



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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CONTENTS

3 **MEDITATION**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

6 **EDITORIAL**
WHAT THE SHEEP ARE SAYING
Rev. Andrew W. Lanning

11 **CONTRIBUTION**
INVITATION TO
A FAMILY CONFERENCE

12 **SOUND DOCTRINE**
FAITH AND CHRIST
Rev. Martin Vander Wal

16 **CONTRIBUTION**
ENDEAVORING TO KEEP
THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT
Garrett Varner

18 **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**
SLIPPERY MCGEOWN
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

22 **CONTRIBUTION**
DEBATING WITH THE DEVIL (4)
Rev. Stuart Pastine

28 **FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! — Psalm 113:5–6

Unlike with many of the psalms, we do not know the writer of this psalm. We can guess from the language of the psalm that its origin is likely the song of the remarkable woman Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Her story is told in 1 Samuel 1. She was married to Elkanah, but her womb had been shut up by Jehovah. No doubt that explains why her husband took another wife, Peninnah. That woman mocked Hannah, provoked her, and vexed her spirit because she had no children. Besides, Hannah was a member of the church during the terrible time of Eli and his drunken, profane, and adulterous sons, whom he restrained not. The state of the church troubled such a woman deeply. Jehovah looked on all her troubles, her affliction, and all the sorrow of her heart; and he gave her little Samuel. With joy in her heart and thanksgiving flowing from her soul, she prayed an absolutely lovely prayer:

6. The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.
7. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.
8. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes. (1 Sam. 2:6–8)

There is the lovely, exalted language of Psalm 113. And Hannah no doubt taught that prayer to her son as she held him on her lap and rejoiced in him as God's gift to her. Samuel, having been well taught by his godly mother, may have been moved by God to write down her prayer for Israel and for us not only in the book of Samuel but also as a song for God's people in their sin. And that prayer and song came from faith, in which God was everything and in which Hannah was nothing. Jehovah—high and mighty—looked on her—weak and lowly, beggar, and poor.

You can easily imagine the glory of God as described by Hannah. God looks low. I can remember being a little boy in church, and, as little boys are wont to do, I would make my way to a group of men who were talking about I knew not what. I would stand at the side of one of the men whom I knew had a pocket full of candy. After a bit he would stop talking, look down at me, come to my level, ask me how I was doing, and give me a Wilhelmina peppermint. He looked at me. He did not need to do that. It was wonderful.

Or you can imagine that a man is in deep legal trouble.

Accused of some crime and facing the certain loss of his freedom, property, and perhaps his life, he appeals to the president of the United States, who then stops what he is doing and takes notice of the case and writes the pardon that frees the man from the charges.

To an infinite degree and far more gloriously, that is true of God. He is high and dwells on high, and he looks low, even into the depths, to take notice of our case, our situation, and our affliction, and lifts us up. That is the incomparable condescension of God.

God dwells on high. Do not understand the psalm as saying God dwells on high in the heavens and humbles himself to look on the earth. The glory of God expressed in the psalm is not about God's dwelling in the heavens.

The glory of God expressed in the psalm is of the absolute transcendence and independence of God. God is above the heavens. He inhabits eternity, dwells in a light that no man can approach unto, and is God blessed forever. The exalted heavens themselves are beneath God. The heavens themselves are not eternal, as God is. The heavens, even the heaven of heavens, are a creation of God, with all their inhabitants.

God must humble himself and stoop down even to enter the heavens, as high and lofty as they are. The psalm is not praising the fact that God dwells in heaven. The psalm is praising the fact that God in himself is absolutely above the heaven. He is very high; he is absolutely transcendent. He is God alone. He is eternal; he is exalted above time and above every succession of moments. Time is not a category of his existence. Time is his creature. He is before time; and in the endless and infinite realm of eternity, he is the eternal. He alone is, and in him is the eternal reality of all things.

As the eternal God, he is absolutely self-sufficient. He has his being of himself. His glory is of himself. His life is of himself. His praise is of himself.

He is holy. God alone is good—absolutely, perfectly, transcendentally, infinitely good. He is holiness; he is righteousness; he is power; he is sovereignty; he is love, grace, mercy, and wisdom; and he is all these and more to an infinite degree. He is most holy, most wisdom, most justice, most gracious, most kind, and most tender. As the only good, his holiness is the absolute separation of God and the consecration of God to himself and his glory as the only good, only perfect, and only blessed God.

Who is like Jehovah! The I AM THAT I AM. He is what he is in all the instant and constant fullness of his divine being from eternity to eternity. He does not change but is perfection and the implication of all perfection—the God who is his perfections and is eternally the same in all his perfections. He does not grow, develop, change, or learn, but he is eternally perfect and perfectly blessed.

Belonging to that word *high* is also this fact: he exalts himself. That is really what that word *high* means: to make high or to lift up. God's exaltation is his constant activity. He delights in his glory as the only good and ever blessed God. He seeks that glory and glorifies himself. His height and majesty and honor and glory are not the result of what another gave him; they are not the result even of what he has done in creation; they are not the result of what he will do in creation. What he does and what he will do are the revelations of the glory that he possesses of himself from all eternity. His glory, majesty, and excellence are who he is of himself.

Who is like Jehovah our God! There is none like him. There is no other God besides him. He is perfect in power and majesty. He is perfect in praise and glory. He is God alone and God blessed forever.

And still more, he *dwells* on high. He is the God who dwells. Most blessed of all the revelations concerning God: he dwells. In his height, glory, and praise he dwells. He does not merely exist. He does not merely live in the superficial sense of that term. He dwells in eternity. He dwells in his high and lofty place.

Dwelling is a covenantal term. It presupposes a household, and in a household there is the constant bustle of life and activity. Dwelling takes us into the realm of the household and the family. It presupposes likeness, love, communion, friendship. Dwelling is covenant fellowship and friendship.

So God, who is high, is no lonely monad in eternity. He dwells. His life is full of friendship and fellowship and is a constant, eternal stream of activity and life. The Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit is breathed back and forth between them. The Father clasps his Son in his embrace, and the Son presses himself into his Father. The Father speaks his eternal Word, and the Word returns to him in the Spirit. The Father delights in his Son, and the Son delights in his Father, and that delight is the Holy Ghost. Willing, planning, counseling, and decreeing from eternity to eternity.

Who is like Jehovah, the triune God, the covenant God, and the living God?

As God, then, he is also perfect and absolutely self-sufficient in that life. He has need of none, for he is sufficiency itself. He needs no praise, for he exalts himself. He needs no company, for he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

He needs no help, friendship, or fellowship, for he has that in perfection in himself.

Who is like Jehovah, who dwells on high?

Who is like Jehovah, who humbles himself to look in heaven and in earth? He looks low. He humbles himself.

Man never does that. If man gains a high position, he fights with all that he is and all that he has to keep it. If he gets wealth, he will remain rich. If he gets power, he will remain in influence. If he gets some honor, he will have everyone beneath him acknowledge it. Man does not humble himself. He would rather go to hell than humble himself. God may humble him for his salvation. But man never does that himself. One man might be thrust down by another man, but he rages about that and rebels against it. He builds himself a kingdom, a life, and a position in this world, and he will not give them up.

And we see that every day. Man struts about as though he is something, when in fact he is nothing. He boasts as though he is something, when in fact he is a damn-worthy sinner, who daily increases his debt. He boasts before God. Man will even boast that God does not see his wickedness. Man boasts in his strength, his wisdom, and his ingenuity. He boasts even in the matter of salvation, claiming what is God's for himself. Such is man.

But God, who is everything and who dwells on high, humbles himself. Therein is the glory of God revealed! The God who dwells in a high and lofty place, who is perfectly blessed in himself, who has need of nothing and no one, humbles himself.

An act of his own. None humbles him. He humbles himself. As he exalts himself out of himself, so he humbles himself out of himself as an act of his free will and his incomparable goodness, eternal grace, everlasting mercy, and boundless love.

For that humbling of God is for salvation. The incomparable condescension of God for salvation and that all things might be glorified in him and that his creatures may understand and know him as the only good and ever blessed covenant God. The psalm does not merely magnify the fact that God looks into creation, takes thought for the creation, and cares for the creation that he made.

In one sense God is immanent in the creation. He is present in the creation and in every particle and subatomic particle of matter with the whole of his divine being. He is not separate from the creation, but in him we live and move and have our being. That all by itself is astounding. God takes delight in the great whales that play in the deep. He knows all the stars by name. He helps the mother animals bring forth their young. He feeds the little ravens and the lion cubs, and he clothes the lilies of the valley. Oh, that is astounding condescension of God, that he looks low and takes care of his creation.

But at the heart of all that activity of God stands the most astounding condescension of all: the condescension of his grace. The psalm here praises God's condescension to his people in his saving grace toward them. The psalm makes this clear when it says that he is our God, that is, that he is our God in grace. The psalm says that he sets the poor and needy among princes. That is simply a picturesque way to describe the exaltation of God's people in salvation. He sets us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The psalm says that he makes the barren woman to be a joyful mother of children. That emphasizes his salvation in the covenant of his grace, for there he speaks of joy in children, and the only children that bring joy are the children of his grace, of his covenant, and of his promise; for the children of the flesh are the fruit of a barren womb and barren race and bring nothing but trouble and sorrow.

God humbles himself to look! He looks low! Of course, he looks low. He cannot look up because there is none above him. He cannot look to the side because there is none equal to him. He looks low. He delights for the praise of his excellent majesty and for the exaltation of his glorious grace to look low.

Where does he look, then? He must humble himself to look into heaven. Heaven is a high and lofty place, a spiritual realm, the dwelling place of the myriad of angels and of just men made perfect, the place of the throne of Jesus Christ, the dwelling place of the ancient of days, and the location of the sapphire-paved throne of judgment, before which all will stand.

God must humble himself to look into heaven, so high and so mighty, so transcendent and so glorious is God. He must stoop down to enter that place and to look into that place and to the goings-on in that place and to the work of his mighty angels. That is an astounding condescension of God, that he would take notice of the affairs of heaven.

But more glorious, he looks into the dust, into a dunghill, and into a barren womb.

Incomparable condescension of God!

Who is like Jehovah our God, who looks low!

He must look into the dust because that is what man is. As Jehovah is high, man is low. He is of the dust originally: a dirt man. Jehovah looked down into that dust, and there in the dust he found that which was suitable to make a man. So he made something out of nothing. And what did that nothing, that dirt man, do? He returned to the dust in his sin and by the sentence of death. And still God looks into the dust. He looks upon man as he is fallen and lying under the curse, and he raises man up out of that dust.

But more glorious still, he looks into a dunghill, the

place of human garbage and waste; a place of excrement piled and stinking and rotting. Have you ever looked into the bottom of a trash can or into the back of a garbage truck, with the garbage rotting and crawling with maggots? Man turns away in disgust from that nauseating and revolting sight. That is where God looks. It is the glory of God that he looks there. The high and lofty one humbles himself to look into the dunghill that is man and that is this creation fallen in sin and lying under the curse. The high and lofty one humbles himself to look into the garbage can crawling with maggots that is man and that is this creation.

Because man is not merely dust, but he is also a rotting, stinking, dead man. A bag of maggots. He is that because of sin and because of the curse of God—and there God humbles himself to look, to take notice of those disgusting and revolting things.

And he looks right into the barren womb. *Barren* is the cutting word that describes a woman who is unable to have children. That is the cutting word that Peninah used to torture the spirit of Hannah by mockery and ridicule. That is the cutting word that describes man, woman, child, and the whole human race spiritually. Barren! Utterly devoid of life and life-giving power. Utterly devoid of anything spiritual or worthwhile or useful to God. Barren, barren, barren man is; signified by that barren womb. All of humanities' wombs are barren, unable to bring forth the seed of God and unable to bring forth any seed of God. Barren, so that he is unable to be fruitful to God. There is a windswept and barren landscape blowing with winds absolutely hostile to God and to anything good—a land in the grip of death.

God must humble himself to look there. And so he did. The Son made himself of no reputation and came to look on a barren womb. And there the Holy Ghost came upon Mary, and the power of God overshadowed her, and God became man, so that the holy thing that was born of Mary was called the Son of God and Immanuel.

And when he became man, he made himself of no reputation in order to look into our squalor, our misery, and our sorrow, affliction, and sin. He took notice of our case, and, having pity on us, he took that all on himself. He looked right into the terrible depths of hell on the cross in order to take away our sin, which was the cause of our misery, and to earn grace, blessing, righteousness, and eternal life for us.

If man does not humble himself, he surely does not look low. Oh, he looks down on all his fellows. He puffs himself up in his pride and his self-seeking and his self-aggrandizement. But he does not look low. Man turns away from the scenes of squalor and poverty, blood and death, and excrement. They revolt him. He will not look into

the plights and sorrows, the anguish and the suffering of his fellow man. Man is by nature high in his own estimation, and all are beneath him. He is by nature implacable, unmerciful, and cruel, so he only adds to the suffering.

Man also will not make himself low so as to be found of God when God looks low. Man is born in the bottom of a pit toilet, in a dung hill, and in a maggot-infested trash can, and he insists that he is something. He shouts and boasts and struts and parades. But God does not look there. He resists the proud. He looks into the bottom, into the depths. He looks low. God humbles himself to look low.

It is our salvation that he does that. It is God's glory and for the praise of his excellent name that he does that. That is who he is and who he reveals himself to be: the God who looks low.

And he always does that for his people. He delights to look at the mess that we have made of things and at our cases and all our afflictions, our sorrows, and our troubles; and, looking upon his people, to lift them up and make them great. All God's works from the beginning

are to make something out of nothing. So he made the creation in the beginning. So also he works in salvation: choosing nothings, nobodies, inhabitants of the depths in order to lift them up and set them among princes, in high places, in heaven; and to glorify them with salvation.

That God is our God. That is why he is our God. We did not look to him. He looked on us, and he made himself our God. What a lovely and comforting phrase. He is our God, and so we are his people: because he looked low; because he looked into the dust, into our dunghill, and into the barren womb, and there he found us, and from there he lifted us up.

Our God.

From all eternity our God. To all eternity our God. Our God who condescended to us of low estate. In his astounding grace and mercy and out of his infinite love. Our God also for this year again, as he has been our God through all the ages of the world and will be to the end of it.

Jehovah our God. Who is like him? Who looks low!

—NJL

EDITORIAL

WHAT THE SHEEP ARE SAYING

Introduction

The shepherds in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) continue to make man's obedience to God's commands to be decisive for man's covenant fellowship with God and even for man's justification. This teaching is not hard to find in the PRC these days. In fact, it is impossible to avoid these days.

But what of the sheep? Are they hearing this message? And do they believe this message? This would be a most interesting and revealing thing to know. After all, it is one thing for the theologians to preach, to write, to give lectures, to hold days of prayer. But what of the sheep? Is the message getting through? Are the sheep going home with the poison of man in their bellies and in their brains? Let us listen a moment to a few things that the sheep in the PRC are saying. This is not meant to expose any of the sheep or to "dox" them, as they say today. Rather, the purpose is to see that false doctrine always finds its way home with the sheep. The lie beguiles the sheep and

corrupts their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ. The lie is serious, and it is serious when men preach it. It is serious that a man speaks the lie at all, for the lie dishonors Christ. But the lie is also serious because after it has been preached and written, the sheep take it home.

And so, what are the sheep saying?

Standing in the Final Judgment with Our Doing

The following comment was taken from a social media forum, in which the participants were alternately condemning or defending a recent sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church. A Protestant Reformed writer made the following condemnation of that sermon and its theology:

Just wow. WOW! I read AL quote and I sit back and wonder—and I'm left speechless. The same people who left our denomination press upon

our faces how “whorish” and how “vile” it was that they actually sat under David Overway’s preaching and actually taught their children the very same—that works merit—and they even shed tears over it when they talk and yet now they sit under this and think nothing? How will they stand before God one day and when God judges them what will they say? “I didn’t have to DO anything! My minister told me it was already done for me?”

[Name withheld]¹

The question that the above writer asks about people standing in the judgment is exactly the right question: “How will they stand before God one day?” The question is, “When God judges them what will they say?” This is the question! It is a question about justification. How shall a fallen, corrupt, ungodly, sinful man stand before the holy God, whose eyes are too pure to behold evil? What shall a sinner say to the just and righteous God, who hates and curses all sin with no exceptions whatsoever? Yes, this is exactly the right question. But what the sheep in the PRC are saying about standing before the judgment seat of God is chilling and heart-breaking. So loudly and clearly have they heard the poisonous message of man’s working and doing to obtain something with God that they take that message before the judgment seat of God himself. When the question is, “What will they say?,” the sheep in the PRC cannot imagine saying, “Nothing!” The writer of the above quotation rejects and recoils from this answer: “I didn’t have to DO anything.” The writer rejects and recoils from this answer: “It was already done for me.” Presumably, the sheep imagine that what must be said is this: “I did have to *do* something, and I *did* it.” Presumably, they are prepared to say such a thing before the judgment seat of God. What other answers could there be? It must be either this: “I didn’t have to do anything to stand in this judgment because it was already done for me”; or it must be this: “I did have to do something to stand in this judgment, and I did it.”

If the author of the above statement is reading this, then I urge you to stand before God today, tomorrow, at your death, and at the final judgment and say exactly what you now recoil from: “I didn’t have to *do* anything! It was already done completely and entirely for me by Jesus Christ!” When you stand before God in judgment, say only this about yourself: “I am ungodly.” Period. Full stop. Nothing more about yourself. When you stand

before God in judgment, don’t say, “But I loved thee and did many mighty works in thy name.” Don’t say, “But I loved my neighbor and served him well.” Don’t say, “But I prayed and went to church and was Protestant Reformed” (or Reformed Protestant or any such thing). Don’t even say, “But I believed in Jesus with a true and living and active faith.” And don’t even say, “But I believed in Jesus with a passive faith.” All of your believing, your loving, your praying, your church-going, and anything else you have ever done are insufficient. You do not have perfect faith, and you never will. You have never served God with the zeal that you ought to have had. You have broken all of God’s laws, and you have a totally depraved nature that is a raving enemy of God. You have a small beginning of the new obedience, and even then the cream of the crop of the best of your good works is only filthy rags. What in the world can anyone say of his doing before God!! The only thing you may say before the judgment seat of the holy God about yourself is this: “I am ungodly, and that is all.”

And when you stand before the judgment seat of God today, tomorrow, at your death, and at the final judgment, your only appeal may be that, whereas you are ungodly, Jesus is godly. The appeal of the child of God is this: “Jesus obeyed for me. He obeyed God in my place. He obeyed God instead of my obeying God. And all of his obedience is counted as mine and is my righteousness.” And the appeal of the child of God is that Jesus’ blood covers everything that I am and everything that I have done. He was cursed for what I am, and he was cursed for what I have done, and he was cursed even for my good works, so that I do not need to be cursed by God for any of them.

Your only word about yourself before the judgment seat of God may be this: “I am ungodly.” Your only appeal before the judgment seat of God may be this: “Jesus said, ‘It is finished’—and he finished it indeed!”

The Credit for Faith

What else are the sheep in the PRC saying? The following comment was taken from another social media forum, in which a lengthy battle was being waged whether saving faith is passive. Over against a Reformed Protestant writer who maintained that faith is passive in justification, a Protestant Reformed man wrote this about faith:

With regards again to faith, it is man’s act but is impossible without God’s continual working in us to have faith. Therefore faith is man’s but

¹ The author of this statement posted under her name in a public forum. Her name is withheld here because the point of publishing this quote is not to expose any sheep in the PRC but to highlight the poisonous theology that they are being fed and that they are taking home with them.

impossible without God. The credit goes to both man and God at the same time. At least, this is how I understand it.

[Name withheld]²

The credit for faith goes to both man and God at the same time? Just follow through what that means for a moment. It means that when a man believes in Jesus Christ, then the credit for that man's faith and for the salvation that comes through that faith goes to both God and man. God and man split the credit. It means that when a man believes, then God says about that faith, "Behold what I have wrought," and man says about that faith, "And behold what I have wrought." It means that when a man believes, that man says, "I credit God for my faith," and that man says, "I credit me for my faith." This is blasphemy.

The truth is that faith is entirely of God and not at all of man. In the matter of faith, as in the matter of all salvation, no man may boast in any respect. No credit in any sense whatsoever goes to man for his faith. Faith is not man's, but faith is God's. Even when man is rightly said to believe, that believing is not of him but of God. "Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active" (Canons 3–4.12, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169). Faith is God's gift to man and not man's gift to God. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). God gives man man's believing, and man does not give God man's believing. "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ...to believe on him" (Phil. 1:29). God produces man's will to believe, and man does not at all produce his will to believe. "He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces...the will to believe." God produces man's actual activity of believing itself, and man does not in any sense whatsoever produce his actual activity of believing itself. "He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces...the act of believing also" (Canons 3–4.14, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169). The Holy Spirit is the author of faith in a man, and man is not the author of his own faith, for the Spirit is called "the Author of this work" that results in a man's believing and "the admirable Author of every good work wrought in us" (Canons 3–4.12, 16, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169–70).

In fact, the whole point of salvation being by faith

alone is that man might be seen to be utterly nothing and that all of the boasting of man might be utterly cut off. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). Lest any man should boast!

The whole point of salvation being by faith alone is that the salvation of man might be seen to be entirely gracious, that is, entirely the undeserved gift of God. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace" (Rom. 4:16).

The whole point of salvation being by faith alone is that Christ and his work might be the whole of our salvation and that not any of us or our work might be any of our salvation. The whole significance of faith is its object: Christ and his work. None of the significance of faith is what man did or does or will do. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. 2:16).

To return to the statement of the Protestant Reformed man, there is a line in his statement that is most revealing. That line is this: "At least, this is how I understand it." The man speaks of his understanding. He speaks of what he knows about faith. He speaks of his knowledge of the doctrine of faith. What he knows about faith is this: "The credit goes to both man and God at the same time." This is what he knows! This is what he understands!

This line reveals that the poison of making much of man is finding its way into the minds and the theology of the sheep. They believe the things that are being taught to them. They are getting the message loud and clear. Even if no Protestant Reformed theologian has ever said or ever would say, "The credit goes to both man and God at the same time," that is the inevitable conclusion of the theology that is being taught. In fact, the sheep are to be commended for coming out and saying the meaning of the theology more clearly than the theologians.

Justification in the Way of Obedience

What else are the sheep in the PRC saying? This email was sent by a Protestant Reformed man to the three editors of *Sword and Shield*:

Nathan, Andrew, and Martin—

I know you men are still claiming that the Protestant Reformed churches preach Justification by

2 The man posted this under his name in a public forum, but his name is withheld for the same reason given above. I understand that the man later edited his post and changed the sentence about who receives the credit but without explaining his change. The fact that a man could write and post the statement at all is an indication of how thoroughly the poison of man's merit (credit) has infected the PRC.

faith and works. As I and my wife read the Bible for family devotions, it has become more and more obvious to me as to what the Protestant Reformed churches mean when they say “Justification in the way of obedience”. The Protestant Reformed church does not and never has preached Justification by works. Justification in the way of obedience means that with an earnest, faith generated desire to obey God’s laws, (however imperfectly) God is pleased to give the believer the assurance of justification. (Read Romans 12 verses 1 & 2.) How much assurance would there be if a person’s only desire was to walk in willful disobedience to God’s law? You men know this is right and true. Please help your followers to come back to the Protestant Reformed church fold of believers.

[Name withheld]³

This letter is a must-read for every Protestant Reformed (and Reformed Protestant) layman. It is a must-read for every Protestant Reformed (and Reformed Protestant) officebearer. This letter simply and clearly lays out the Protestant Reformed doctrine of justification as that doctrine is understood by a Protestant Reformed layman in the year 2021. The letter is a perfect snapshot of what the Protestant Reformed man in the pew believes about justification. The view of the Protestant Reformed layman is critical. Really, the view of the layman is more important than the views of all of the theologians, because the layman’s view is the fruit of all of the theologians’ teaching. The message that the layman believes is the message that the theologians have been getting across to him. This letter shows that the Protestant Reformed man in the pew has been listening and learning. The Protestant Reformed man in the pew has been ingesting what his professors, ministers, and elders have fed him. After all of the sermons have been preached, after all of the speeches have been given, after all of the articles have been written, after all of the theologians have clashed, after all of the ink has been spilled and spilled again, after all of the lengthy and learned dissertations have been delivered, after all of the settled and binding decisions have been made, after all of the discipline has been exercised, after all of the lamenting and moaning has been uttered, and after all of the dust has settled, this letter shows what the Protestant Reformed man goes home with.

The Protestant Reformed man goes home with this: “Justification in the way of obedience.”

This is no small matter, for whoever goes home with “justification in the way of obedience” also goes to hell with “justification in the way of obedience.”

“Justification in the way of obedience” introduces man’s good works of obedience into man’s justification. It introduces man’s good works of obedience into man’s justification at the point of man’s *assurance* of his justification. “Justification in the way of obedience means that with an earnest, faith generated desire to obey God’s laws, (however imperfectly) God is pleased to give the believer the assurance of justification.” According to this doctrine, God is not pleased to give the believer the assurance of his justification without these good works of obedience. The believer’s assurance of his justification waits until the believer has desired to perform his good works of obedience. Only when the believer desires to perform his good works of obedience, then with that desire of the believer, God is pleased to give the believer the assurance of his justification.

As if that were not enough of a burden for the poor believer before he may be justified before God, it is added that his desire to do good works must be “earnest.” Now before the believer can have the assurance of his justification, he must have a desire to do good works, and it must be an earnest desire to do good works.

It makes no difference for this doctrine that the believer’s desire to do good works is faith-generated. The issue is not where the desire to do good works comes from, whether from God or from man. The issue is that a believer’s works are introduced into his justification. His justification and the pleasure of God wait on the believer’s earnest desire to do good works.

As proof of this doctrine, our Protestant Reformed man in the pew appeals to Romans 12:1–2. This is part of the conditioning that he has fallen victim to through the doctrine of the PRC. He views any and every text that contains a command to do good works as a command *unto* his salvation and *unto* his justification and *unto* his assurance and *unto* his covenant fellowship and *unto* his communion with God. He has been conditioned to read the Bible as one great program of conditions. The fact of the matter is that Romans 12:1–2 is the command to do good works *because of* God’s salvation. Chapter 11 ends with salvation: the salvation of all Israel (v. 26). Chapter 11 ends with God’s covenant: God’s covenant with all Israel (v. 27). Chapter 11 ends with justification: the taking away of Israel’s sins (v. 27). Chapter 11 ends with a doxology of praise to the God, the depth of whose wisdom and

3 After sending his letter to the editors, the author wrote again twice, demanding that we not publish his letter. No explanation was provided for why we should not publish his letter. My approach to letters is that once a letter is submitted to the editors of *Sword and Shield*, it is the possession of the magazine and may be published at the discretion of the editors. However, because the point of publishing this letter is to expose the theology in the letter and not the man who wrote it, the author’s name is withheld.

knowledge is unsearchable (v. 33). And Chapter 11 ends with a confession that “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (v. 36). Chapter 12 opens with the conclusion of all of this salvation and wisdom of God: Therefore! “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. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (vv. 1–2).

But the Protestant Reformed man has been conditioned to see “justification in the way of obedience” even there.

With this doctrine of “justification in the way of obedience,” no man will be justified. With this doctrine, men go to hell with Cain, with the Judaizers, and with the Pharisees. This is our Lord’s own evaluation of a doctrine that introduces man’s obedience into his justification. In Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee who had a whole prayer full of good works did not go down to his house justified but went down to his house unjustified (Luke 18:14). In the apostle’s condemnation of any works-righteousness, he wrote, “A man is not justified by the works of the law” (Gal. 2:16). In the Spirit’s doctrine in Hebrews, Cain did not obtain witness that he was righteous with his offering of the fruits of his toil and labor (Heb. 11:4). The doctrine of “justification in the way of obedience” sends men to hell. And this is the doctrine that Protestant Reformed men are being sent home with.

All who believe that justification is in the way of obedience: Repent.

The truth about justification is that it is not “justification in the way of obedience” but “justification by faith alone.” The obedience of man has nothing to do with his justification. Only the obedience of Christ has to do with his justification. The believer’s righteousness before God is strictly and entirely the righteousness of Christ. And the believer’s assurance of his righteousness in Christ is strictly and entirely faith, regardless of his works and irrespective of his works.

That has to be put in the strongest possible terms. For justification it does not matter if you sin, or if you do not sin. For justification it does not matter if you obey God’s law or if you do not obey God’s law. For justification it does not matter if you do good works or if you do not do good works. So also for your assurance. For your assurance of justification, it does not matter if you sin or if you do not sin. For your assurance of justification, it does not matter if you obey God’s law or if you do not obey God’s law. For your assurance of justification, it does not matter if you do good works or if you do not do

good works. Justification simply is not a matter of what you do or do not do. Assurance of justification (which is justification) is not a matter of what you do or do not do. In fact, the only thing that you are in your justification is ungodly. You have no good works but only sin. You have no purity but only filth. You have no obedience to God’s law but only rank and raging disobedience to God’s law. You are the murdering thief on the cross, you are the chief persecutor of the church, you are the thieving publican, you are the sheep who wandered when none of the others did, you are the prodigal son, you are the notorious harlot, you are the chief of sinners. In a word, you are ungodly. And the ungodly are justified! Only the ungodly are justified!

For your justification it does not matter whether you sin or do not sin, but it very much matters whether Christ sinned or did not sin. And Christ did not sin! For your justification it matters whether Christ obeyed God’s law or did not obey God’s law. And Christ obeyed God’s law! For your justification it matters whether Christ did good works or did not do good works. And Christ did good works! So also for your assurance of justification. For your assurance of justification, it matters whether Christ was pure, obeyed God’s law, and did good works. And he was pure, he obeyed God’s law, and he did every good work. In justification you are given a righteousness that is entirely external to you and that had nothing to do with anything you did or will ever do. It is an alien righteousness. It is a righteousness that is entirely someone else’s. That is, Someone Else’s, for it is the righteousness of Christ. That righteousness, which will never include anything that you ever did or that you will ever do, is counted as yours, so that God counts you to have done what you never did and never will. God counts you to have done what only Christ ever did. Christ obeyed the law perfectly instead of you. He obeyed God’s law in your place. You will never, never, never have to obey the law to be right with God. Your obedience to the law does not make you more right with God. Your disobedience to the law does not make you less right with God. For your righteousness with God is not your obedience or disobedience to the law but another’s obedience to the law. That is, Another’s obedience to the law. And God publishes your righteousness to you in the gospel and applies it to your heart by the Spirit, who causes you to embrace Jesus Christ by faith, not by works. That is justification.

Now, do you believe all that? It is too good and gracious to fathom, but that is the gospel. “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no

difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:21–23).

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

That alone is the gospel. That gospel is “justification by faith alone.” And that gospel is the mortal enemy of “justification in the way of obedience.”

Again, let all who believe that justification is in the way of obedience repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone.

But Protestant Reformed men will not repent at my call, though it is the call of Jehovah himself. Protestant Reformed men have been taught that they must not listen to me, and they have learned that lesson well. Protestant Reformed men have been taught that the editors of *Sword and Shield* are not ministers who bring the word of Jehovah, and they have learned that lesson well. We are not Reverend Langerak, Reverend Lanning, and Reverend VanderWal, but we are “Nathan, Andrew, and Martin.” It is exceedingly rare that a Protestant Reformed man or woman refers to us as ministers or calls us by our titles. It is nauseatingly common that Protestant Reformed people go out of their way to make it a point to call us “Nathan, Andrew, and Martin.” Not that any of us care about a

title. But the seriousness of it is this: Protestant Reformed men and women are going to their houses with “justification in the way of obedience,” and they have been rendered stone deaf to the only ministers in the world who are truly calling them in the name of the Lord to repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

Conclusion

So, this is what the sheep are saying because this is what the sheep are hearing. If anyone has lingered in the PRC until now, it is time to get out. Man is so ingrained into the theology of the PRC that the sheep are going to the final judgment with their doing, giving the credit for their faith to God and man, and going down to their houses with justification in the way of obedience. This is not going to get better in the days to come but worse.

The antidote to the poison is not hard to find. “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere [pure] milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet. 2:1–3).

—AL

CONTRIBUTION

INVITATION TO A FAMILY CONFERENCE

Greetings to all the readers of *Sword and Shield*. This letter is an open invitation to all members and any friends of the Reformed Protestant Churches to attend a family conference. Members of First Reformed Protestant Church are organizing and hosting the conference to be held August 15–19, 2022, at Green

Lake Conference Center in south central Wisconsin.

During the week we plan, the Lord willing, to have three speeches on the topic of “God’s Sanctification of His People.” Rev. Martin VanderWal will speak on “Sanctification and the Holy Spirit.” Then, Rev. John Flores will speak about “Sanctification and the Covenant.” Finally,



Rev. Nathan Langerak will teach us about “Sanctification and Good Works.” Also, there will be a series of morning devotionals, in which Rev. Andrew Lanning will instruct us in the truth of union with Christ.

The accommodations at Green Lake Conference Center include lodging in hotel-style rooms in Bauer Hall, Kern Hall, and the Roger Williams Inn. Rooms accommodate four to six individuals, and there are some adjoining rooms for families that need an extra room. There will be eleven buffet-style meals served to guests from Monday evening through Friday morning. The lodging buildings, dining hall, auditorium, play areas, and lakefront access are all within short walking distances from each other.

There will also be organized activities throughout the week for individuals and families to join as they desire. These include team sports of volleyball and softball, as well as large group mixers where everyone can get to know each other better. During the unplanned times of the days, there will be hiking available through the nine hundred acres of land and along the lakefront property of the conference grounds. For those with small children, there are also three different playground areas. If your family loves water sports, there are boats to rent for use on Green Lake, or you may bring your own boat. Besides boating and water sports, there is also a sandy beach area for swimming and playing in the water. The conference grounds include a golf course, and there are two other

great courses within eleven miles of the facility.

We encourage all those who are interested in attending the conference to visit the website of Green Lake Conference Center at <https://www.glcc.org>.

Registration will open on February 1, 2022. Families can register either on the conference center’s website or by a phone call to the conference center. By February 1 links and phone numbers will be posted under the “Family Conference” tab on the website of First Reformed Protestant Church, which is www.firstrpc.org. Half of the reservation fee will be due when the reservation is made, and the balance will be due upon arrival at the conference grounds. The approximate cost will be \$700 per couple to about \$2,000 for a family of ten. These costs include lodging and meals. Food sensitivity options are available upon request when reservations are made.

Those in need of financial assistance with expenses or those who are willing and able to donate to help those in need, please contact one of the men on the finance committee: Bob Birkett (robertbirkett@gmail.com), Dewey Engelsma (dengelsma@hotmail.com), or Jeremy Langerak (jeremylangerak@gmail.com).

We look forward to seeing you all at the conference and anticipate a week of great fellowship and blessed communion among brothers and sisters in Christ.

On behalf of the steering committee,
Matthew Overway, president

SOUND DOCTRINE

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

FAITH AND CHRIST

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.

—Galatians 2:16

Faith, in its essence, must be and must always be passive.

There are three main scriptural points of evidence that prove that faith is passive.

The first point of evidence is, simply, that faith is trust. God’s word describes faith as *leaning upon* or *resting upon*. Faith is putting confidence in another, another who has what is necessary. Trusting God and believing on Jesus

mean self-abandonment, or abandonment on self-reliance. Trusting God and believing on Jesus mean looking to God and Jesus Christ for what one himself does not have and cannot provide. Faith is the denial of self as any object of trust. Faith does not allow trust in self, recognizing both the frailty of the creature and the total depravity of the human nature. Faith insists on no trust in self, for the sake of trusting only and always in the

living God through Jesus Christ. Faith is trust in the only proper object of trust: the only solid foundation of Christ and his works.

The second point of evidence is that faith is opposed to works. Works signify activity and endeavor. Works represent strenuous endeavor to accomplish certain goals. In those endeavors the worker says, "I am doing," or, "I am going to get it done; I am going to finish the work." The worker looks to the time when he is finished and can expect a reward for his efforts. Faith is the opposite. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). Faith says, "I cannot work because my savior has done all the work for me." Faith hears and honors the word of Christ from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

The Bible declares the sharp and simple antithesis between faith and works. The antithesis is between faith and works simply as works. The antithesis is not between faith and meritorious works, obtaining works, works of the law, or works as qualified in any way. The antithesis is merely between faith and works. To state it simply, one must either believe or work (do or act). He cannot do both.

The third point of evidence concerns the only and proper object of faith, the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the end and aim of faith. He is the fullness of faith. He is the one upon whom faith relies exclusively and extensively.

This third point of evidence is the weightiest. The truth about faith must be complementary to the truth about Christ. Because Christ is a complete savior, faith must rest in Christ, and it must rest only in Christ. The blessed tidings of the gospel are that Christ is the only and the complete savior. Faith *cannot* rest in anything else. Faith *cannot* rest even in itself. It must rest only in Christ. It must seek and must find salvation, peace, and all assurance and comfort in Christ.

The weightiness of this third point of evidence is made clear in scripture with all the ways that scripture draws the relationship between faith and its object, Jesus Christ. Most powerful is the testimony of Galatians 2. In verse 16, addressing the truth of justification, the phrase "by the faith of Christ" is used twice. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ." The phrase is also used in verse 20 to describe the source of the life of the child of God. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." This expression does not refer to Christ's trust in God, but it states the glorious truth that faith cannot be separated from its object. It makes clear that the fullness of Christ is received by faith alone. And it makes clear that faith,

possessing Christ, possesses full and complete salvation. There is nothing missing, nothing left for the believer to pursue independently of Christ.

Prominent for its emphasis on faith as living, organic fellowship is Jesus' teaching in John 15:1–16, with its emphasis on bearing fruit. That fruit is the love of the true disciples of Christ for one another. The fruit can come only from abiding in Christ. That abiding in Christ is the gift of faith is clear from two verses in the passage. The first is verse 3, the declaration of Christ concerning the cleansing of the disciples: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." The second is verse 5, with its absolute statement at the end: "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

Christ is the vine. Believers are the branches. Without abiding in the vine—that is, faith—they are dead and cannot bear fruit. Bearing any kind of fruit is impossible. Only in the vine is life, life to be fruitful in good works. Faith is abiding in Christ, remaining engrafted, and clinging to him, for the sake of a fruitful life of good works to the glory of the husbandman and the vine. As stated in Galatians 2:20, the life of believers is the life they live by the faith of the Son of God.

For faith to be truly receptive in nature, it cannot be active but must be passive in itself.

Were faith to be active, it must be a rival to the work of Christ. Were faith active, it must have some significance of itself. It must then be somewhat centered on itself or, worse, centered on the believer. Were faith active, it must propose two objects: Christ and faith itself. Both must be placed in the same realm and given the same character. Christ does his part, but it is up to the believer himself to do his part and to keep his part.

Instructive on this point is article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

A bit of background is helpful. It is certainly true that the main thrust of the Belgic Confession with this article is the doctrine of the church, namely, the three marks of the true church of Jesus Christ. In harmony with that identification of the true church, importance is also given to the marks of the false church. But we must not forget that there is an identification in the article besides that of the true and false churches. The Confession also addresses itself to the mark of a Christian, a spiritual identification rather than an observable one. In this same respect we must remember that the true church is about true Christians. The true church does have hypocrites in it, which is why it cannot be measured by everyone in it being true believers. But true Christians are true Christians. For this reason article 29 finds it necessary to follow the confession of the three marks of the true church with the one mark of the true believer.

In article 29 of the Belgic Confession, Christians have only one essential mark: faith.

That faith is also identified, strictly speaking, as passive. Its entire nature is about receiving Christ, the only savior. He is the only savior; the glorious, only begotten Son of God. He is the complete savior: his merits the ground of the church's salvation, his resurrection the life of all his own. Therefore faith must seek, find, and rest in Christ alone. To attribute any power to faith apart from Christ is to make Christ half a savior and is truly to deny him. Both Lord's Day 11 of the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession 22 make the argument of the Protestant Reformation against Rome, that faith in any other than Christ alone is itself a denial of Christ. He cannot be a partial savior or half a savior.

Speaking of faith *itself* as active with respect to Christ points in the direction of Rome. When the Council of Trent dealt with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the council directed several *anathemas* against the Protestant Reformation. The council pronounced its anathema against all those who taught justification by faith alone, excluding meritorious good works. It pronounced its anathema against all those who taught justification by faith alone "to the exclusion of the grace and *the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them.*"¹ It pronounced its anathema against those who taught "that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake."² Trent also pronounced the following anathema:

If any one saith, that man's free-will moved and excited by God, by assenting to God exciting and calling, nowise cooperates towards disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace of Justification; that it can not refuse its consent, if it would, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive: let him be anathema.³

The Council of Trent did not misunderstand the Protestant confession. The council directed its anathemas against what the churches of the Protestant Reformation were preaching and teaching. The council directed the anathemas against what Reformed believers were believing.

The above issues, which Rome raised against Protestantism's doctrine about faith, are reflected in Prof. David Engelsma's letter to Rev. Ken Koole concerning what the

latter had published in the *Standard Bearer* about faith as "doing."

To contend that, because faith always "does," that is, works, salvation is by faith and faith's "doing," or that salvation is by faith *as* a "doing" is ominously similar to Rome's argument that, because faith loves, salvation is by faith and love. Faith does indeed love, but justification is by faith alone, without its loving (on our part). So also, faith always works (does), but salvation is by faith alone, without its works and working (by us).⁴

Earlier in the same letter, Professor Engelsma stated that the above "salvation" must include every part and aspect of salvation. He quoted from an earlier writing of his:

It is of the essence of faith to renounce every work, and all working of the sinner himself, *including repenting and believing*, as earning, contributing to, conditioning, or making effectual the saving work of God in Christ, whether the saving work of God in Christ is viewed as justification, membership in the covenant, or the blessings of the covenant.⁵

Later, the Arminians would take up the same Romish criticism of passivity and use it in the conflict that led to the Synod of Dordt. Such is the testimony of the conclusion of the Canons, which contains the following words by which the Arminians slandered the Reformed faith.

That the doctrine of the Reformed churches concerning predestination, and the points annexed to it, by its own genius and necessary tendency, leads off the minds of men from all piety and religion; that it is an opiate administered by the flesh and the devil, and the stronghold of Satan, where he lies in wait for all, and from which he wounds multitudes and mortally strikes through many with the darts both of despair and security; that it makes God the author of sin, unjust, tyrannical, hypocritical;...that it renders men carnally secure, since they are persuaded by it that nothing can hinder the salvation of the elect, let them live as they please; and, therefore, that they may safely perpetrate every species of the most atrocious crimes. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 179)

Let the Reformed believer understand: faith *must* be passive for the sake of *the active Christ*.

1 The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, sixth session, "On Justification," canon 11, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 2:112–13.

2 The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, sixth session, canon 12, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:113.

3 The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, sixth session, canon 4, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:111.

4 David J. Engelsma, "Faith as a Doing?," *Standard Bearer* 96, no. 4 (November 15, 2019): 84.

5 David J. Engelsma, "Response," *Standard Bearer* 79, no. 20 (September 1, 2003): 465, as quoted in "Faith as a Doing?," 84.

Let the Reformed believer understand: faith *must* be passive for the sake of *the active Christ*, so that everything that follows from faith is Christ *in him*, and him *by Christ* and *in Christ*.

Why?

So Christ can be all in all (Eph. 1:23).

Returning to article 29 of the Belgic Confession, the Confession makes clear why faith must not itself do or work with respect to Christ.

Article 29 does not cease with the believer's receiving Christ alone by faith alone. There are certain, definite, glad and joyful consequences to receiving Christ by faith.

When they *have received* Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 63)

Indeed, by faith *they* become active. *They* avoid sin. *They* follow after righteousness. *They* love the true God and their neighbor. *They* neither turn aside to the right or left. *They* crucify the flesh with the works thereof.

How do they do these things? How are they active? By faith. That is, by faith because it *has received* Christ. Faith is union with Christ, Christ crucified and risen from the dead.

Faith is nothing of itself. But faith becomes *everything* as it possesses Christ as its only object. It possesses Christ as righteousness and life. It possesses Christ as head and mediator of God's everlasting covenant of grace. It possesses all the power of sanctification, the power that must bring forth good works in a walk that is pleasing to God because it is the work of God himself through the Son of God by the operation of the Holy Spirit. It is then the faith which truly "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6) and bears all manner of fruit (vv. 22–23).

Christ is all the fullness of faith.

Christ, received through faith, is all the "must" of good works, according to Lord's Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism. He is all the reason it is impossible that the doctrine of justification by faith alone without works can "make men careless and profane" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 64; Belgic Confession 24). He is the reason for the power within us of the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross. "By virtue thereof our old man is crucified, dead, and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Heidelberg Catechism, A 43, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 100). This power of faith is expressed in the second benefit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, received by faith: "We are also by His power raised up to

a new life" (Heidelberg Catechism, A 45, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 100; see also Rom. 6).

This is also the grace that is signified and sealed in the sacraments, according to the explanation given in the Heidelberg Catechism. As faith, through holy baptism, receives the certainty of regeneration and renewal in the image of Christ, the believer is admonished and assured that the sacrifice of Christ is of real advantage to him. Not only is that advantage his justification, but it is also his sanctification: "To be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin and lead holy and unblamable lives" (Heidelberg Catechism, A 70, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 109). In the Lord's supper the admonition and assurance are driven home that believers "become more and more united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us, so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone*; and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul" (Heidelberg Catechism, A 76, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 113).

Faith is truly all about Christ. Faith is not about itself. Faith is not about the believer's believing. Faith does not speak of what it does. Faith does not speak about what the believer does. Faith must speak of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do. Faith must have Christ be all in all.

This language about faith is the language of the Reformed confessions. Faith is the hand and mouth of the soul, according to Belgic Confession 35. It is the instrument of feeding on Christ, on his flesh and his blood. Without the holy food of his divine flesh and blood, there is no use of the spiritual hand and mouth. The Heidelberg Catechism is careful to emphasize that faith does not at all make the believer worthy of acceptance with God (compare with Heb. 11:6). Instead, it is *only* the way of receiving and applying the righteousness of Christ. Before true faith is identified in Lord's Day 7 as "a certain knowledge" and "an assured confidence," it is taught to be the means by which the elect are "ingrafted into Him" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90). The passive mood of the verb is used to describe faith as union with Christ. So with *joined*. So with *united*.

Faith as a bond is a work. Faith as union with Christ is a deed. But it is not the work or deed of the believer. It is the work of God (John 6:29). It is a fruit of the cross of Christ (Phil. 1:29). It is the glorious working of the Spirit of Christ himself (2 Cor. 4:13).

Faith is for Christ. Faith is upon Christ. Faith is of Christ. Faith is not of yourselves but is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

—MVW

ENDEAVORING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

“**E**ndeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Blessed peace! Peace with God. Peace wrought by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, through which Christ bore the wrath of God against all our sins—original and actual sins—and imputed to us perfect righteousness. Having established peace with God, Christ joins us by his Spirit into saving fellowship with himself. One by one, the Spirit draws all of God’s people into one body in Christ. That body is united as a human body is joined together. A human body has many members which support each other and without which the other members cannot function. Those members are united by joints, tendons, bones, and tissue. All the members of Christ’s body serve Christ their head. As the head of his body, Christ is the legal representative of all his people. Furthermore, that Christ is our head means that he takes us to be his own and gives to us all the blessings of salvation and of covenant fellowship with God.

Believers in the church can be at peace with each other because they experience peace with God. Peace in the church is demonstrated in the church’s unity. That unity is “of the Spirit.” The unity of the Spirit is the unity of God himself in his own divine being, shared with his people in Jesus Christ. Only the Spirit can produce this unity. The natural man is at enmity against unity, just as he is at enmity with all things that are of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14). Man often stakes his claim on peace and unity. Man boasts of pursuing peace with his neighbor, even with his enemies. Man will even suffer great expense for the sake of what he calls “peace.” However, this is no peace at all. At best, man’s peace is an expression of tolerance. Peace for the natural man is inclusive: this false peace accepts everyone and everything and never seeks to offend anybody. Wretched peace! This is not the peace that is wrought by the Spirit of God.

Being of the Spirit, this unity is wholly spiritual. The spirituality of a church is expressed in her interest in spiritual things, including the defense of the truth of the sacred scriptures concerning her unity in Christ, godly marriages, the rearing of covenant seed, the support of the gospel ministry, and other like things. Being spiritual, this unity of the Spirit is not carnal. Unity and

peace are not maintained in the church because everyone has similar likes and dislikes. Unity in the church is not maintained because her members only speak soft words with each other. Unity in a denomination of churches is not maintained because there are no admonitions, no warnings, and no rebukes found in her pulpits, consistory rooms, classes, and synods. God’s judgment of that church or denomination that prides herself in such “peace” is this:

11. They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.
12. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.” (Jer. 8:11–12)

As believers—indeed, as Reformed Protestant believers—we are called of God to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This does not mean that we maintain this unity among ourselves by our own strength and our own zeal for God and even for spiritual things. Rather, we are called to keep watch over the unity that we have with one another and to ward off any assaults against that unity.

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit means that we remain on our guard against false doctrines and heresies that easily creep into the church by hirelings who are not sent by the Lord but come with their own agendas, new ways of interpreting scripture, eloquence of speech, and smooth craftiness. That is, men who seek to create factions and divisions in the church by means of false doctrine, however subtle that false doctrine might present itself in our midst. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit involves calling sin and false doctrine out for what it truly is. No excuses, no minimization, and certainly no toleration.

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit is to treat each member of the body of Christ in love: forbearing with one another, exercising lowliness of mind, and caring for one another in all things physical and spiritual. Furthermore, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit

means that we receive into our fellowship those whom God has given eyes to see the glorious truths that all of God's people confess concerning the revelation of himself in Jesus Christ.

What, then, threatens our unity as individuals and as churches? It is my conviction that some of us have become entirely too comfortable in our dealings with those within our own immediate families and former friend groups, many of whom remain in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). I am also guilty of this sin. After we have brought to light the issues within the PRC to our Protestant Reformed family members and friends once, twice, even multiple times, to the point where we have nearly run out of words to say, is it then lawful for us to silence the truth for the sake of some outward, carnal, and even superficial relationships? What is the heart of all godly relationships? Unity in Christ. Unity that is spiritual. Unity that can speak freely concerning those things that are of real interest to us—or at least they should be—including the truth of God's unconditional covenant, the gracious experience of salvation in Christ, the sufficiency of Christ's cross, and the power of the gospel.

I believe that a question we all need to ask ourselves is this: What draws me to keep this relationship? If it is not because we are like-minded and have fellowship in Christ, then it is carnal. Is it endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit whenever we—for the sake of family and close friends—come to all the family outings and social gatherings and accept every invitation to visit? Those who remain in the PRC bear witness by their membership that they concur with the promotion of false doctrine and the killing of God's prophets. This is true of the most outspoken minister down to the family member or friend who would like nothing more than to fellowship with us, just not to speak about the controversy or the truth or the errors with his or her denomination.

And we bear witness, too, as those who have come out of that apostatizing denomination, of Christ. His name was on our lips whenever we separated from the apostatizing church. We confess by our membership in the Reformed Protestant Churches that we reject the false doctrine upheld in the PRC and abhor their murderous abuse of God's prophets. What is our witness to those who remain in the PRC if any of us compromise the truth, setting it aside for the sake of a few passing moments of fellowship? Was Christ not displaced in the PRC? Why, then, did we ever need to separate and form the church anew? Why start our own Christian schools? Fundamentally, we must ask ourselves this sobering question: Does the truth mean more to me than anything? In other words: What am I willing to

give up for the sake of the truth and out of love for those who cannot yet see the departure of their own churches?

We should not be surprised if endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit forces us to cut off fellowship in relationships where we are not united. The same God who brings his people into saving union with himself in Jesus Christ is the same God who divides families for the truth's sake. Christ said of himself, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). Christ did not come to bring peace on the earth, but a sword. That is, Christ did not come to bring earthly peace. Christ did not come to this earth to bring peace according to how man evaluates peace. Rather, Christ came to bring a sword. And what does Christ do with that sword?

35. I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.
36. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.
37. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (vv. 35–37)

If we esteem earthly peace with our families and friends more than we esteem the confession of Christ and his truth, then we are not worthy of Christ. Even worse, we deny Christ. And whoever denies Christ before men, him will Christ deny before the face of his Father (v. 33).

Unity is one of the greatest gifts that God gives to his church in the world. Unity in the truth of God's word and in the confession of Jesus Christ forms the foundation of all true fellowship in all our relationships, whether that be the relationship of husbands and wives, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, or friends with friends. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Unity with those who are of a same mind and heart as himself is of great importance to the believer. He strives after it. He pursues it. He endeavors to keep it. Even now, Christ is busy at work gathering all his people by his word and Spirit and will be until he returns. The unity of the people of God into one in Jesus Christ is the very purpose for which God preserves this present world. Whenever all of God's people are gathered, then will Christ come gloriously to gather all his chosen ones to himself to dwell with him in heaven, where there is perfect peace.

—Garrett Varner

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

SLIPPERY MCGEOWN

Clever Piece

Rev. Martyn McGeown has written a piece on the blog of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), entitled “Passive Faith?”¹ Why he put the title in the form of a question is not clear. Reverend McGeown does not believe that faith is passive, least of all in the matter of justification. It is not an open question for him whether faith is passive. He hates the concept of passive faith and rails against it.

I say his piece is the work of an eel or a snake. You can take your pick. He was nonexistent in the recent fight for the truth in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). He was languishing in Ireland under instructions from the Protestant Reformed hierarchy, as were all the denomination’s sister churches and ministers, not to write concerning—or “interfere with,” in the common terminology—the PRC’s doctrinal controversy. The instructions from on high were, “Stay out of it; do not get involved.” Even though the Protestant Reformed ministers were denying justification by faith alone, and Protestant Reformed classes and synods were right there with them, the instructions were, “Do not interfere; just some troublemakers in Israel; we will handle it.” Reverend McGeown was part of that, tucked away in Ireland. Now that he does not risk any trouble or death and has the backing of the same Protestant Reformed hierarchy, he slithers out of his hole or from under his rock to hiss and to spit at us.

People complain about my tone; but after reading his nasty blog post, I will not listen to complaints about tone again. His post is mockery, pure and simple. His blog is condescension and dismissal. His writing is the work of a very proud man. And that is unsurprising; his theology is a proud theology. He lays claim on God’s work as his own and boasts of his own activity of faith, of all places, in the matter of justification.

Remember, justification has always been the issue in the PRC’s doctrinal controversy. How does a man come to God? What is the way to God? The answer was Jesus Christ through his works that he works in you. That was the denial of justification by faith alone and the denial that Christ is the only way to the Father. Those who were teaching that in the PRC threw sand in everyone’s eyes by making it seem as though the issue was antinomians and

those who were making men stocks and blocks and those who did not want the call of the gospel or the preaching of admonitions. But that was all distraction to hide the false doctrine that man, man’s spiritual activities, and man’s obedience are part of the way to the Father.

Reverend McGeown continues that and advances it by clearly teaching that faith is what man does to be saved. For him faith is not God’s work; it is emphatically man’s work and man’s work for justification and salvation. If McGeown will do that before God, then we should expect that he will also vaunt himself against his fellow man.

Also, his bantering style and false and leading questions reveal that theology is evidently a game for him and one that he is intent on winning. His cards are the terms; his audience, the dupes; and he is the dealer. What he has come out with is one of the cleverest pieces of writing that I have read in a long time.

Such cleverness is not always the case with Protestant Reformed theologians. Professor Cammenga comes out plainly with his false doctrine and slander of the gospel. He is more like a snarling jackal. He has no art, and he is not clever at all. He proclaims boldly that Jesus Christ did not personally accomplish every aspect of our salvation; that God condescends to us to use our good works to confirm our faith; or that it is not enough for our salvation that Christ was crucified, but we must also come to him. This is a naked two-track theology of God and man.

Reverend McGeown assures the readers of his blog post that no Protestant Reformed ministers believe that Christ is not enough for justification; but if he were not such a respecter of persons, he could listen to or read Professor Cammenga’s sermon on Lord’s Day 7 concerning justifying faith and see that he very definitely adds works to faith as the way to the assurance of salvation. Assurance of salvation is the chief fruit of justification, according to Romans 5:1, where the apostle teaches that being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But Christ is not enough for Professor Cammenga. He teaches doubting people to look at their works; they must work for their assurance. Once they have worked for their assurance, then they work

¹ Martyn McGeown, “Passive Faith?,” November 15, 2021, <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/passive-faith>.

some more to keep it; and if they stop working, they will not have assurance. You can see my previous articles for a summary of his false doctrine and his hypocrisy and lies.²

The point now is that Professor Cammenga's denial of all the *solas* of the Reformation is very plain, unless one is blind. His writing and preaching are designed for the Protestant Reformed person who could not care less about doctrine, to let them know where the teaching of the churches actually is and that a little controversy has not put them off their game. Professor Cammenga would also be the first to admit that there is a huge divide between the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and the PRC and that the divide is over doctrine. He is very open, if a bit vicious, that we in the RPC are all antinomians in our doctrine and that, by contrast, he represents the truth. He panders to his audience and peddles all the usual slanders of apostate churches at the time of reformation. But at least he is open about what he believes. He and others of his generation, like Rev. K. Koole, in their writing and preaching are cut from the same cloth. They come out openly with their false doctrine.

It is because of the offense that this false doctrine has caused among Protestant Reformed people who still do care about doctrine and whose hair stands on end at the appalling statements of Professor Cammenga and Reverend Koole, that Reverend McGeown must come on the scene with his oily words to assure everyone that all is well doctrinally in the PRC. He craftily uses orthodox-sounding language and emphasizes many theological distinctions—such as basis of justification and instrument of justification—to assure the restless that the Protestant Reformed denomination, indeed, has every doctrinal *i* dotted and every doctrinal *t* crossed. He is clever and crafty in his doctrine. I am not sure if this is from long practice or whether this is a newly acquired art. Regardless, neither explanation is commendable. Perhaps, he did not write this clever piece and only put his name to it to protect the one who did write it. These kinds of things do happen. Such a thing would be dishonest, but we cannot expect honesty of everyone.

Regardless, he is now the newly anointed defender of Protestant Reformed doctrine.

Loyal Servant

To understand Reverend McGeown's blog post denying passive faith, you have to understand what he wrote previously regarding faith in the *Protestant Reformed Theo-*

logical Journal and how he was used by the Protestant Reformed hierarchy.³

After Synod 2018, when the Protestant Reformed hierarchy was bound and determined to overthrow any good in the doctrinal decision against Hope church's theology, Reverend Koole wrote an article in which he taught that there is that which man must do to be saved. What man had to do was faith and repentance. Koole grounded this in Acts 16:30–31 and the incident of the Philippian jailor. Koole was blatantly militating against synod. But when he was called out on that article, without blushing he lied and said that he had not militated, and he even promised to write a protest to the next synod if he disagreed with Synod 2018's decision (secret revelation: the protest never materialized; it did not need to because the decision of Synod 2018 was dead on arrival). When Reverend Koole's Arminian theology was pointed out, he defended it.

Then, Reverend McGeown's piece appeared in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* to teach everyone that there is in fact—exactly as Reverend Koole had taught—something that man must do to be saved. What he must do is faith! But McGeown assured his readers that this faith was *not* a condition.

You can now read that journal article in installments on the blog of the RFPA, which is busy republishing the article as a great piece of orthodox writing.

Reverend McGeown, of course, is going to howl that he wrote that article long before Koole's articles; but the fact is that if McGeown did not mean to defend Koole in that journal article, then when the editors of the *Standard Bearer* pointed to McGeown's writing as proof that what Koole had written was orthodox, Reverend McGeown should have publicly and vigorously repudiated the association. He did not. He did not because he believes what Reverend Koole taught. McGeown believes, as does the PRC, that there *is* that which a man must do to be saved. McGeown provided the deceptive defense of Koole and showed himself a loyal servant of the Protestant Reformed hierarchy.

Besides, I know a thing or two about how that hierarchy works. The editors of the *Standard Bearer* did not point to McGeown's article without his knowledge, and his article is not being republished as a series of blog posts on the RFPA's website without the editors' permission. I know from long experience that the RFPA is captive to the seminary and the editors of the *Standard Bearer*. A man might be able to get an article or two published by accident; but if the Protestant Reformed hierarchy does not

2 See Nathan J. Langerak, "Professor Settled and Binding (1): A Shabby Screech," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 16–20; Nathan J. Langerak, "Professor Settled and Binding (2): The Real Antinomian," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 9 (November 2021): 12–21; Nathan J. Langerak, "Professor Settled and Binding (3): The Charge of Schism," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 10 (December 1, 2021): 15–24.

3 Martyn McGeown, "Faith: A Bond, a Gift, and an Activity, but *Not* a Condition for Salvation," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 52, no. 2 (April 2019): 3–32.

approve of his writing, he will be maliciously charged with sin behind his back at the board meetings of the RFPA and at the *Standard Bearer* staff meetings, his writings will be privately slandered, and he will soon be banned from writing altogether or subjected to an obnoxious censorship. So Reverend McGeown is not writing without the permission of, if not with instructions from, the Protestant Reformed hierarchy. I do not believe for one moment that his article in the journal or his recent blog “Passive Faith?” on the RFPA website was published without passing through the censors at the seminary. He writes in his blog about what the Protestant Reformed denomination believes and what she does not believe; and he should be taken at his word, for if the denomination does not believe that, the censors would have shut him down.

He is a mouthpiece for others who have burned up all their capital. A new face and a new approach are needed. It would not do very well to trot out Reverend Koole or Professor Cammenga again. The line now is that whatever trouble the Protestant Reformed denomination faced was the unfortunate outcome of the older generation; the newer generation has it right and will lead the churches in a new direction. But McGeown writes the same old lie and the same old doctrine now that he defended in Reverend Koole: there is that which man must do to be saved.

I ask, why all this wordiness and difficulty about faith, a doctrine that is simple and easy to understand? Why does Reverend McGeown and with him the PRC have to write so many words to explain something so simple as faith? The doctrine of faith is simple. It is a living bond with Christ by which the elect are made members of his corporation; if you live long enough to become an intelligent and thinking human being, then that bond manifests itself in you as the knowledge of God as the God of your salvation and the assurance that Christ is yours, and so is heaven. Faith is an activity of the whole soul. And with regard to every aspect of faith, God gives it, confers it, breathes it, works it, and whatever other phrase you can think of to give God all the glory for faith. Because faith is all of God and none of man, all of salvation is unconditional. Now, this is all very simple. But McGeown makes it complicated in order to confuse the people.

So let us examine his doctrine.

Mark of the Dragon

Reverend McGeown has a Pelagian and Arminian view of man and of the work of grace. You must remember that Pelagianism and Arminianism are essentially the same. That is why the Canons of Dordrecht can condemn Arminianism as “the Pelagian error” brought up “out of hell” (Canons of Dordt 2, rejection 3, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 165).

Throughout church history that Pelagian error has taken various forms and showed itself again and again. At the time of the Reformation, the Pelagian error was represented by the Roman Catholic Church. Erasmus, who recognized all the abuses of Rome, nevertheless stayed in Rome because he was one with Rome in her Pelagian doctrine. Consequently, Erasmus wrote against Luther and Luther’s doctrine of gracious justification as the linchpin of the doctrine of a wholly gracious salvation. Then, at the time of the Synod of Dordrecht, Arminius dressed up the same theology in different clothes. His theology found expression in the well-meant gospel offer and in the conditional covenant theology of the Liberated Reformed. Our fathers condemned all of this as Arminianism and Pelagianism.

Of course, the proponents of these errors yelped like beaten dogs when they were accused of Arminianism and said that they were not Arminians. They were only interested in a full-orbed gospel and in doing justice to the responsibility of man, were concerned not to make man a stock and a block, or merely had an interest in the holiness of the church.

But history has proven that the analysis of our fathers was right and true, and those things invariably developed into full-blown Pelagianism and Arminianism. So, for example, the Arminianism of common grace during the early 1920s in the Christian Reformed Church developed into the full-blown Arminianism of Harold Dekker in the 1960s in the Christian Reformed Church. This same thing has happened in the PRC and will continue to happen because the theology is likewise fundamentally Arminian and Pelagian. To be sure, those who promote and teach this theology, as for instance Reverend McGeown, will insist that they are being Reformed; indeed, they will insist that they are most Reformed according to the best writers. They will have their scripture passages, and Acts 16:30–31 is emerging as one of them. They will have their quotes from Reformed writers. McGeown even takes passages from Herman Hoeksema to overturn Hoeksema and does no differently than Hoeksema’s own students did with Hoeksema, as though he were a friend of their theology of man. Likewise, the Protestant Reformed theologians will have their passages from the creeds. Canons 3–4.12–14 and 17 seem to be favorites. These are creedal articles that through tricks of logic they use to prove the responsibility and work of man in salvation. All of this is nothing new. There is no new error. It is the same old error. It is Pelagian and Arminian.

And if we must seek for the signs of Pelagianism and of Arminianism, what are the signs? The Bible teaches us that the one who looks like a lamb speaks like a dragon. He has marks that betray him in spite of his deceptive

looks. Pelagianism and Arminianism betray that they are of the dragon because they always have as their chief concern what man must do. They come with the slander that the truth makes man a stock and a block. That is an Arminian slander, do not forget. It came in the mouths of the Arminians against the truth. It is a slander of the truth, but the proponents of Arminianism speak about making man a stock and block as though it were a real danger instead of a cleverly disguised attack on the truth of God's sovereignty. Because their chief concern is what man must do, they corrupt the truth of the grace of God. When they speak of the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, it is always to enable man to do what man must do to be saved. The scripture teaches that the law serves Christ; but the Arminian and the Pelagian make Christ serve the law. Grace enables man to fulfill the law so that man can do what man must do to be saved. Man, man, man: that is the main concern of Arminianism. Grace, God, and the Holy Ghost are enablers of man.

I maintain that this is the essence of all Pelagianism and all Arminianism. That doctrine places the activities and works of man alongside of and in consequence of the works of God, and together those two works—man's and God's—achieve salvation.

It is true that the work of grace as something supernatural is basically nonexistent in Pelagianism. The grace of Pelagius was external through the law, which showed man what was right and wrong so that man could do the right and avoid the wrong. Still, the main issue was the same: grace enabled man to do what man must do to be saved.

In that sense the Protestant Reformed error is more Pelagian. It is Professor Cammenga's doctrine, the doctrine of the theological school committee, the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed synods, and the doctrine of the majority of the ministers that the preaching of the law is a means of grace. This is their doctrine because it is the doctrine of Professor Cammenga, and he is not and indeed never will be disciplined for it; he is allowed to teach it to class after class of seminarians. This teaching of the law as a means of grace makes the Protestant Reformed error more Pelagian even than Arminian. But the issue in all of the various forms of the Pelagian error is the nature of grace. In the Pelagian error, grace is an enabling power so that man can do what man must do to be saved. The error is not merely that grace enables man, but it is also that grace enables man to do what man must do to be saved. The issue is always man and what man must do for salvation.

All recognize, of course, some measure of spiritual inability in man, but grace swoops in as the theological *Deus ex machina* that delivers man from his spiritual inability so that man is able to do what man must do to be saved. That is the Protestant Reformed doctrine. That

is Reverend Koole's doctrine by explicit admission, which doctrine led to the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing, led to the formation and publishing of *Sword and Shield*, and led to the discipline of three ministers who would not stand for that doctrine. That doctrine of Reverend Koole led to those ministers being driven out of the PRC and led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. Let history note that it was Reverend Koole's doctrine more than any other that led to all these things. His doctrine tore and divided. His doctrine destroyed and ruined. He bears the blame, and for it he will be judged. His doctrine is that there is that which man must do to be saved. Man does it by the enabling power of the Spirit, he does it by grace; but man does it, man must do it, and man cannot be saved without man doing these things.

Faith Not God's Act

That is also the doctrine of Reverend McGeown's earlier journal article on faith that was pointed to as a defense for Reverend Koole's theology. McGeown has never repudiated that association; indeed, he defends it; and he is now republishing that article in installments on the RFPA blog. That is the theology of Reverend McGeown in his blog post "Passive Faith?" That is what is behind all his language of active faith. He is not merely defending that faith is a spiritual activity of the whole soul, but he is teaching faith as what man must do to be saved. Oh, to be sure, faith is an activity of the whole soul of the believer, by which he clings to Christ; but that activity is not of himself; it is not man's fulfillment of the command to repent and believe; it is not what man does to be saved. But that is offensive to Reverend McGeown, and he reacts against it with mockery. His faith is like the working of Pelagius and the faith of Arminius and the faith of the well-meant gospel offer and of the Liberated's conditional covenant view. Reverend McGeown's faith is that which man must do to be saved. McGeown's faith is what man does to be saved, and included in that faith is works, and these are what man does to be justified. He does it by grace, of course, because grace must swoop in to rescue man from his inability; but *do* it man must. Man must exercise his faith, must do faith, must believe, and must be active, must do this, and must do that. McGeown's whole blog post "Passive Faith?" is nothing but the glorification of man and the work of man and the doing of man, so much so that one wonders whether McGeown has ever understood what the gospel actually is, whether he has ever tasted its sweetness and glory as the proclamation of what Christ did to the exclusion of what man does, and whether he understands the apostle's contrast at all between faith and working.

Reverend McGeown openly admits this when he

rejects what I wrote in *Sword and Shield*: “No one is denying that faith precedes justification...Is faith, as man’s activity now, the means unto justification?...I deny that faith as man’s activity, faith as what man does, is the means unto the end justification.”¹ If he rejects this, then for him faith as man’s activity, as what man must do, is the means unto justification. That is McGeown’s doctrine, that is the doctrine of the PRC, that is the doctrine with which I disagree and that I call Arminian and Pelagian.

McGeown expresses a great distaste for saying that faith is passive. Then, this much is true: the PRC does not want passive faith. The churches do not want that in any sense, not—and especially not—in the matter of justification. In shocking language he gives us his doctrine

of faith: “Justification is God’s act of declaring believers righteous, while faith is our activity of trusting Jesus for salvation, which is *not* God’s act.”²

Wow! How far they have fallen from the gospel. That is the doctrine against which we contend and because of which a separation was necessary.

Then, not content to make faith man’s act for, unto, and in consequence of which man is justified, the Protestant Reformed error adds law-keeping to faith for assurance and for the experience of salvation. The denomination is awash in man and man’s works and man’s activities.

We will examine Reverend McGeown’s doctrine of faith more closely next time.

—NJL

CONTRIBUTION

DEBATING WITH THE DEVIL (4)

Introduction

My allegory based on Psalm 2 continues. But now, Spaul has joined Thames in frowning on Shepsema, who is still smarting from Thames’ rebuke. “Shepsema,” Spaul says, “you’ll be vexed...yes...vexed! You didn’t hear the decree, did you?”

Shepsema, bewildered, asks, “Decree? What decree?”

“God’s decree! God has set his king on his holy hill of Zion! Do you understand? By decree Jesus is king, and his people are given to him by that decree. Oh, Shepsema,” as they walk away, “beware...it’s kindled!”

Shepsema, upset by the decree, wonders what is kindled.

I continue my analysis of Norman Shepherd’s book, *The Way of Righteousness*,³ having shown previously that from his dubious references Shepherd has attempted and failed to prove that James has the last judgment in view. However, Shepherd needs the hypothesis that James has the last judgment in view because Shepherd intends to plug his (false) notion of James’ forensic justification into his (disproved) final judgment. That is Shepherd’s next stop. Having botched James 2:14–26 and misunderstood

James’ illustrations, nonetheless, Shepherd will plow ahead to ask, how will a person be judged then at the last judgment?

Shepherd’s Faith That Works

I forecast that justification in the last judgment will be by a combination of faith and works because that’s where Shepherd’s whole fabrication is leading. He will say, based on James 2:14–26 and the broad context of James, that those forensically justified in the last judgment will be justified by a faith that works. However, in this exercise the parts won’t come together because the parts don’t exist.

I have already adequately demonstrated that James never said a word about forensic justification and that James’ so-called references to the final judgment don’t exist. Rather, those references suited James’ exhortations; they were not pointing beyond them to the last judgment, as Shepherd supposes. So far then, I have demonstrated that no idea of forensic justification comes from James; that James’ scattered references to judging were only intended to add urgency to his exhortations;

1 Nathan J. Langerak, “Chanticleer,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 8 (October 15, 2021): 12–13.

2 Martyn McGeown, “Passive Faith?”; emphasis is McGeown’s.

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

and that James has consistently kept in view the trying of his brethren's faith, to vindicate the true believers in the Lord's church over against the many false brethren.⁴ Having seen that there is absolutely nothing in James' epistle to support Norman Shepherd's (false) view so far, I strongly doubt that Shepherd can pull off an *ex nihilo* creation of a final justification that involves faith and a person's works, when nothing in scripture teaches it.

We consider now the final section of Shepherd's analysis of James, "The Meaning of Justification by Works" (26–32). Here Shepherd enters into some final observations of James 2:14–26, beginning with this statement: "The first and most important observation we must make is simply that James is not denying that justification is by faith. He is not saying that justification is by works alone" (26). Shepherd does not say it specifically, but he sows the seed: according to Shepherd, James has some special combination of faith and works up his sleeve. Shepherd needs this insinuation because, after anchoring in the reader's mind the idea that James is teaching justification by faith, Shepherd will build a bridge from *that* faith to works in such a way that he "satisfies" James' statements yet does not directly contradict Paul in Romans 3:10–28 and in Galatians 2:16. Clever, but we've seen this confounding of scripture before. At this point, faith and works are courting each other; soon the two shall be one!

The green light for that comes in these words: "Verses 14–26 [of James 2] are designed to establish justification by faith in *a pointed and precise way*" (26; emphasis added). Notice carefully those words! Shepherd is able to see the "pointed and precise way" in verses 14–26, but he could not see the pointed and precise way in which James speaks of *that kind of faith* in verse 14. No matter; we follow Shepherd now as he introduces James' new and precise way of not denying justification by faith, even though Shepherd says that James adds works.

How will it be done?

Shepherd next states that James' brethren are "believers whose faith is being tested by various trials," with which we would agree. We would agree also when Shepherd writes, "James urges perseverance in faith." We would also agree that "James offers both encouragement and assurance to that end" (26). Shepherd then offers the conclusion that James "urges faith not as a meritorious human virtue making a person worthy of being saved, but as total dependence on Jesus Christ" (27). Sounds good, but I suspect that "*total-dependence faith*" combined with James' *new and precise way* of defining justification will involve some kind of human activity. But we will follow

along, our antennae extended. Having laid out his path that James is establishing justification by faith in a new, precise way and having given a suspicious definition of faith, Shepherd moves on.

Step one of this procedure: Shepherd's misunderstanding of James 2:14–26 is now patched into the above thesis about faith. The admixture begins, and at the end of the paragraph Shepherd concludes that Paul and James "both teach justification by faith" and that "both writers have soteric faith and soteric justification in view" (27). James does not, but we go along for the ride. Significantly, Shepherd leaves out important details in these statements. Paul teaches justification by faith without works (that is, $A - B$), and (according to Shepherd) James teaches justification by faith with works ($A + B$). Therefore, Shepherd's statement, "James and Paul cannot be set over against one another," is not true; it's a half-truth. James (according to Shepherd) adds works, while Paul subtracts works—a major (conflicting) difference—so that James and Paul must be set over against one another. In fact, if Shepherd's half-truth were the whole truth, Paul's whole argument in Romans 3 would be contradicted. For example, he would be wrong when he says, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified" (v. 20), because James (according to Shepherd's interpretation of James) would say, "Oh yes, it's by works, not by faith only!" That is conflict, which means that James and Paul are definitely against one another, at least until Shepherd can do something about their differences.

How shall Shepherd's magic work? How will the two (faith and works) become one? Here are James' words: "By works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (2:24). Here are Paul's words: "Justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). One says, *faith with works*; the other says, *faith without works*. Faith with works ($A + B$) and faith without works ($A - B$) are not the same. "Both teach justification by faith" (27). That's false. It's a half-truth. Only when their vital qualifications are omitted can one say, "Both [James and Paul] teach justification by faith." So far, then, in building his bridge from faith to faith and works, Shepherd begins with a half-truth and misleading statements. But somehow Shepherd will make $A + B = A - B$. However, we are already aware of this word game. We have seen it before.

Next, then, we are told to believe that James 2:24 "does not teach salvation or justification by works *apart* from faith or even justification by works in *addition* to faith" (27; the emphasis is Shepherd's). "Not...by works *apart* from faith"—that is a clue and also a loaded sentence. The

4 Rev. 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; "Debating with the Devil (3)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 10 (December 1, 2021): 29–35.

action word Shepherd chose is *apart*. Not *apart* from faith. However, a problem arises with Shepherd's choice of the words *not apart from*. The Greek word used in James 2:24 is *μόνον*, and *apart from* is *not* its basic meaning. Shepherd chooses it because the English suits his purpose of conjoining faith and works, but it is not what *μόνον* means in this verse. *Apart from* in English is conceptually loaded; that is, *a-part* suggests the idea of parts, from which the idea of fitting the parts back together is a small step. The King James Version is correct in using *only* (forty times with the negative) because *μόνον* when used with a noun (faith) is used "to separate one person or thing from others"⁵—that is, this *and* that, A *and* B, but definitely not AB. For example, Paul says, ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐ μόνον δεθῆναι ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀποθανεῖν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἑτοιμῶς ἔχω ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. "I am ready *not to be bound only*, but also *to die* at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). Paul distinguishes two things with οὐ μόνον: "to be bound" and "to die." He does not speak of one being set *apart* from the other but of one in addition to the other. Also, when *μόνον* is used with the conjunction *καὶ* (*and*, present in James 2:24), the second word does not include the first (Bauer, 529). Therefore, in James 2:24 faith and works are being distinguished, not set apart, and spoken of additionally, as in faith and works, not faith alone.

Shepherd's other phrase, "not...even justification by works *in addition* to faith," adds more action words, "*not...in addition*." Here is a statement, according to Shepherd, that eliminates all combinations of faith and works that amount to simple addition of the two. With that we have Shepherd's magic marriage. He is saying faith cannot be separated from works, and it cannot be in addition to works. What's left? Why, "faith-works," of course. Shepherd has just conducted a faith and works marriage. The new couple is "working faith." He has done it! A + B equals A – B. They are the same. The two are one.

We have followed Shepherd's line of reasoning for display purposes only. None of it is true. It is built on a half-truth, twisted and misinterpreted scriptures, fabricated translations, and deceptive language.

Consider, according to James himself, a man is justified "by works...*and* not by faith only" (James 2:24). Mark his words carefully! Be alert to word games being played. James himself says, "By works...*and* not by faith only." For James the action word is *and*. A simple glance at verse 24 in the Greek verifies this. Here is what James says: ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον. Notice the highlighted word *καὶ*, which means *and*. That makes it quite simple. James is thinking of works and faith, two separate and distinct things; not two things conjoined into one, as Shepherd would like us to believe. Also, as

stated, *καὶ* with *μόνον*, when used with a noun (faith), is used "to separate one person or thing from others" (Bauer, 529). It is reasonable to conclude, contrary to Shepherd, that James has been considering two things all throughout verses 14–26. He has been exhorting his brethren that they must have both faith and works to be vindicated. His two examples, Abraham and Rahab the harlot, both had faith and works, and that is why they were vindicated. That was James' question in verse 14. It was about the necessity of two things, but the individual had neither; can that *faith* without *works* save him? In verse 18 the exchange is about two things: one man has faith but not works. Supposedly, in verse 19 the devils have one but not the other. Abraham's faith, thirty years later, was vindicated by his works (v. 21). The difference here is important. James is speaking of two distinct things throughout his exhortation, while Shepherd makes James speak of two things conjoined into one (in verse 24), so that the works are coming out of the faith rather than in addition to it (as fruit). His whole theory requires this conjoining of the two because without it he is stuck with justification by faith and works—a most vulnerable position—and that is not where he wants to be. In fact, if he doesn't have this conjoining, he is in grave trouble because he has proved (falsely) that James is writing about faith and works for forensic justification, a most un-Reformed theology. Whereas the language indicates clearly that James is referring to two things, namely, "Ye see that *by works* a man is *vindicated*, and not *by faith* only." Correctly understood, James 2:24 corroborates James' teaching of the entire section; the verse says what the antinomian brethren need to hear rather than present some new (novel) and precise (unknown) understanding of faith.

That "precise way" of James now shows itself. Shepherd says that both James and Paul are talking about the same justifying faith. Shepherd says, "James is talking about... the same faith that Paul talks about when he says that justification is by faith and not by observing the law" (27). Again, we consider this misleading talk because this is a hypothetical, incomplete statement. Shepherd supposes that they are the same—the same "justifying faith"—but if one justifies with works and the other doesn't, they are entirely different in character. Only one faith will justify, and the other will not justify; therefore, it may not be called "justifying faith." Therefore, they are not the same. But Shepherd needs us to believe that both James and Paul have the same faith and justification in view. Then, all Shepherd needs to do is harmonize *with works* and *without works*. Interesting development. Follow it carefully because now Shepherd says that James has "more" in his words "about this faith" in James 2:24 (27). James' words, Shepherd says, "focus our attention on *the kind*

5 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 529.

of *faith* that justifies and saves” (27; emphasis added). Did I hear that right? “Kind of faith”? Funny that Shepherd couldn’t see the exact same thing in James 2:14, as a previous article pointed out. But now *the kind of faith* is needed; previously, it destroyed Shepherd’s whole theory.

Now, while we have our attention focused on *the kind of faith* that justifies and saves, the whole thing comes out practically in one breath:

Justification is by faith, but not by a faith that stands all alone devoid of action and unproductive of good works. Saving faith in Jesus Christ is a faith that works. It is a living and active faith. Only a living and active faith justifies and saves. That is the point James is making in verses 14–26. (27)

Here is Shepherd’s whole position in a few sentences. The rest of his comments on James seek to bolster this. It is quite a mouthful, but we will examine it minutely before ever swallowing any of it. I have successfully disproved all of it so far by proving that James did not have soteric justification by faith in mind, and neither did he have a future, forensic judgment in mind. Now we will examine carefully and prove that James does not have Shepherd’s conjoined faith in mind, that is, *a faith that works*.

Going back over the James 2 passage, Shepherd returns to verse 14 and states that James’ question “whether a faith that has no deeds—faith without obedience—can save” implies a negative answer and that the following verses illustrate that (27). A poor person receives only words, not necessities, from a so-called brother. Shepherd says that James’ illustration allows this comment: “The wish without the deed accomplishes nothing. It does not serve to clothe or to feed the needy person. In the same way, faith without deeds accomplishes nothing. It does not save and it does not justify” (27). We agree with every word of that statement except the last. If James were allowed to speak for himself, he would say, “It does not save, and it does not vindicate.” As I have demonstrated, Shepherd misses the precision of James’ words in verse 14 and in so doing assumes that James is speaking of faith in general, while he is actually speaking of faith specifically, namely *that kind of faith* (without works). James then asks, “Can that kind of faith save him?” A rhetorical question implying a negative answer but with no answer immediately given. The answer is given as James elaborates in verses 15–26, advancing his theme: faith being tried to see if it is genuine and therefore vindicated. Verse 14 sets up the test. This has been covered in my previous articles. But we notice the absence on Shepherd’s part of any elaboration of the text in terms of James’ stated

purpose of trying (proving) faith to produce patience, leading to faith’s completion. Nothing except the unjustified intrusion of “justify,” based on his mistaken notion that James intends to teach forensic justification.

Next, referring to verses 15–16, where the destitute brother receives nothing, Shepherd says, “The illustration brings us once again into the sphere of Matthew 25:31–46” (28). In explaining this text, Shepherd writes, “The thought is not simply that righteous people show themselves to be truly righteous people by the help they give to those in need. Jesus is saying in Matthew 25 that only the righteous—those whose faith is wrought out in deeds—enter into eternal life” (28).

I consider those remarks shallow and duplicitous, for they distort our Lord’s words and actions in Matthew 25:31–46. By lifting out of context only that which appears to support his view, Shepherd has passed over the whole text, which rejects his view. I now give a more serious examination of those verses because in Matthew 25:31–46 our Lord’s final *judgment* and its *vindication* are the main features of the text. And possibly, James patterned his epistle after its teaching.

Shepherd’s Final Judgment

Matthew 25:31–33 present Jesus’ coming in glory to judge the nations. Sitting upon the royal throne of his glory, he separates his sheep from the goats, setting the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. This fulfills Romans 14:10. It is the beginning of his royal judgment: choosing who shall stand at his *right hand* (Ps. 16:11; 17:7; 20:6; 45:9; 110:1; Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 12:2). *Setting apart* is the basic meaning of the Greek word for *judgment*.⁶ That final separation is the first feature of the judgment explained in Matthew 25. It is already “a judging-process” (Vos, 261). Jesus exercises his sovereign authority, claiming his sheep. The elect are immediately brought to Christ’s right hand, the position of salvation. They at last possess final salvation. I note in passing—because Jesus here issues divine, royal verdicts—that the righteousness of those verdicts will also be demonstrated.

Next, Jesus proclaims that “the sheep” are the “blessed” of his Father (vv. 33–34). The perfect participle indicates completed action before the main verb: they were

blessed...with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the *adoption* of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according

⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, 4th edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 267.

to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace. (Eph. 1:3–6)

These verses explain Matthew 25:34. In love the Father blessed the elect before creation, giving them to Christ to be saved by him in the covenant of grace. Now, they are standing before him “holy and without blame.” That also is a feature of their final judgment (Ps. 33:12; 135:4; Prov. 16:4; John 6:37, 39; 15:16; 17:2, 6, 9; Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:4–5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Next, Jesus from his royal throne graciously and authoritatively pronounces his royal judgment upon those who have been predestinated to the *adoption* of children and stand blameless before him. He *commands* the blessed children to receive their *inheritance*, the kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34 is Jesus’ verdict and their final judgment (Isa. 8:18; Matt. 13:43; Gal. 4:6–7; Heb. 2:10–13; 1 John 3:1).

I call special attention to the fact that Matthew 25 presents the elect at Christ’s right hand, already “blessed” of God the Father and righteous in Christ by faith when they appear. All their sin is already covered in the blood of Christ (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). None of it is ever mentioned (Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22; Jer. 31:34). Then, in fulfillment of their predestination to sonship by the Father, Jesus issues his royal command to them to *take possession* of their kingdom inheritance! (κληρονομήσατε τὴν ἡτοιμασμένην ὑμῖν βασιλείαν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, Matt. 25:34). The word κληρονομήσατε means “to inherit,” “to acquire,” “to take possession” (Bauer, 435). Its form is aorist imperative, indicating that Jesus as judge gives his royal judgment, commanding his sheep to take immediate possession of the kingdom at that moment. The aorist tense being punctiliar signifies completed action.⁷ That is Jesus’ verdict and their judgment! The judge has spoken. His judgment is now finished. It is a gracious verdict concerning his sheep. Nothing further is said to them. Their judgment being *over* and *finalized*, they immediately go into the heavenly kingdom at Jesus’ command. Only *after* his judgment of them is completed and after going into their Father’s kingdom are their works then publicly proclaimed (Matt. 25:35–36). Jesus speaks of his people, stating in a personal way what they did. The purpose of Jesus’ stating their works *after* his judgment verdict is to vindicate his verdict as well as to vindicate them as being righteous in him “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Vos, 277).

If someone (Shepherd?) is looking for a forensic judgment based on faith and works, he will be disappointed in Matthew 25, because no works are cited *before* Jesus’ final verdict is given on which to base his judgment (see the procedure in Acts 24:1–22; 25:9, 17–27; 26:31–32).

Jesus’ final verdict is given first, and then the elect’s works are cited, as already mentioned, for the purpose of demonstrating the righteousness of Jesus’ verdict. The simplest works are mentioned, but the elect don’t remember doing them. They did not do those things for merit, to be justified; they did them naturally from the heart, proof that they were righteous and living by faith in gratitude for their salvation.

It is vital to recognize that the elect’s works are proclaimed by Jesus *after his final command* to take possession of the kingdom. I repeat that because it is a most important element for rightly understanding Matthew 25:31–46. The text is a God-centered and Christ-vindicating judgment scene. It vindicates Jesus as the righteous one! Jesus, sitting on the throne of judgment, commands, “*Inherit the kingdom!*” The king commands his elect: “Take possession of your kingdom!” The elect respond to his voice and go into the final kingdom. Then their works, given after his verdict, must be publicly proclaimed to vindicate the king’s verdict, to demonstrate that it was just and based on valid evidence. The reverse would not be true, that is, that their works were brought forth as evidence that should produce a verdict, because the verdict has already been given. It was pronounced in verse 34. Therefore, justification or condemnation based on faith and works, as Shepherd and many others envision, is not what this text teaches. This text teaches the vindication of Jesus the righteous judge and of his righteous judgment of the elect and the reprobate.

However, a question remains concerning the three parables told by Jesus in Matthew 24:45–25:30, which follow his admonitions that no one knows the day or the hour of his return (24:36) and that we must be ready because the Lord will come when we don’t expect it (24:44). First is the parable of the faithful and unfaithful slaves. The faithful servant was ready because when the Lord returned, he found the servant faithfully serving his Lord. The servant was then pronounced “blessed.” The other servant’s thinking was, “My lord delayeth his coming.” So the servant beat his fellow servants and got drunk (24:48–49). Similar is the parable of the ten virgins. The wise prepared for the return of the groom, and the foolish did not prepare (25:10–11). That was serious because the Lord said to the foolish, “I know you not.” The third parable is similar: the distribution of the talents, their use and nonuse, and the rewards of those who received the talents. That parable ends with the mention of hell and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus’ purpose with these parables was obviously to warn his disciples of unfaithfulness because they did not know the day or hour of his return. When he spoke, they had time to be faithful and serve their Lord before his

⁷ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*: “Aorist represents action in the simplest form, presented as a point—timeless,” 824.

return. That is why in all three parables the pattern is different from that of Matthew 25:31–46. The pattern Jesus established in the three parables was works done, works examined, verdict given, then reward or punishment. These parables illustrate how important the responsibility of faithfulness is, as well as the result of unfaithfulness. In all three parables the Lord returned and settled with each individual according to how each had lived and served. But the parables particularly trace the whole time for preparing and serving, allowing his disciples to see the faithful and the unfaithful, as well as the final end of each when the time for preparing is over. But then, in Matthew 25:31–46, the pattern is different. Not in parables but in plain language Jesus clearly stated what will happen when he does finally return. Jesus taught his disciples that when the judgment day comes, the time of warning and preparation is past. There is no more warning, no more preparation, no time for anything—just the king’s judgment—so those steps of the former pattern are omitted. The former pattern cannot be the pattern followed at the last judgment because at the last judgment men appear as they truly are, elect or reprobate; either given to Christ to be saved by him or passed over by God in his sovereign will; their earthly lives now over and how they lived completed.

What is left, then, is for the last judgment to reveal the final separation of elect and reprobate and the righteousness of God’s predestination of each, vindicated by the works of each publicly proclaimed. The elect loved and served Christ by the faith given them. The reprobate lived wicked and sinful lives and rejected Christ and were justly condemned. Note that their condemnation is also proclaimed before their works are cited (Matt. 25:41).

Finally, I call attention to the fact that the concluding verse of this judgment scene, after all the confirming evidence has been presented, is not a verdict nor the judge’s giving his final verdict, but is merely a factual statement, which confirms that Jesus’ judgments infallibly take effect (v. 46). There is no command or verdict in verse 46; it is a descriptive statement of fact. I conclude that there is nothing in Matthew 25:31–46 that supports Shepherd’s theory; rather, the text, when allowed to speak for itself, conclusively disproves it.

The same is true of 2 Corinthians 5:10, which speaks of the last judgment but says nothing of justification by faith and works. It says that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, which Matthew 25:31–46 has demonstrated; and that we all shall *receive* according to what we did, which Matthew 25:31–46 demonstrated also. The Greek is ἵνα κομισῆται ἕκαστος τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος πρὸς ἃ ἔπραξεν, εἴτε ἀγαθὸν εἴτε φαῦλον. Note well: the verse speaks of *receiving* (κομισῆται—“to get,” “to receive,” “to obtain” [Bauer, 443]; πρὸς ἃ ἔπραξεν—“to

do,” “to accomplish” [Bauer, 705]; John 5:29; Rom. 7:15; 1 Thess. 4:11). Each sheep and goat *received* his final reward *according* to what he did, *not because of what he did*. The verb contains no forensic element (κομισῆται is not a synonym for or equal to κρίμα—Heb. 10:36; 11:39; 1 Pet. 1:9; 5:4). The elect did good and received good; the reprobate did evil and received evil. Exactly as they did, they received. As stated with both, their works were cited after their judgment to vindicate the Lord’s verdict about them. Vindicating Christ’s judgment, that each *received* justly according to what they did, is what Matthew 25:31–46 is all about; vindicating the righteousness of God (Acts 17:31). Again, nothing for Shepherd.

Finally, I have finished with Shepherd’s abuse of James, having sufficiently demonstrated that the doctrine of “working faith” based on James 2:14–26 is a fraud. I have proved that there is nothing in James of a final, forensic justification justifying believers on the basis of their faith and works. It has been a long and winding road, but I have reached my goal. I have successfully defended the truth of God’s word against a noted adversary. In doing so hard words have been spoken. They were necessary. Just as Jesus said to Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” I have spoken in that same manner, believing *The Way of Righteousness*, written by Norman Shepherd, deserves sharp criticism. However, my words were not intended to judge the heart or faith of my former (beloved) professor but only his words, which are deserving of condemnation.

Now it is appropriate to address Professor Shepherd’s acolytes. How long will you halt between two opinions? You cannot hide behind the disproved theory of “working faith” anymore. The truth has been placed before you. “Working faith” is another gospel. Will you believe that you can be saved by an impure grace, alloyed with the smell of man’s (filthy rags) works!

Read Malachi:

If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?...ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick...cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a *corrupt thing*” (1:8, 13–14).

Therefore, choose this day! If Jehovah is God, follow him! And if your idol is god, go after him. But you cannot halt between the two! You have seen that on these pages with your own eyes. The only acceptable offering for sin is the pure and spotless Lamb of God, who laid down his life for his elect! I counsel you to follow wisdom; she will be vindicated by her children. Shepherd’s acolytes will not. “The Lord shall have them in derision...Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”

—Rev. Stuart Pastine



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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

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth—1 Corinthians 13:6

Charity is the greatest of the spiritual perfections, greater than faith and hope, though they are always together. Those who do not know faith and hope are likewise ignorant of charity. They take the word *love* on their lips but know nothing of its power; faithless and hopeless are they.

Charity never fails. Those who teach that charity fails are liars. Charity does not fail because all true charity is of God, and God does not fail. All true charity is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and he does not fail. All true charity is rooted in Christ, and he does not fail. So charity does not fail.

Charity rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth.

But who would rejoice in iniquity? Perhaps, you have not committed the iniquity yourself. If you do not condemn it; if you do not separate from it; if you make excuses for it, then the Holy Spirit accuses you of rejoicing in iniquity. To excuse it you must rejoice in your own iniquity, which you also will not condemn. Not condemning your own iniquity, you excuse that of others. Excusing, you show that you know it is wicked, but you have no love to condemn it as wicked or to separate from it as offensive to God.

The iniquity that is in view in 1 Corinthians 13 is the iniquity of false doctrine. False doctrine is a lie, idolatry, image worship, profanity, and treacherous adultery. Charity does not rejoice in false doctrine or in the iniquity that invariably accompanies it. When the preaching is befouled by false doctrine; when there is discipline of faithful officebearers; when the truth is slandered as evil; when the instruments of church discipline are used to murder the truth; when classes and synods bargain about the truth; when there is collusion among officebearers to condemn the righteous and to drive them out of their inheritance; when false and lying letters circulate; when there is gross wickedness in the church, and the powerful—protecting themselves and their own wickedness—labor to cover it up, then charity does not rejoice. Charity renounces the iniquity and separates from it.

So when lying men speak of charity and at the same time are not revolted by false doctrine and, indeed, peddle it; do not believe their lying words about charity. Such men have charity on their lips but iniquity in their hearts. And when their charity fails, it is revealed that they never had any charity at all because they never had the truth.

Charity rejoices together with the truth. They are constant companions. Where the truth is, there is charity; for the truth is Christ. Together they rejoice. The truth—only the truth and nothing but the truth—is the object of charity's delight. They are companions together in happiness. Whatever the truth delights in, charity delights in. That is the reason charity—true charity and not the devil's imitation of it—cannot abide the lie. Charity loves God with God's own love of himself, and, loving God, charity hates the haters of the Lord.

That charity never fails. In love for the truth—and hatred of the lie—it opposes the lie, and it stands for the truth. It separates from the lie and condemns it. It hates iniquity, and it loves the truth and together with the truth rejoices. That charity cannot fail any more than God can fail.

—NJL