very place where they ought to enjoy freedom from tyranny by the pure preaching of the word of God, they meet only with bondage! How great their suffering and their bondage in that suffering! Instead of finding the gracious rule of Christ proclaimed to them, they find themselves in bondage to men.

Men who are supposed to proclaim the gospel of peace

Power cannot be accountable or responsible. Accountability and responsibility, power accounts as weakness.

and freedom in Jesus Christ proclaim instead the necessity of doing good works in order to possess and grow in assurance. The people are told that they cannot possess assurance of forgiveness and salvation merely by faith alone in Christ alone. They are told that such a doctrine is the heresy of antinomianism. They are told that subsequent blessings from God will be given to them only in the way of their obedience and good works by faith. To look for such blessings from God's grace alone, without their works, will make them careless and indifferent to a life of good works. Gratitude for salvation proclaimed in the gospel is not a sufficient motivation.

Then the people watch the men who proclaim these false doctrines. The people recognize that these men do not appear so interested in holiness or good works for themselves. They see these men showing no mercy but dealing harshly with those who question their teachings. They see these men refusing to deal with protests and appeals that would require admission of teaching false doctrine. The people see these men attacking with slander and lies those who would hold them accountable to God's word. They see these men misusing the Church Order and twisting it in order to protect themselves and to deny their objectors. They see these men driving out faithful people of God and decrying them as slanderous and schismatic.

However, just as in the world, so in the church, sometimes these men are required to give apologies. Sometimes they are found to be in error. Ecclesiastical assemblies decide that apologies must be given. Wrong and hurt must be acknowledged. Sorrow must be declared. A change of manner or behavior must be promised. But power is still expressed in the apologies. Words are spoken, read, or published in letters to congregations, but the words are not genuine. They signify only the further exercise of power. The powerful are quickly excused and declared orthodox, sound, and upright in every way. Those beneath the powerful, those who have pursued matters and whose labors have brought about such apologies, are treated with contempt. They receive no thanks for their efforts in behalf of the gospel of Christ. They are branded as troublemakers, and the sins of schism and slander are imputed to them.

In the meantime the power builds its institutional walls higher and thicker. The power builds more and more legal bulk in those walls, pretending that bulk is spiritual. Inside the walls is salvation. Outside is

damnation. Cut off from the outside, warned against all the perils and dangers lurking without, God's people are told that their only safety and peace are within the walls. But within the walls the tyranny and abuse continue and grow. God's people are more and more bewildered by false doctrine that masquerades as the truth. They are led further and further from the truth that sets them free and into a labyrinth of innumerable errors. These errors deprive them of the peace and joy of their salvation and put them in deeper bondage to their leaders. Confusion dominates, and the abusive, domineering power promises all help through the confusion, if the people will but trust wholly in the power.

What wretchedness! What misery!

There is the wretchedness that is caused by the powerful. Their tyranny is oppressive to freedom in the truth and freedom in Christ. Their tyranny demands that they and their precepts of men be served. Their teachings as

the teachings of men must be believed and confessed by those under them. Their tyranny means that their apologies must be accepted as genuine and sincere. Those questioning their genuineness and sincerity are treated as malicious and destructive.

There is also the wretched misery of their blind followers. Some are glad to find their refuge under the power of men. They gladly echo what they have heard from their leaders and multiply reasons for adhering to their teachings, exactly as the teachings of men. They present tokens of loyalty on every occasion, lauding and applauding the faithfulness, goodness, and holiness of their leaders. Exactly as they are told, they do. They labor in ignorance, unable to present the simplest explanations for the doctrines or actions of the powerful. But still they criticize and shun those whom they find disagreeable. Elders discipline members for raising questions and concerns, without any idea what those questions and concerns truly represent. They are just following orders, orders from the power.

Judgment to Flee

What great evil is afoot! These are the circumstances that are set out in Psalm 12:8: "The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted."

Surrounded by this wretchedness, God's people raise the cry of verse 1: "Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men."

Similar are the descriptive words of the lament that

No promise is made of repairing
the gash in the ship's hull
through which water is pouring
in. Instead, a promise is made to
rearrange the deck chairs.

follows in verse 2: “They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.”

That language is that of proud rebellion against the Lord, as is made clear in verse 4: “Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?”

These verses describe the particular pride of men shown in words of boasting. With their words they command and control. With their words they exercise oppressive tyranny in every possible way. They oppress the poor and cause the needy to sigh, who must bear upon their hearts the heavy weight of the hard and harsh words of those tyrannical men.

God’s word in this psalm not only addresses the proud, oppressive words of the wicked and of those who flatter the wicked, but also God’s word is set against the words of the wicked. The word of God judges their words to be vanity (v. 2). In contrast to their words are the words of Jehovah. “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (v. 6).

God in Psalm 12 judges power’s words of vanity and deceit that cause such misery to God’s oppressed people. “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him” (v. 5). “Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever” (v. 7).

In these circumstances, especially in the church, the child of God must not suppose that God is far off, that God takes no notice. Though the powerful oppressors

Though the powerful oppressors have used their words to push away the knowledge of God’s truth, he is near. He is near in judgment.

have used their words to push away the knowledge of God’s truth, he is near. He is near in judgment. Note carefully the circumstances. The proud know better. They know doctrine. They know true holiness. They know church order. But what they know, they distort. What they know, they set aside. What they know does not serve their oppressive purposes, so they cast it aside. They distort because it serves their oppressive purposes. In their boastful, proud words they give evidence of the judgment of God. God gives them over to their evil ways to pursue them with reckless abandon. Hear in their words and see in their deeds the judgment of God against them. That judgment of God is why the powerful show no shame even in their apologies.

That judgment of God manifesting itself must cause God’s people to flee from those proud men with their vain words. In their flight they must pay no attention to the high and thick walls that are meant to keep them in. They must not allow the fear of being shunned to

keep them under their oppressive circumstances. They must not suppose that their departure from such corrupt institutions is departure from the kingdom of heaven and the loss of their salvation.

Their flight is escape into freedom, the freedom of the truth, the freedom to live not as the servants of men but as the liberated servants of God. The freedom outside the walls that are dominated by corrupt power is the power to serve God from the heart, the heart filled with gratitude for the joyful freedom of their salvation from the bondage of men.

—MVW

DEBATING WITH THE DEVIL (3)

Introduction

I begin with an allegory based on Psalm 2. Thames overhears Shepsema and scolds him: “Are you plotting against the Most High? Yea, will you really cast away his cords? That can never happen, Shepsema! He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. Why do you imagine such a vain thing? He will have you in derision. Doing...? You speak of doing? *If God wills!* That’s *doing!* No one can *do* anything unless God wills it. ‘If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.’ Shepsema, be wise. Goodbye.”

13. Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:
14. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.
15. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.
16. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. (James 4:13–16)

In this article I continue to refute Norman Shepherd’s argument that James has soteric justification in mind when he writes, “By works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (2:24). Shepherd alleges, “The passage [vv. 14–26] contemplates a Day of Judgment to come when all people will appear before the Lord Jesus Christ to be judged.” Shepherd postulates, “James says in verse 24 that they will be justified and saved by what they do and not by faith alone.” And Shepherd adds, “The broader context in James confirms the fact that the author has in view the final judgment and a soteric justification on that day.”¹

My first two articles have exegetically demonstrated that, contrary to Shepherd, James had no such thing in mind; that he wrote of demonstrative justification (vindication) in order to promote the decree of the Jerusalem Council; and that by enduring trials and “doing well,” by living according to the royal law, the true believers would be vindicated in the church at a time of

much confusion and many false brethren. That has been demonstrated by exegetical argument to be “the flow” of James’ line of reasoning in James 2:14–26, contradicting Shepherd.²

I begin now by calling attention to the fact that James wrote his epistle having the vindication of true faith in mind *from the beginning* and that he developed that thought *throughout* his epistle and demonstrated it with various arguments in order to make abundantly clear to his scattered brethren what true Christian faith is—a vital necessity at that time. He began by writing, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (1:2–3). Notice especially that in verse 3 James has the *trying* or *proving* of faith on earth in mind, which is a totally different concept than final justification in heaven.

In those beginning words, James announced the theme of his epistle: faith being *tried* (tested) by trials and temptations to prove its genuineness. This theme is then worked out in the succeeding exhortations to his scattered brethren—a very mixed group needing their faith to be *tried* to vindicate the genuine believers and to expose the false ones. James will teach them how faith is *tried* (proved) regarding trials (1:1–18), the true hearing of the word (vv. 19–27), respect of persons (2:1–13), faith and works (vv. 14–26), control of the tongue (3:1–12), and so on throughout the rest of his epistle.

Going back to James 1:3, I call attention to the fact that James used the word *trying* (δοκίμιον), which means “to test something, to prove its genuineness.”³ For example, Luke 14:19 uses the same word. In the parable of the great supper, one of those making an excuse says, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove (δοκιμάσαι) them.” The meaning is that the oxen will be taken into the field *to test* their ability to plow. Their genuineness will be demonstrated (tried, proved) in the field by their sample plowing; that is, by their works they will be either vindicated as valuable farm animals able to plow well or exposed as useless beasts that can’t plow. In that way the oxen will be *proved*.

1 Norman Shepherd, *The Way of Righteousness: Justification Beginning with James* (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2009), 25–26. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from this book are given in text.

2 Stuart Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (1),” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 28–35; “Debating with the Devil (2),” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 9 (November 2021): 36–41.

3 Walter Bauer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 201.

If they plow well, they will be vindicated as good workers; and if they don't plow well, they will be exposed as bad ones for not working (that is, having no works). That is basically James' method and concern throughout his various exhortations: that the genuine believers *be proved*.

Applying that formula, we may expect the faith of the scattered brethren to be variously tried to prove its genuineness and so be validated in the congregation (the field). Like the oxen, faith will be taken into the field to examine and demonstrate its genuineness by its works. Thus "the trying of your faith," which "worketh patience" (1:3), is expected. The reason? To prove its genuineness in the congregation, which truth James develops throughout his epistle, but particularly in James 2:14–26. James recognizes the necessity of vindicating the true believers in the church at a time of much confusion and many false brethren (as developed in "Debating with the Devil (1)").

By tracing in my first article Satan's method, I have shown that "every tree" became "not every tree." "In the day you eat" became "if you eat." God's fellowship with Adam became the covenant of works. In addition, God's providence became common grace. The gospel became the free offer. Now add to those deceptions what was done to James 2:14–26: "vindication" became "forensic justification." Using that deception, Satan is now confounding the debate about faith by using the word *faith* when he really means Shepherd's "working faith." The purpose of that, which will be demonstrated, is because "working faith" implies man's doing.

Notice this example from Andrew Sandlin's foreword of Shepherd's book: "Shepherd stands squarely in the broad stream of this tradition [Luther and Calvin]" on justification by affirming "the imputation of Christ's righteousness" and the instrumentality of "faith alone" for justification (xiii–xiv). However, Sandlin is not talking about the faith of Lord's Day 7, which he denies but doesn't mention. He has Shepherd's "working faith" in mind—not Luther's or Calvin's—when Sandlin says, "Faith alone." We see this when he describes the nature of Shepherd's "Faith and faith alone...that justifies" as "a submissive, penitent, obedient faith," that is, a working faith (xiv).

Be warned: these are word games for the unwary.

Shepherd's Book

Continuing, then, I return to the beginning of James' epistle. Recall that James wrote in 1:4, "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, want-

ing nothing." The word "perfect" (τέλειοι) means "to complete, to bring to an end, to finish" (Bauer, 817). As we shall see, the words *completing*, *finishing*, and *bringing to an end* when referring to the test of faith are clearly referring to sanctification on earth rather than to Shepherd's future judgment day in heaven. I carefully note that the goal James has in mind here for the trying of faith is its *completing*, the *perfecting*, of that life of faith *on earth*. That will become the central part of James' argument in chapter 2:14–26. James will write that Abraham's faith, by works, was made "perfect" (v. 22)—perfect in the sense of completed, brought to fulfillment, and therefore vindicated before men. That was exactly James' purpose in writing his epistle and, as we shall see, the repeated formula of James' exhortations in his epistle.

With that background I continue the review of Norman Shepherd's book *The Way of Righteousness*. I left off with Shepherd's attempt to disprove the demonstrative sense of the word *justify*. He speculated, "It would run counter to the argument of James to insist that a faith without works, a faith that cannot save, can nevertheless justify in the forensic-soteric sense" (25). Exactly, because James has no intention of teaching forensic justification, no intention of teaching that *that kind of dead faith* can justify in any sense of the word. The formula Shepherd offers would run counter to anyone's argument. It's a straw man. No one would insist that dead faith can justify! Neither would anyone insist that temporary faith or historical faith or miracle faith can justify in the forensic-soteric sense.

Against Shepherd's speculation, I have convincingly demonstrated that James never had any intention of writing anything about forensic-soteric justification. James' argument (in 2:14–26), given with two irrefutable examples (Abraham and Rahab the harlot), demonstrated that *that kind of faith*—faith without works—is a dead faith, a faith that cannot save and will not vindicate in the church either. That is why James concluded in verse 24, "Ye see [understand] then how that by works a man is justified [vindicated], and not by faith only." That is precisely his object: to make the confused brethren see (understand) that their antinomian "faith" (without works) is not the same as Abraham's faith. Their faith will not vindicate them as true Christians in the church.

Shepherd's straw man does him no good.

Neither does his next speculation: "Only if 'justify' in

By living according to the royal law, the true believers would be vindicated in the church at a time of much confusion and many false brethren.

verse 24 carries the forensic-soteric sense does the verse answer the question posed in verse 14” (25). In this also he is wrong. As shown, James’ question (v. 14) and answer (v. 24) need not be conclusive but successive: as dead faith doesn’t save, neither will it vindicate. James’ statement in verse 24, understanding *justify* as *vindication*, makes good sense in the context: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified [vindicated], and not by faith only.” As a conclusion, after three witnesses, it meets the trying-of-faith test according to James’ introductory purpose (1:3), namely testing it (*δοκιμῖον*) according to its works to determine if it is genuine. By testing three examples, dead faith failed because it had no works to demonstrate anything; it was like oxen that can’t plow, whereas Abraham’s faith was “made perfect” by works (v. 22), and Rahab was “justified by works” in assisting the spies (v. 25). These examples amount to three witnesses to establish a testimony—one negative (dead faith) and two positive (Abraham’s and Rahab’s faith)—proving that “as the body without the spirit is dead, so [that] faith without works is dead also” (v. 26). James’ conclusion of the testing (trying) of (that) faith without works is stated in verse 26. According to James’ stated purpose in chapter 1:3–4, that “faith without works” (which is the faith he is testing) is like a body without the spirit: it is obviously dead. In addition, having been tested and proved, that faith has failed. The conclusion: it will never vindicate anyone in the church.

The comparison in James’ argument between that kind of dead faith and an example of true faith comes in chapter 2:22, where James contrasts dead faith with Abraham’s faith (which no Jew would deny was justifying faith), saying that with his works “was faith made perfect.” Notice: “made *perfect*.” I draw attention to that because James previously wrote in 1:4, “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” “Be perfect” (that is, completed) is what James was looking for in this test. The thought is, Abraham’s justifying faith—when patiently tried through waiting (thirty years) for Isaac and almost sacrificing him—was made complete (reached its goal).

How did Abraham’s faith reach its goal? That is explained by James’ adding, “The scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (2:23). The scripture (Gen. 15:1–5) was fulfilled in this way: Abraham had believed God’s promise that Isaac would be Abraham’s heir and that his descendants through Isaac would be as the stars in multitude. Abraham believed that, and it was counted as righteousness; he was forensically justified (v. 6). Yet through faith (thirty years later) Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac, resulting in no descendants. His previous justifying faith was being perfected by his call to offer Isaac

and was thus made perfect; it reached its goal (*τέλειοι*) by his attempted sacrifice of Isaac.

In that way the scripture was fulfilled; that is, God substituted a lamb instead of Isaac, so that Abraham actually did receive all those promised descendants (vv. 1–6; Heb. 11:17–19). By the substitute lamb that God provided, both the promise to Abraham and the scripture referring to his innumerable descendants were fulfilled. James added that statement in James 2:23 to demonstrate how Abraham’s faith was made perfect (*τέλειοι*), its purpose being completed by the substitute lamb being introduced for the salvation of the covenant people.

This particular *trying* of faith, as to works or no works, being completed, James moves on to another test, the *trying* of the tongue (3:1–12). He has proved his point: “Ye see [understand] then how that by works a man is justified [vindicated], and not by faith only” (2:24). That especially the scattered brethren, confused and rejecting the law, needed to understand! So explained, James’ exhortation concerning how a man without works is tried and found wanting is a unified, instructive, conclusive lesson for the immediate need of his scattered brethren.

Shepherd’s Final Judgment

Continuing his argument, Shepherd next claims, “The broader context in James confirms the fact that the author has in view the final judgment and a soteric justification on that day” (25).

Three things are cobbled together in this statement. Shepherd claims that he sees “the broader context” and that “the author has in view the final judgment” and “a soteric justification on that day.” That speculation is based upon the following dubious reasoning: Shepherd says that because James refers to the Lord’s coming, James must refer to the Lord’s *second* coming, so judgment is in view. And Shepherd interprets James 5:9 this way:

Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! When James says that those who grumble against each other will be judged he means that they will be condemned in the judgment. (25)

Adding up these broken pieces, Shepherd concludes, “Salvation and destruction are the only two possible outcomes in the final judgment” (25–26).

Still more texts Shepherd takes out of context: “Verse 1:21 teaches us to get rid of all moral filth and to ‘accept the word planted in you, which can save you.’” “Verse 5:20 tells us that if we turn a sinner from the error of his way, we will save him from death” (26).

Putting all those disparate references together, we have Shepherd’s summary:

The salvation referred to in both of these verses would have to be salvation from condemnation in the judgment of God on the last day. The last day is the day when we will all stand before the Lord God to be judged. Either we will be condemned for our sin or we will be justified and saved.

To summarize, the justification in view in James 2:24 is soteric justification. It is the salvation in view in verse 14. The passage contemplates a Day of Judgment to come when all people will appear before the Lord Jesus Christ to be judged. Will they escape from a judgment that is unto condemnation and death? James says in verse 24 that they will be justified and saved by what they do and not by faith alone. This brings us to the second question. What does James mean when he says that this forensic-soteric justification is “by works and not by faith alone?” (26)

Here we have Shepherd’s theory almost in one breath. Brave as Don Quixote, he rides after his windmill but never gets there, being wrong from the start. His essential foundation and pivotal argument, on which everything stands, is that “the justification in view in James 2:24 is soteric justification” (26).

Contrary to this false notion and conclusively contradicting it, my previous articles clearly demonstrated that James *would not* write that, he *could not* write that, and he *did not* write that. My threefold proof has established a clear and definitive testimony. Shepherd has nothing from James 2:14–26. There is *no* soteric justification in James 2:14–26! James has the perfecting of faith in view and its vindication in the church. He is following his stated theme of chapter 1:1–3, rather than contemplating heaven and the final judgment. I have previously demonstrated that Shepherd has no foundation for his soteric theory.

The next part of Shepherd’s argument is that James has in mind the final judgment, when all appear to be justified and saved or condemned and lost according to what they have done, that is, works.

Before refuting this, I call attention to the fact that for Norman Shepherd, final justification and salvation are by the righteousness of Christ and the works of man. Fine Roman Catholic doctrine, which he will deny, but certainly not Reformation truth. However, it does demonstrate the absolute necessity for Shepherd and his followers to have James teach forensic justification, because if James does not say that, all is lost. Shepherd and his followers will not find a shred of evidence for their view anywhere else in scripture!

I now consider Shepherd’s second assumption: “The author [James] has in view the final judgment” (25). This statement is based on several indirect and debatable

statements in James’ epistle, which Shepherd summarily explains and then assumes his point has been established.

I would respond by asking, how could such a vital assumption on Shepherd’s part actually be legitimate, when out of 108 verses that James writes, not one specifically refers to the last judgment, and only eight indirectly relate to that (proposed) subject? For his proposed major theme—which Shepherd calls “the broader context in James” and says it “confirms the author has in view the final judgment”—he has no exegetical proof. The eight questionable statements from James that Shepherd claims establish “the broader context” and confirm that “James has in view the final judgment” are in James 1:21; 3:1; 4:12; and 5:7–9, 12, 20.

First, considering the epistle as a whole, James makes *no* explicit reference to the final judgment; and in the first fifty-three verses (chapters 1–2) of James’ message, Shepherd can find only one verse. If we add the next two chapters, in which James makes two debatable references to the final judgment, then in the first eighty-eight verses of his epistle, only three debatable references appear to support Shepherd’s theory. Considering that there is only one chapter left, three oblique references to the (supposed) final judgment in eighty-eight verses is hardly the “broader context” of James’ message! And when those other supposedly supporting verses are examined, the result is hardly convincing.

Consider, in James 5:7, one of Shepherd’s chief references, the author exhorts his brethren to “be patient... unto the coming of the Lord.” (Μακροθυμήσατε οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου.) By this statement does James suggest that he is thinking of the final judgment? I think not. The Greek informs us that James is looking at the time *before* the Lord’s coming. James’ words should literally be read as “be patient...*until* [*up to*] the coming of the Lord.” How do we know? The Greek particle ἕως is a temporal conjunction denoting the end of a period of time; therefore *until* or *up to* is correct (Bauer, 334; see also John 21:22; 1 Tim. 4:13; Heb. 1:13). James’ meaning is this: the brethren are to be patient *until* this present period of testing is ended by the Lord’s coming. James’ emphasis is therefore on the period *before* the Lord comes, the trying-patience period—not after it at the final judgment. Recall that James wrote, “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect, and entire, wanting nothing” (1:4). His main emphasis in chapter 5:7 is patience and the perfecting of his brethren’s faith.

We saw this with the example of Abraham, about whose faith James says, “By works was faith made perfect” (2:22). Faith being made perfect by patience is the single emphasis of the text. James’ reference then to “the coming of the Lord” connects with that purpose of being *patient*,

being *made perfect* (“let patience...work”). He supports that purpose with two witnesses: “Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (5:7–8). “Be ye also patient” instructs the brethren to be like the husbandman who waits it out until the rain comes. Likewise, the introduction of the Lord’s coming is similar to the coming of the rain; that is, wait it out until the Lord comes. The phrase is intended as an encouragement to continue patiently waiting like the husbandman’s waiting for the rain. “Be ye also patient” connects the two verses. James says, “Be patient like the husbandman—wait long.” Same idea: “The Lord is coming—wait for him!” The mention of the Lord’s coming is intended to give encouragement and to bolster patience in the brethren, who must wait long. They may be encouraged by the fact that the Lord’s coming is near, rather than far away; also, because that coming being far away would be discouraging for the brethren struggling to maintain their *patience*.

Summarizing, then, it is warranted to understand the text as teaching that James is thinking of the period *before* the Lord’s coming, and James’ reference to it is adduced to promote his subject: the brethren’s patience in that period. So understood, there is no suggestion that James has in view the final judgment, as Shepherd imagines.

Additionally, to interpret that verse as if James is telling the brethren to be patient because their judgment is near makes no sense. If their judgment were near, they would have no incentive (or time) to be patient, nor any need for it. They would soon be snatched away to the judgment hall. Interpreting the verse as suggesting the final judgment disregards, contradicts, and is not supportive of the context because the call to “long patience” would be soon interrupted by that *near* judgment. Therefore, I may conclude that the author does not adduce the Lord’s coming with a view to the judgment and soteric justification, as Shepherd claims, but rather adduces the Lord’s coming as an incentive for the brethren to hold out in their patience. That interpretation satisfies the context, satisfies the purpose of James in chapter 5:7–8, and satisfies the “broad context” of James’ epistle: “The trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting

nothing” (1:3–4). *Shepherd’s view ignores and contradicts the context and James’ purpose.*

Another verse that Shepherd claims to support his view that James has the final judgment in view is James 5:9: “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.” (μὴ στενάζετε, ἀδελφοί, κατ’ ἀλλήλων, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε: ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτῆς πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἔστηκεν.) The verb στενάζετε means “to groan against someone, to complain of someone” (Bauer, 773).

The brethren should be patient, but instead they continue to complain against each other. James commands them to stop their grumbling and complaining so that they are not judged, because the judge is near and might come through the door and find them grumbling, in which case they would surely be judged and found guilty. This is another instance of James’ using a figure to support his exhortation, as he does throughout the epistle: wave of the sea (1:6), sun withers the grass (v. 11), beholding in a glass (v. 23), bits in the horses’ mouths (3:3), ships (v. 4), fountain (v. 11), fig tree (v. 12), the husbandman (5:7), and the judge before the door (v. 9). Naturally, a judge who hears the brethren complaining will find them guilty.

However, that figure does not specifically identify this judge as the *Lord Jesus Christ*, neither would the brethren be *forensically* condemned for complaining. Rather, James has in view the activity before him and applies a suitable figure to bolster his exhortation. The judge is placed at the door, an ideal location to overhear the brethren’s complaining. Also, the use of the figure of a door implies that the person is about to enter (Kittel, TWNT, 3:173), and he will then witness their complaining firsthand and certainly find them guilty. Again, no final judgment in view; no support for Shepherd.

Perhaps he was misled by the English Bible translators, who capitalized the word *judge* but neglected to do that with the word *husbandman* (see NKJV, RSV, TEV, NIV); although both figures have the definite article, so that capitalizing the word *judge* is inconsistent (Nestle-Aland, ad.loc. James 5:7, 9). The King James Version does *not* capitalize the word *judge*.

Another incidental statement of James draws Shepherd’s attention: “Let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation” (5:12).

The immediate context is James’ commanding the brethren to stop swearing. He may have had our Lord’s teaching in Matthew 5:34–37 in view. James says, “Above

Brave as Don Quixote, Shepherd rides after his windmill but never gets there, being wrong from the start. His essential foundation... is that “the justification in view in James 2:24 is soteric justification.”

all things,” meaning before the other exhortations, you must do this, lest you fall under condemnation (ἵνα μὴ ὑπὸ κρίσιν πέσητε). The word “condemnation” is the Greek word *κρίμα*, which has a wide variety of meanings (Bauer, 451ff.). Lydia, in Acts 16:15, uses it to say, “If ye have judged me to be faithful...” I doubt she has the final judgment in mind in that text. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 11:31–32: to say, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord.” It seems that our being *judged* of the Lord is his present *chastening* in this life. In addition, the Greek word *to fall* (πέσητε) in James 5:12 is an aorist subjunctive, which in Greek is timeless; it suggests no time (“aorist represents action in the simplest form, presented as a point—timeless”).⁴ James’ words in verse 12 envision no future time. Given these exegetical considerations, it would be forcing this brief phrase to suggest a final judgment where believers might be condemned for using oaths. I conclude that there is no support for Shepherd’s view in this text either.

Another example of Shepherd’s alleged support is James 3:1: “My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” “Be not many teachers” (Μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι) takes us into the early church, which was much like the synagogue, where anyone was allowed to stand up and teach; hence “many teachers.” With many teachers there were many abuses, so this admonition was needed (1 Cor. 14:26–33). The admonition cautions all the brethren because those teaching will receive greater judgment (*κρίμα*) than those who don’t teach; James is thereby encouraging fewer teachers. Since James includes himself in this group (“knowing that *we* shall receive”), being a teacher himself and teaching the brethren by this epistle, the condemnation he has in view cannot be a forensic judgment unto the condemnation of hell. Why should teachers be condemned? James will not be condemned for writing his epistle. If Shepherd is correct, we must imagine that James has the final judgment in view here, and then James will also be condemned, which is ludicrous; even worse, he will be condemned for writing the scripture!

As stated, the Greek word *κρίμα* has a wide variety of meanings (Bauer, 451ff.). It is used for “lawsuits” in 1 Corinthians 6:7; judgment beginning at the church, that is, not unto condemnation, in 1 Peter 4:17; James uses it to say, “My *sentence* is...” (Acts 15:19); and Lydia says, “If you have judged me to be faithful” (16:15). I may conclude—knowing that James will not “receive greater condemnation” for his teaching and that the word used has a broad meaning, possibly “greater consideration” or “greater examination”—and be quite certain that it is not the condemnation of the last judgment, which Shepherd

imagines, but a cautionary warning regarding the many teachers’ causing confusion in the church.

The same is true with James 1:21, which contains a phrase that Shepherd latches onto: “able to save your souls” (σῶσαι τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν, where *σῶσαι* may mean “to preserve, to rescue, to heal, to save from death, to free from disease, to save” [Bauer, 805ff.]).

In the gospels and Acts, *σῶσαι* is used forty times in a non-saving sense and twenty-five times referring to salvation. The Greek word is less frequently used in the non-saving sense in the rest of the New Testament, although James 5:15 may refer to healing.

The context of James 1:21 is hearing and doing the word (vv. 19–27). In that context verse 21 is an admonition to James’ brethren, those who already have the word implanted in them (v. 18), to continue in meekness receiving that word. Why? Why continue receiving the word? Because they must be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (v. 19). *Swift to listen* is to believe the word; *slow to speak* is slow to react to things and people with anger. That is the only way they will lay apart their filthiness and the abundance of evil around and in them. Only the engrafted word (and Spirit) can perform this purifying, not their reacting with wrath. Rather, by listening and being sanctified instead of reacting with wrath, the word will “save [their] souls.” James may have purifying (they are filthy in sin) in mind and, if so, *σῶσαι* may be translated as “preserve,” “rescue,” or “heal” their souls. James’ instruction is: there is no other way to be purified, to have your faith completed, other than receiving the word. Again, James is not looking at some future judgment, but rather he is teaching his brethren, desperately needing purification, what the implanted word is able to do to them. It can save (rescue) them from their filthiness and sinful excess and the wickedness around them. Again, nothing here for Shepherd’s scheme.

Finally, we consider chapter 4:12, another of Shepherd’s proofs that James is thinking of the last judgment: “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?”

The context of verse 12 is James’ command to the brethren to stop their evil speaking and judging of each other. By speaking evil and judging, he says, they are speaking evil of the law and therefore making themselves judges of the law. By setting themselves above the law, they are assuming the authority of God. James corrects their making themselves judges (gods) of the law by reminding them that God is the one and only lawgiver, who is able to save and destroy. James’ point is that they may assume God’s authority, but they do not have God’s power—power “to save and to destroy”—especially power to “destroy” false

⁴ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 824.

gods. They know this quite well but need to hear it again. James needs that illustration of almighty God for these self-made gods to see their folly. The need in this situation warrants James' introducing God as the one lawgiver and stating his absolute power to save or destroy over against the false judges (gods) that have no power. As we have seen, James introduces illustrations and figures that meet the need of his argument, not as hidden references to the final judgment, as Shepherd wrongly alleges.

What we have seen from Shepherd's misuse of these verses is a determined effort to impose his mistaken view on the text of scripture.

I have refuted him concerning James 2:14–26, and now by Shepherd's disregard of the contexts of these other verses, lifting phrases out of context to suit his purpose

and neglecting the first principle of biblical interpretation, that clearer texts interpret more difficult ones, he has been refuted again.

From his dubious references Shepherd has attempted and failed to prove that James has the last judgment in view. However, he needs that hypothesis because he intends to plug his (false) notion of James' forensic justification into his (disproved) final judgement. That is his next stop. Having botched James 2:14–26 and misunderstood James' illustrations, nonetheless, he will plow ahead to ask, how will a person be judged at the last judgment? "Will they escape from a judgment that is unto condemnation and death?" (26).

I will come back to this next month, the Lord willing.

—Rev. Stuart Pastine

PLEASANT PRAISES

Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.—Psalm 147:1

FLOCCINAUCINIHIPIPILIFICATION

Definition: The estimation of something as having no worth or value

Pronunciation in twelve syllables: Flok-suh-Naw-suh-Nai-hil-uh-pil-uh-fi-KAY-shun

Origin: From the Latin *floci* + *nauci* + *nihili* + *pili*, all meaning basically "little" or "nothing."

Now learn a word about man and his salvation—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

Twisting the tongue but simple in signification—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

Its meaning is this: "This thing has no valuation"—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

The perfect word to teach a divine equation—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

For all of man and all of his occupation—
Is floccinaucinihilipilification.

Mere dust of the ground is he by his creation—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

In rebellion he heeded the tempter's instigation—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

Fallen and dead, he deserves but condemnation—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

But man is proud and denies his lowly station—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

He boasts himself in his own self-exaltation—
But floccinaucinihilipilification.

Ever again must he hear this accusation—
That man is nothing and empty and desolation—
The drop of a bucket is man and every nation—
Worthy of naught of himself but all damnation—
To every sin prone by evil inclination—
In a word:
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

And then let men hear this gospel proclamation—
That God is the God of mercy and supplication—
Who gave us his Son to purchase our liberation—
Exchanging our sin for his robes in justification—
To fill us with gladness and joy and great elation—
To give us the works of grateful obligation—
According to his sovereign determination.

Let this be forever of God the glorification—
"Our Savior and Lord who is worthy of all adoration!"

And let this be ever of man the estimation—
Floccinaucinihilipilification.

—AL



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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

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.—Psalm 90:10

An eventful year! Who could have seen all that has happened? Who can recount all the events? God knows. Man passes through these events, and his time is soon cut off, and he flies away. The life span of mortal man is like the flicker of sparks that shoot out of the fire and fall as ash to the ground. Man's time passes as quickly as the sparrow's flittering and fluttering from branch to branch in the bush. Man's days are as fleeting as a dream when he awakes. Man inhabits for a brief moment the relentless rush of time and flies away to his permanent abode, whether heaven or hell.

God's word spoken to Adam in Eden, "Return to dust, ye children of men," is active in the life of every one of Adam's descendants. Everyone's life span is laid out in its seconds, minutes, days, and years. Each person is appointed exactly so many days and not a moment longer. From the moment of conception, the seconds turn into minutes, the minutes into hours, the hours into days, and the days into years, and man is cut off and flies away.

Perhaps his days are seventy or eighty. Most are cut off long before that: the baby whose life is a few months in his mother's womb; the child whose days are few on the earth; the young man cut off in his strength; the father whose days end while his children are yet small; the millions who perish from war, famine, pestilence, and a host of unnamed afflictions.

A man lives eighty years and boasts that he lived a good, long life. The boast is vain, for the very best of those eighty years is backbreaking labor and vanity. He labors in a world under the curse of God. Man eats his bread in the sweat of his brow, and the woman receives the sorrow of her conceptions. If man lives perfectly, he does nothing but what is required, but in reality, he only daily increases his debt. A man passes his whole life in labor and sorrow and flies away to the judgment seat of God. There his whole life is cast in the brilliant and searching spotlight of God.

Let our lives, activities, motives, purposes, and hearts be cast in the light of God's unapproachable eternity, awesome holiness, and perfect righteousness, the terrible finality of his verdicts, and the crushing power of his wrath and anger.

Then, let us cast ourselves at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ, who is God's grace, beauty, and light that broke into this world of darkness and the curse. Christ took that terrible word of God, "Return to dust, ye children of men," upon himself. He labored and sorrowed under God's holiness and righteousness and the crushing power of his wrath. And God was satisfied with Christ's labor, for he arose the third day. Apart from faith in his name, there is only the terrible, sorrowful, and swift passage of time, and man is cut off and flies away to an eternity of sorrow; and his house, which he supposed would last forever, crumbles to ruins.

But all who look to Christ in faith are satisfied and are made to rejoice and be glad in him. The work of their hands—Christ's own work in and through them—God establishes for good. In Christ the afflictions we suffer during the swift passage of time are but for a moment and work a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. For our days and afflictions are quickly cut off, and we fly away to an eternal home, fixed in the heavens, appointed to us from all eternity.

—NJL