

The background features a stylized, orange-toned illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. A shield is positioned in the lower right, overlapping the sword's blade. The shield has a circular design with several smaller circles inside. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

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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Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

—James 4:13–17

A godless life. Among professing Christians this godlessness is manifested. I will go. I will do. I will accomplish. He does not retain God in his thoughts. An example of the faithless pride of men who masquerade as believers in the church and so also another temptation to which believers themselves are prone in the world.

The life of the believer with God in the covenant is not a life of friendship with the world. Ye adulterer and adulteress, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity against God? Rather, the covenant is the believer's life of walking with God, of living before the face of God, and of resting and relying upon Christ's perfect righteousness alone. The believer is in this world, not being of it but seeking the life that is to come. He is a pilgrim and a stranger here. In this world he has no abiding place. His home and citizenship are in heaven. Walking with God and living before God, the believer must become a sinner before God every day. He must walk in the forgiveness and righteousness that is his in Christ. So daily he draws near to God, fights against sin and evil, and resists the devil as God's enemy.

Life with God is also a life of submission to the only rule of life that God reveals in his word. The friend of God makes all his judgments based on the word of God alone. So when the friend of God judges, he is a doer of the law and not a judge. Because he judges based on the word of God, he does not judge, but God judges by his word. No one may call the friend of God a judge or judgmental because it is not he but God, the only lawgiver, who judges.

So when anyone departs from the word of God and contrary to that word calls evil good and good evil, he manifests a monstrous pride in which he demonstrates that he faithlessly will not submit to God, the only lawgiver.

You ought to say, "Today and tomorrow and every day of my life and in all things, 'If the Lord will.'" That is the thought on the mind of the believer, the covenant friend of God, as he lives his life in this world.

Submission to God's word will manifest itself in the believer's humble dependence upon God every day. God is in his thoughts, and he relies on God for all things. The believer does that because he knows what his life is: he is dead, and his life is hid with God in Jesus Christ. This life is not his goal, his joy, and his treasure; but God and life with God is his goal, his joy, and his treasure.

What is your life? In all your considering do you consider what your life is? Do you consider who you are?

The text answers these sobering questions with an equally sobering answer: you are a vapor that appears for a time and vanishes away! Just a vapor, a puff of smoke, that appears and is gone. In all your decisions do you consider that?

So in light of who you are—just a vapor—James says that you must live soberly in this world: "If the Lord will, I will live," and only then do you also say, "If the Lord will, I will do this or that." If the Lord will. If the Lord—the Lord himself and eternal life with him—is in the thoughts of the godly man, he will say, "If the Lord will!" Because his life is

a vapor that is vanishing. Thus James puts your life in the proper perspective for you.

Over against that is the proud boast of dying man: "Today or tomorrow I'll go into such and such a city and buy and sell and get gain."

You ought to say, "Today and tomorrow and every day of my life and in all things, 'If the Lord will.'" That is the thought on the mind of the believer, the covenant friend of God, as he lives his life in this world. If Jehovah will!

When the friend of God says that, he shows that God is on his mind every day and that he does all his thinking in relationship to the ultimate reality of all things—the Lord God himself. So also God's friend makes himself nothing in his life and God everything. Indeed, he

makes the Lord God himself his life, his goal, and his all in this life.

The believer understands the controlling importance of God's will. God is, and God is absolutely sovereign over all; so that nothing comes by chance, but all things happen according to God's eternal counsel. All things in time and history and all things in the life of every man are the unfolding of the eternal will of God.

When the believer speaks of the Lord, he speaks of the triune God. When the believer speaks of God as the Lord, he emphasizes the sovereignty of God. The name *Lord* especially reveals that God is the sovereign who has authority over all things. All authority is his, all things are in his hand, all things are the product of his will, and all things are determined by him. Jehovah's relationship to history is not that he sees in advance, but his relationship is that he determines and brings to pass. He does all his pleasure.

The Lord of all is a willing God. The Lord's will is his eternal good pleasure concerning all things. God decreed and determined all things before he created the world. His will is as eternal as God is. In his counsel God determined all that would be and how all would happen and how all would end up. He determined the end from the beginning! He determined in his counsel that Christ would be the head of all things and that God would perfect all things in Christ for God's glory and the revelation of God as the covenant God in a new heaven and a new earth. He determined who would be saved and who would be damned, so that the eternal destinies of all men are determined by the will of God. He determined their salvation and their damnation not because they did something or were something but only because he loved some and hated others. He determined, therefore, creation and the fall and all things to serve Christ and the salvation of his elect people for the revelation of the glory of God in Christ. God determined the rise and fall of nations and the course of the sun in the heavens and the falling of a single hair, when that hair would fall and where that hair would fall.

So also we must see that everything, absolutely everything—good and evil, fruitful years and barren, sickness and health, all events and the outcomes of all events in all of history and in the entire universe—in heaven, in hell, on the earth, and in the farthest reaches of the cosmos is determined by God. All is the result of God's will. The will of God is not a blueprint according to which

God designed the universe, but his will is living, abiding, and active now and at every moment in history.

James places your and my lives in their entirety within the scope of God's will. James says, "If the Lord will, we will live. If the Lord will, we will do this or that." God's will is active in our lives as God gives to us every heartbeat, gives our strengths and weaknesses and our health and sicknesses, gives us all the works that we do, and puts us in every situation in which we find ourselves. Our lives are nothing except the unfolding of the deliberately appointed and eternally decided will of God. So James places all of our activities and thoughts in the scope of God's eternal will. The Lord wills our births; he determines the entire lengths and the whole courses of our lives; he determines every thought and deed of our lives and the precise moments of our deaths. We are, and every man is, wholly subject to the will of God.

The God-determined life has a God-appointed goal. For the wicked it is hell. For the righteous it is heaven. The goal is not the here and now. Not for any man. It is salvation or damnation. It is eternity with God or eternity under the wrath of God.

So God knows all things that are and that will be. He knows all these things because he determined them. He knows where you will be and who you will be today, tomorrow, ten years from now, and to the end of your life.

Over against the reality and denying the reality that God is and that all things are the product of the will of God stands the evil boast of godless men in the church. Of these men James speaks when he says, "Ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." The word "rejoicing" means to boast. These godless men boast in their godless lives.

James gives an example of the boasting that he condemns when he says that these men say, "To day or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." These members of the church and professing Christians—in the presence of their wives, their friends, and their families—on the job, in the office, or in the back of church confidently lay out their lives for a year. They state their goals for the year and when and how they will accomplish those goals. "We will leave today or tomorrow. We are traveling to this city and that city. We are going to continue there for a year. We are going to buy and sell these things and those things.

Submission to God's word will manifest itself in the believer's humble dependence upon God every day. God is in his thoughts, and he relies on God for all things.

We are going to make a lot of money. It is going to be a great year!”

Do not change James’ admonition to be against crooks whose businesses are built on fraud and deceit. The boasting men James exposes are impeccable in their business relationships, as far as men are concerned. They are going to buy and sell. They are doing so with a number of business associates. They will get gain by buying and selling, not by fraud and deceit. They surely have outstanding reputations.

Their sin is not their business practices but that they themselves are godless. They live godless lives. These boasting men hold their lives and all that happens to them in their lives in their own hands. They talk, plan, and live without a thought of God. They do all their figuring and calculating without God. “We will do this and that. We will go here and there. We will accomplish all this or that. We have goals, and we will bring these goals to completion.” But God is not in their plans and in their thoughts. They have arrogantly excluded God from all their plans.

Belonging to their godless lives are their carnal plans. Their goals are to increase in wealth. They have set their affections on worldly gain and will become rich in the world. Listen to them boast: “We will get gain!” To get and to have and to increase in riches are the high points of their achievements and the goals of all their plans. The success of their work is measured by the level of their increases in the earth.

Where are heaven and eternal life in all their thoughts? Where are the saints and church of God in all their plans? What of all the good they could do in the church instead of being so busy making money? What of all the missed worship services, all the unattended church and school meetings, and ignorance regarding important church matters in their deranged and godless pursuits of gain?

While they serve mammon, they make pretenses of serving God. God is not in their thoughts.

Godless professing Christians.

James rebukes the businessmen who make the building of their businesses the chief goals of their lives and who confidently lay out huge expenditures of money but do so with no thoughts of God.

James rebukes those who for their vacations forsake God’s church for long periods of time. Their relaxation is more important than God and his church and their souls.

James rebukes the couple whose chief and controlling goal in life is to have as many experiences in this life as possible or whose whole goal is their retirement planning.

James rebukes the young person who for the sake of

his college education, his job, and his success in life forsakes God’s church and the fellowship of the truth.

James rebukes the young person whose plans for dating, marriage, and life are all made without God and his word. I will marry so-and-so, and I will finish my education, then we will have this many children, and we will do this and that in our lives.

James rebukes the man who for the pursuit of gain lets the church offices go vacant, the seats on the school board go unfilled, and the pew at the worship services sit empty. Gain, gain, gain controls everything.

Thus James rebukes in general a godlessness and an earthly-mindedness that make the pursuit of wealth the highest ideal in life so that all things are subjected to it. He rebukes the earthly-mindedness in which this life and the things of this life are the highest good. He rebukes the godless planning to which we and all men are so prone, so that we plan our days, weeks, months, and years without a thought of God.

It is all godless.

Godlessness is not first of all gross wickedness. Godlessness is not first of all that a man is a thief or obviously carnal in his living. Godlessness is God-forgetfulness. It is to do, to plan, and to live as though God is not and as though all things do not depend in every detail upon the plan of the living God. It is to live and plan as though our every heartbeat and every breath do not depend on God. It is to live as though our lives and our destinies are in our own hands.

A God-forgetter talks, acts, and plans as if he were God. A God-forgetter makes himself god of his own life. His plan is determinative, and his strength will bring him to the end of what he wants to do.

Being godless, it is folly, especially for the professing Christian.

Such a God-forgetting man does not even consider who he is. What is your life, proud boaster? It is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Your life is a vapor that is disappearing the moment it is breathed out. Man is nothing. He appears for a little time. He has no strength of himself. He cannot think one thought apart from God. Man can do nothing without God’s upholding and preserving him in all things that he does and giving him his life from moment to moment. And man thinks, plans, and acts as though his life were in his own hands.

But worse than his failure to recognize and believe that he is a vapor is his failure to recognize that he vanishes away. Indeed, James says that man is being destroyed. Man in this world, all men in this world, does not merely pass away as a vapor passes away. This would mean that man is born with a certain amount of strength and that

because of his exertion he uses up his strength. But man does not merely vanish away. He is destroyed. As Moses said, “We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our...secret sins in the light of thy countenance” (Ps. 90:7–8). The preacher said, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2).

There is a power in the world that pulls man to destruction. That power gnaws on him, tears at every fiber of his being, pulls him apart, and pulls him down until that power rips him apart and drags him into the dust. That power is the curse of God. Because God made all things in this world vanity, man is a fool when he makes earthly gain and this life his goals. God made all things vanity in Adam and through his fall. The will that controls all things is God’s will that all things become vanity in Adam, that all things groan and travail under the curse, and that all things in this life be destroyed in order that all things might be made perfect in Jesus Christ in a new heaven and a new earth. And lighter than vanity itself, the chief of vanities, is man. Man became a sinner by his fall and by the instigation of the devil. Now all exists under the curse of God that turns man to destruction. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, man perishes in that vanity and under that curse.

What is your life? It is nothing apart from Christ, faith, and his word. Your life is less than nothing. Your life is being torn to pieces by the curse of God. Does not every pain in the body, every creak of the joint, every fading away of strength—does that not all speak loudly to man of God and his curse?

Not to the proud, boasting, godless man! Not reckoning with God, proud man does not reckon with sin—his own sin and his sin in Adam. So such a man has no room in his heart and in his life for God, Jesus Christ, the word, and the eternal things that matter. Proud, godless man has no wisdom to see and plan and live in light of God, Jesus Christ, and eternity.

Proud, godless, boasting man is thoroughly carnal. A carnal man in the church. He sets his affections on things here below. What is his life? It consists in food and raiment, in investments and business ventures, and in successes here below as man measures them. His god is his belly, mammon is his lord, and for him the good life is the successful life here in this world. That is carnality, even though there be nothing outwardly impeachable in that man’s life.

Indeed, James calls it godlessness of the worst kind.

It is the expression of the arrogance of man. James says that such men are arrogant boasters, and their boasting is evil. That is what James means when he says, “Ye rejoice in your boastings.”

This means that in their God-forgetting, foolish, and carnal planning they are arrogant. And in arrogance they boast as though all things depend on them. But they are nothing, and their lives are nothing; indeed, they are being torn to pieces by God as all creation labors and travails under vanity.

And James says that such godless living is evil of the worst kind: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” James means that when such a man is confronted with his godless, foolish, and carnal living, he defends himself and says, “Yes, I know. I know, but I have to get what is mine in the world. I know what opportunities I have been given, and I have

to seize on those opportunities.” And he says this while he knows to do good. He knows that the Christian life is not only saying no to obvious sin but also loving God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. He knows that, but he does not do it.

So when James says, “To him it is sin,” James not merely points out that knowing to do good and not doing it is sin, but he also points out how wicked that sin is. It is sin against knowledge, not simply the knowledge that all men have to lead an externally orderly life but the knowledge of the gospel and of heaven and of hell and of God and of his counsel and will. That is all nothing to such a godless man. God is nothing to him. He listens to sermons on Sunday. He sits in church before God and Jesus Christ, and it is all nothing to him.

So his godless, foolish, and carnal life is against the knowledge of God Most High, whom the man deliberately and consciously puts out of his life, whose goodness he abuses, whose commands he ignores, and whose gospel he despises; and so he becomes the worst of sinners.

For by his place in the church he confesses to believe in God, but by his life he denies God in all that he thinks, plans, and does.

Rather, he ought to say, “If the Lord will, I shall live and do this or that. How must I live in light of the reality that God wills all things and knows all things, also all things about me?” Say and mean it, “If the Lord will, I shall live.” That is a profound statement of true faith. My whole life is in God’s hands. All its twists and turns and ups and downs and all things that befall me in this life

The covenant is the believer’s life of walking with God, of living before the face of God, and of resting and relying upon Christ’s perfect righteousness alone.

come from his fatherly hand. I, my life, and all that I am are subject to the will of God.

What is your life? You do not know if you will be alive at the end of this day, let alone tomorrow or in ten years. If the Lord will, I will live. You and I do not know what will happen the next minute; how can we possibly know what will happen in the next year? We must live that way. We must say that of our hearts: “If the Lord will, we will live this day.”

Does that not also bring peace? How man is full of anxiety and frustration and fear when he puts his life in his own hands. But what peace it brings to say, “If the Lord will, I will live.” If you and I actually say that and live that way, how much more peace we would have in our lives. It is true faith to say that and actually to live that way every day. That takes away fear for the future: fear about what we will eat, what we will drink, what we will wear, and how we will pay the bills. If the Lord will, we will live.

And because our lives are wholly in God’s hand and wholly determined by him, then if the Lord will, we will live and do this or that. All our doing, all our thoughts, and all our planning are in God’s hand.

You see that James does not forbid planning. That is how the boasting fools that James rebukes try to defend their godless and carnal lives. “But James,” they say, “would have us live without a plan, without foresight,

and without hard work.” That is a lie. A man who actually says, “If the Lord will, I will live” will also say, “If the Lord will, I will do this or that.” That is a plan. I will do this or that. That man only can make the best plan for his life because he makes that plan, carries it out, and orders all things in his life in subjection to God and his glory. Then that man does this or that in view of God and by faith in God and with a view to God’s eternal counsel and will that all things be subject to Christ and to the glory of God in Christ.

So James does not say, “Have no plan.” Rather, James demands that we plan in faith and subject all our planning to God’s will as that will becomes known to us in his word and in the circumstances of our lives.

Also then, because our lives here are vapors, our planning may not be merely carnal and devilish planning that has to do with only this life. This life is nothing more than preparation for eternity. We think ninety years is a long time, but they are nothing compared to eternal life and the endless joys of life with God forever. All our purposes that only have to do with this life are also then vapors. All our plans and purposes must be subject to the same goal as God himself has in all his planning and purposes: his glory in the salvation of his church and the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

That is true life with God.

—NJL

GOOD WORKS

1. *I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.*
2. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*
3. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*
4. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*
5. *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*
6. *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

7. *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*
8. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*
(John 15:1–8)

Introduction

This evening we continue our series of meditations on the doctrine of covenant fellowship or the doctrine of unconditional covenant fellowship.¹ The specific doctrine that we are dealing with in these speeches is the doctrine of the covenant but that aspect of the covenant that is the actual experience of fellowship with Jehovah God, the actual walk of God with his people and speech of God to his people—the fellowship and friendship of the covenant. We are dealing in these speeches with the very essence, therefore, of the covenant because the essence of the covenant *is* friendship and fellowship between Jehovah God and his elect people in Jesus Christ. That is the topic, that is the doctrine, that is the subject we are dealing with: covenant fellowship with Jehovah God.

We have seen in these speeches that this covenant fellowship is something that belongs to Jehovah God himself, even apart from us as his church and as his people. God *is* a covenant God. God does not have to have creatures in order to be in a covenant relationship, but Jehovah God in himself *is* covenant family—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. As covenant family, God lives as the triune God in eternal life and lives as the triune God in perfect fellowship.

God in his mercy has willed that we as his church be brought right into that fellowship, so that when we deal with covenant fellowship, we are not dealing with some insignificant thing in our lives; but we are dealing with the very covenant life of God himself. When God takes us into that covenant fellowship, we enjoy fellowship with the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We enjoy that fellowship with him as creatures. He enjoys that fellowship as divine; we enjoy that fellowship as creatures. We are taken right into that very fellowship through the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole doctrine of the covenant and the whole doctrine of covenant fellowship find their focal point in the Lord Jesus Christ because he is the head

of the covenant, and he is the mediator of the covenant. And it is through Jesus Christ alone—through his atonement, which covers all of our sins, and through our union to him as our head—that we have that fellowship with Jehovah God.

God creates that union between Christ and us by his Spirit, so that last time we met we looked at the truth of the Holy Spirit, especially the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, where the Holy Spirit is the author of faith. And by that faith, which itself *is* union with Christ, we are united to Christ, and therefore through faith we have covenant fellowship with God.

Along the way in all of these speeches, we have been seeing that because covenant fellowship is a triune reality, because fellowship is through Christ, because fellowship is by the Spirit, and because fellowship is by faith, our good works that we do as believers do not enter in as that which *causes* the fellowship or as that which is the *means* by which we have the fellowship. That fellow-

ship does not depend upon those good works in any sense.

What Are Good Works?

Tonight we are going to turn our full attention to the truth of good works and continue developing the doctrine of unconditional covenant fellowship by looking specifically at good works: what they are and their place and function in relationship to covenant fellowship with God.

Let's look then at the truth of good works and see what these good works are.

Good works are the works of obedience to the law of God that Jehovah God has decreed for his people, that he works in his people, and that he gives to us as a gift. Good works are the thoughts, the words, and the actions of obedience to God's law. And these thoughts, words, and actions of obedience to God's law are his gift. They come from God and are worked in us by Jehovah God. That's what a good work is.

It is through Jesus Christ alone—through his atonement, which covers all of our sins, and through our union to him as our head—that we have fellowship with Jehovah God.

1 This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given June 2, 2021, which can be found at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=6321015235277>.

Now, important for this topic of covenant fellowship is that these good works are fruits. That is the place and function they have; that is what they are. These good works are fruits. And it is not the invention of the church to call them fruit. That is the word of God in John 15, where Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (vv. 1–2). What Jesus is talking about there in his description of fruit is the good works of the child of God—the obedience to the law of God that God gives to his people. That is the fruit.

That is a common figure throughout scripture and also, therefore, the figure that our confessions take up. In article 24 of the Belgic Confession regarding man’s sanctification and good works, we confess that faith is always a fruit-bearing faith.

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin... Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture *a faith that worketh by love*... These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 52–53)

The Belgic Confession there takes up this language of fruit and calls our good works the fruit of faith.

The picture then that scripture draws for us is that of a grapevine—as Jesus says, “I am the vine”—and the branches that spring from this vine: “Ye are the branches.” That grapevine has a root in the soil, and it is from that root and that vine that all of the branches in that grapevine that are truly united to him receive all of their sap and all of their life. And the result of that life in the branches is that the branches bear fruit. There are grapes, clusters of grapes, hanging from the branches, which are the good works of God’s people—that fruit of faith.

And if we press that illustration a little further, that connection of the branch to the vine is faith: that is the graft by which we are united to Jesus Christ, so that by

faith we produce these fruits of good works. That is the truth of good works. Our good works are the fruit of faith and, therefore, are the gift of Jehovah God.

Now, we can even go further and say that our good works are Jesus’ good works. They are *his* good works. Jesus himself leads us there in John 15:5 when he says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Without the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no fruit. Only by the Lord Jesus Christ, by his power, by his life, and by faith—which is not itself a work but is the opposite of working—by faith, which unites us to him—only by Christ and by faith does that branch bring forth fruit. And so we may say that these are the works of the Lord Jesus Christ, which he works in us and which he works through us. This is no denial that the child of God works and obeys by the power of God through faith. But those works that

the child of God produces must all be ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit, who unites us to Christ. For that Holy Spirit is the author of faith, and that Holy Spirit is the author of every good work that we do.

That is confessional language in Canons 3–4.16. The author of every good work works these

in us. The confession that these good works are Jesus’ works that he works in us and through us is the same thing as confessing that these good works are the fruit of faith and the fruit of salvation and the fruit of the work of God.

The Place and Function of Good Works

To zero in on the place and function that these works have with relation to covenant fellowship with God, there are four points.

First, these good works have an expansive place, a huge place, in the life of the child of God and in God’s purpose for the child of God. Good works are not a small matter. Good works are not insignificant things that we have no real use for. The truth of good works and the good works themselves have an expansive place. The good works of the child of God are the *purpose* of our salvation. The reason God saves us is in order that we may bear fruit and in order that we may do good works.

The scriptures teach that in John 15, for example, when they call our good works the fruit that is borne by the branches. Why does a husbandman have a grapevine? Why does he plant a grapevine and tend it? His

Those works that the child of God produces must all be ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit, who unites us to Christ.

purpose with the grapevine is the fruit of the grapevine. So also Ephesians 2:10: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” God has created us unto, for the purpose of, these good works and living in and walking in these good works. That is a huge place for good works, a beautiful, expansive place. It is not the place of *ground*. Good works are not the ground of salvation. Then we say, no. Good works are not the means of salvation or the instrument. No. But purpose? Yes. God has saved us by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to his glory alone, and his glory is served by the doing of these good works. That is an expansive place.

Also with regard to the expansive, large place of good works, good works are the demonstration of our faith. Good works are how other people know that we are Christians. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). How do men know if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ? You can tell them, and you can show them. And you show them by your love of God and your obedience to his law, your keeping of his commandments. That is a huge place for good works, so that other people see those good works, and the elect among them are led to glorify our Father who is in heaven. They are led to ask us a reason of the hope that is in us. This is a huge and an expansive place for good works.

That takes us to the second main place and function of good works: they have a very desirable place. The child of God loves good works; he wants to do them. He does not go around wanting *not* to do them. He does not say to himself and to the church, “I hate good works. I wish I could stop doing good works.” The child of God loves good works. He wants to obey the law of God. In fact, he insists on it that he *must* do good works and that he *wants* to do them.

This is an answer to the accusation that the church that teaches salvation by grace alone without works, and the church that teaches covenant fellowship with God by grace alone without the imposition of good works for that fellowship, has no use for works, that that church is against the law of God, that that church is lawless and delights in sin and eventually will become a congregation that runs in sin and that is completely antinomian and anti-law. The accusation that a church that teaches salvation by grace alone hates works is false. That is a slander.

The reason God saves us is in order that we may bear fruit and in order that we may do good works.

The church that teaches salvation by grace alone loves works. We want to do them; we love the law of God that teaches us what those good works are. The child of God loves to bear fruit; he wants to bear fruit. And that child of God reproaches himself and is sorry before God when he does not bear the fruit that the word of God requires of him. The child of God loves good works and finds good works to have a very desirable place. In fact, we can say it this strongly: the child of God is truly happy when he is doing good works. That is when he is truly happy: when he is doing good works. And he is not truly happy when he is walking in sin and not doing good works. That doesn't mean that he is happy *because* he is doing good works. It does not mean that he is happy *by means of* doing good works. No to both of those. The child of God, loving good works and loving the law of God, is truly happy when he is doing good works, and he is not truly happy when he is not doing good works. The believer sings and believes Psalm 1: “Blessed [happy] is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (vv. 1–2). Amen, we say to that. Blessed is that man, happy is that man who loves and obeys that law.

And we believe and confess Canons of Dordt 5.5. We are sometimes made out to be enemies of Canons 5.5, which says that by “melancholy falls” (Canons 5.6) the child of God may “lose the sense of God's favor for a time” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 174). The child of God interrupts the exercise of faith until, returning to the right way of repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon him. We are made out to be enemies of this article. That is a slander too. We love this article. We believe and confess Canons 5.5. There is a delightful and desirable place for good works.

Third, the main place and function of good works is that they are necessary. It is a necessary place. Works are commanded. Fruit is commanded. Fruit is promised too. And fruit is produced not by the law and not by our efforts to keep the law, though God gives us those efforts and calls us to expend those efforts. God gives us that fruit, but that fruit is commanded. The law of God requires the child of God to obey. The church that teaches salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and the church that teaches fellowship with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, is not a church that sets aside the law of God as the rule, guide, and standard

of our thankful lives for the salvation that God has given to us. The child of God hears that law and knows that the command, “Thou shalt have no other gods” is a command for me and that God requires of me that I have no other gods before him. Now, I know that that obedience does not earn me a thing. And the moment I try to make it earn me something, I have ruined the whole thing. That obedience is strictly fruit. But that obedience is *required* fruit. The church that confesses salvation by grace does not deny the necessity of good works and the command of the law of God but teaches that command and teaches that law, even vigorously. And the church then also calls to repentance her members for disobeying that law and rebukes the members for their sins against that law and calls them to repentance for those sins and to faith in Jesus Christ for the covering of those sins and for the doing of good works. Because only by faith in Christ—only by faith in Christ, which is not work—does the child of God do those good works.

Those are the three places so far with regard to the place and function of good works: an expansive place, a desirable place, and a necessary place.

Now fourth, a restricted place. Good works have a place, but it is a very specific place. And good works must be kept in that place. It is the place of fruit. That is the place of good works. It is fruit. And it is only fruit. It is only ever fruit. Good works never become something more than fruit in the life of the child of God. Good works, for example, never become the graft that unites us to Christ. What a foolish thing. What a foolish farmer who would come to his grapevine and pluck off a grape and take in his hand a dead branch and try to make that grape hold that dead branch to the vine. That fruit is not the graft. It is the fruit, and it remains the fruit. The graft is something else: the graft is faith. That is the union to Christ. That is how the child of God does these good works—by faith and by faith alone. The fruit, the good works, remain only the fruit.

And neither is the fruit the root of the plant. The fruit cannot be plucked off and smashed onto the base of the vine where it enters into the ground, so that that grape becomes the root of the plant. The root is the root, and the vine is the vine, and the good works are the fruit. Jesus Christ alone has the honor of being the vine. And he alone has the honor of producing the fruit in

the branches, which is why it is by faith, which is not a work. Jesus Christ alone has that honor, so that the good works remain fruit. That is what they are. That is the very restricted place of good works.

Good Works and Covenant Fellowship

That means then that the covenant fellowship that we enjoy with Jehovah God is not *because of* your works and not *by means of* your works. The works are the fruit of that faith, by which faith alone we have this fellowship. The works are the fruit of the Spirit’s work uniting us to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that it is not by those works that we have covenant fellowship. You could put it this way: that covenant fellowship is walking and talking. That is Genesis 3:8. After Adam and Eve fell, “they heard the

voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Here comes God walking, walking with his people. Here comes God speaking, talking to his people. Walking and talking. That’s covenant fellowship with God. He walks and talks with you. He walks with you by his Spirit and speaks to you by his gospel. And that is your fellowship with him. That is his fellowship with you. That is how you enjoy that friendship with him.

We can even say this: our good works are then the response and the result in this fellowship of walking and talking with God. How do we respond to his fellowship with us? By obedience, by taking out his law and by seeking the Lord Jesus Christ by faith to obey that law, and by saying, “This is how I will walk and I will speak to him in worship.” That is really what worship is. Worship is the speaking of Jehovah’s people to him in praise. That is what our confessions call our part in the covenant. Our part in the covenant is obedience to God.

But all of that part in the covenant does not obtain the fellowship and does not obtain the walking and speaking of God with us. You have that fellowship with God by faith through the Spirit and in Jesus Christ alone. You have that fellowship with God *before you ever do a good work*.

That is how it was with Adam and Eve. When they fell God came to them, and he fellowshiped with them. He spoke to them the most blessed word of promise: the seed, the seed of the woman who would deliver them. That was God’s fellowship with them. They heard it with their ears; they saw God standing before them as he spoke

The child of God enjoys fellowship with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And our good works are the fruit of that faith—not the cause of it, not the condition for it, not the instrument of it.

it. And he walked with them in that fellowship when he took an animal and slew it and shed its blood as a picture of the shed blood of Christ and covered them with the skin of that animal. That was God's fellowship with them before they ever did a good thing. While they were still wallowing in their sin, afraid in their sin, God came and fellowshiped with them. And the fruit of that was their obedience in teaching Abel what a right sacrifice is and what right worship of Jehovah God looks like.

The child of God enjoys fellowship with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And our good works are the fruit of that faith—not the cause of it, not the condition for it, not the instrument of it.

Doctrinal Heritage

I want to impress upon us that this is our heritage. This doctrine is our heritage as a congregation, and it is our heritage as the Reformed Protestant Churches.

It is this place of works that explains the difference between this church and other Reformed churches. And it is the place of works in this specific arena of covenant fellowship and friendship and enjoyment of the covenant that is the difference between this church and mother. This is the doctrine that is distinctive and separate. And this is the doctrine for which we have separated: unconditional covenant fellowship. If someone asks you, "Why aren't you Protestant Reformed anymore?" your answer is not this: "Well, they deposed Reverend Lanning" or "They suspended Reverend Langerak." That all is something, but that is not the reason you are not Protestant Reformed anymore. The reason you are not Protestant Reformed and had to come out and had to exist separately is unconditional covenant fellowship. That is what has been lost in mother. That is what is being corrupted in mother. And that is the truth you cannot stand to see corrupted and must stand in favor of: unconditional covenant fellowship.

Now, if anyone challenges that and says, "We never corrupted unconditional covenant fellowship," indeed mother did. These are two quotations from writings or sermons after Synod 2018, quotations that stand; and the ministers who spoke them are not only in good standing in mother [at the time this speech was given] but also

leaders in mother. "If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do." That is bad enough in itself. "If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do." But what did the minister mean by that? What arena of theology was he working with when he made that statement? He went on later in the same article to clarify this way:

That the writers of the Canons insisted that the gospel preached was a necessary means of grace (cf. the opening sentence of Art. 17) means they confessed and taught that if a man with his household was to be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom, placing himself with his family under the rule of Christ as his Lord and Savior, he was called, he was required, to respond obediently to the call and command of the gospel—"Repent and believe, that thou mightiest [*sic*] be saved with thy house."¹

Did you catch the arena that he was working with? Consciously entering the kingdom. That is fellowship. That is the arena of covenant fellowship with our mind, with our understanding; knowing the fellowship of God. And what is his theology of that covenant fellowship? It is this: If a man would have that, there is that which he must do. That is the wrong place for good works.

That is a condition for good works. That is mother. That statement stands to this day. That is intolerable. That is the need for a separate existence.

Then, in a sermon by a different Protestant Reformed minister:

God's sovereignty, man's responsibility.

God's gifts and Christ's merits does not exclude God's use of means, does not exclude God's gift of the use of the means of our obedience.

One more time: God's gifts and Christ's merits does not exclude God's sovereign use of the means of our obedience.

So as the inspired word in Hebrews 4:11 says, Labor to enter into the rest, lest ye fall in unbelief. *Labor* to enter into the rest, lest ye fall in unbelief, Hebrews 4:11. And that labor is what we identified in Deuteronomy 10:12: keep his commandments.²

1 Kenneth Koole, "What Must I Do...?," *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 8.

2 Transcript of sermon, "Calling toward the Canaanites," preached by Rev. R. Van Overloop on November 29, 2020, in Grace Protestant Reformed Church.

Did you catch the arena that he was working with? Entering rest. That is fellowship; that is covenant fellowship. And what is his theology of entering into rest? You must labor to do it. That is good, biblical language; but that good, biblical language in Hebrew 4:11, Labor to enter into the rest, is not a reference to the law. That is what he makes it: “That labor is what we identified in Deuteronomy 10:12: keep his commandments.” How do you get into rest? How do you enjoy that fellowship? Labor by keeping commandments. That is conditional; that is the wrong place and function of good works.

That is the reason that there had to be separation.

And now take warning, because that same error of conditions is going to come back. The devil is not finished with that false doctrine in the church of Jesus Christ. How that will look, who knows? But that has always been the attack of Satan from the beginning, from the moment

Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves to cover themselves by their work. And that remains the attack of the devil to the present day. Beware.

Good works are beautiful. They are a lovely fruit that God gives, but they have a very specific place, a very restricted place: they are fruit.

And so let us maintain by the grace of God that place for good works. Let us not heed those who would say, “Good works are not only fruit; they have other functions too.”

Good works are beautiful fruit but only fruit. And that to the glory of Jehovah God and to the glory of Jesus Christ, so that our salvation and our covenant fellowship and our enjoyment of that covenant fellowship is by grace alone through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of Jehovah God alone.

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

Already it is March. Here at the headquarters of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP), the sun has some warmth in it again. There may be snow yet, but the winds of spring begin to blow. “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth” (Ps. 104:30).

Meanwhile, the winds of false doctrine continue to blow unabated. This too is according to the counsel of Jehovah. “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor. 11:19).

The articles in this issue set forth the truth of the gospel over against the lies, “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14).

The articles in this issue speak for themselves, except, perhaps, for the editorial. The editorial is a transcript of a speech at one of the Wednesday night doctrine classes last year in First Reformed Protestant Church. The popular and thoughtless accusation of the day is that the Reformed Protestant Churches are antinomian, despising good works. Let the reader examine the speech and judge for himself whether the accusation is true or false.

The editorial that was originally planned for this issue is being pushed back to a special March 15 issue of the magazine that will deal with the doctrine of repentance. Let Caesar beware the Ides of March, but let *Sword and Shield* readers keep an eye on their mailboxes.

Speaking of special issues, we continue to hear how much our readers look forward to letters editions of *Sword and Shield*. So keep the letters coming! Whether you have a question to ask or a point to make, or you just need to let us know how wrong we are about everything, you have an open forum and a wide readership in *Sword and Shield*.

Finally, a note about bound volumes of *Sword and Shield*. Those who have saved their issues from volume 1 and would like them bound, please have them brought to the RBP office by April 1. The cost to have them bound will be \$35. Reminder: there are fifteen issues in volume 1 (twelve monthly issues and three special issues).

Those who do not have their back issues can purchase a bound volume using RBP’s stock at a cost of \$45. Please notify the RBP office by April 1 if you would like to purchase this option.

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

—AL

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

APOLOGY OF REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Apology

The purpose of this letter is to apologize. From November 15, 2020 through January 15, 2021, I wrote a series of five articles on the seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Witsius, reflecting on his book entitled *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions, on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomianism and Neonomians*. On account of objections raised against these articles, working with my consistory, and discussions with a number of my colleagues, I am persuaded that I owe the readers of the *SB* an apology.

As I informed my consistory and the readers in my articles on Witsius, I was persuaded that the statements I commented on could be explained in such a way as to harmonize with our Synod's decisions, that is, when considered in the light of the error Witsius was opposing and then his fuller explanation. My consistory pointed out that a number of Witsius' statements, as they are worded, no matter how I read them and was convinced what Witsius meant by them, stand in contradiction to decisions of our recent synods (in particular those of 2018) and to our confessions, and thus constitute false doctrine. As a result, the articles, instead of helping clarify issues in our present controversy over the place and function of good works in the life of the child of God, sowed confusion and, in light of Synod 2018's decisions, promoted statements and theology that Synod judged to be erroneous.

In particular I was pointed to Witsius stating, in the context of the utility (usefulness) of holiness and good works, that "Scripture teaches that something must be done that we may be saved"; also to the statement, "We must accurately distinguish between a right to life and the possession of life.... But certainly, our works, or rather those, which the Spirit of Christ worketh in us and by us, contribute something to the latter [that is, to the possession of life and salvation]"; and also to Witsius' statement,

"Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the souls [*sic*] as to its justification."

My attempt to explain what Witsius meant by these phrases in an orthodox fashion did not help clear up confusion, but contributed to it, as if such wording and phrases could be [*sic*] still be considered orthodox and language that I would approve of today. Let me state categorically, I do not. And I certainly do not maintain that good works are to serve along with faith as a secondary instrument to assure one of justification, of one being counted righteous before God. Faith, based on Christ's atoning sacrifice, is the one only instrument.

I do not propose we use Witsius' language in the preaching, nor would I suggest we approve of it if it were used. No more than I would approve in our day of using the word "conditions" in connection with life in covenant. Such words and phrases have come to be loaded with erroneous connotations and ought not have our approval today. I should have made that clear in my articles, but did not, leading to unnecessary questions and confusion. For this I am sorry and apologize.

Whatever Witsius may have meant or intended by them, they are not phrases or words we should use from Protestant Reformed pulpits. Nor should they have our approval if used. As they stand, they would teach that man's good works function as an instrument through which the believer receives or gains some aspect of salvation. This is error to which I do not subscribe.

I am sorry for the confusion and resulting unrest these articles have caused. I assure you, as I did my consistory, that I wholeheartedly agree with and subscribe to the decisions of our recent synods, repudiating all that is contrary to them.

Rev. Kenneth Koole¹

¹ Kenneth Koole, "Apology," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 4 (November 15, 2021): 79–80.

Reverend Koole Taught the Same

Herman Witsius said, “Scripture teaches that something must be done that we may be saved.”

Reverend Koole asked, “Is it altogether improper for preachers so much as to suggest that there is that which one *can* do (is able to do)? And then, in the end, to go so far as to declare that if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do?”² However, that was not a question for him. The question was deception. He meant this question as a statement, as his later *Standard Bearer* articles proved.

He also wrote,

What the Canons wanted no part of was the notion that these spiritual actions [“Good actions! Namely, faith (actively believing) and godliness (the life of good works)”] are automatically present and produced where grace has worked, provided by God in such a way that the child of God has nothing to do with actually believing or walking in godliness. The Spirit of Christ who has begun this work in him is really the One who now does this work through him, simply providing for one what he cannot do himself. (8)

Reverend Koole shamelessly denied what Canons 3–4.14 teaches in almost exactly opposite words from what he confesses: God “produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 169). He denied this because he teaches that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.” Man does it by grace, but man must do it. To use an analogy for Koole’s theology: God gives to man an arm, and God gives to man strength in his arm, and all man has to do is exercise that strength. There is that which man must do to be saved.

Seeking to find his doctrine in scripture, he wrote,

This must be maintained if one will do justice to the record of the apostolic Scriptures.

On Pentecost, following Peter’s sermon concerning Jesus crucified and risen as the scripturally prophesied Messiah, a multitude besought the apostles, asking “Men and brethren, what must *we do*?” To which Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...” (Acts 2:37,38)

The Philippian jailor cried out “Sirs, what must *I do* to be saved?” To which Paul responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...” (Acts 16:30, 31).

There was something they were called *to do*. And they did it. (8)

Koole’s understanding of the apostles’ answer to the questions posed to them is that the apostles were assuring the people that there was indeed something they had to do to be saved. They had to do faith, and they had to do repentance. Faith and repentance were their obedience to the gospel by which they were saved. They did it!

He taught that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.” He taught the same thing as Herman Witsius taught, in almost the exact same words.

You must remember that in his apology Reverend Koole disapproves of Witsius. Koole says,

I do not propose we use Witsius’ language in the preaching, nor would I suggest we approve of it if it were used...

Whatever Witsius may have meant or intended by them [the quotes that Reverend Koole used], they are not phrases or words we should use from Protestant Reformed pulpits. Nor should they have our approval if used.

Koole analyzes Witsius’ statements in the following way: “As they stand, they would teach that man’s good works function as an instrument through which the believer receives or gains some aspect of salvation.” According to Koole, Witsius’ statements teach the heresy of salvation by works.

In his apology Reverend Koole also says,

Such words and phrases have come to be loaded with erroneous connotations and ought not have our approval today. I should have made that clear in my articles, but did not, leading to unnecessary questions and confusion. For this I am sorry and apologize.

He writes as though he understood that those phrases of Witsius were full of erroneous connotations, but his only error was that he did not make that clear in his articles. However, Reverend Koole used Witsius’ quotations to prop up his (Koole’s) own false theology and to instruct the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) that she should preach and teach the same theology.

Now he condemns Witsius as teaching the heresy of salvation by works. But in that Koole also condemns his own theology as the heresy of salvation by works. He apologizes for Witsius, but Koole never has retracted and never has militated against his own false doctrine that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.”

2 Kenneth Koole, “What Must I Do?,” *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 7. Subsequent quotations from this article are given in text.

Reverend Koole also says in his apology that his use of Witsius led to “unnecessary questions and confusion.” But what of the theology that, prior to quoting from Witsius, Koole himself taught in almost the exact same words as he now condemns in Witsius? That did not lead to mere “confusion,” but it led to schism. It did not lead to “unnecessary questions,” but it rent apart the churches of Jesus Christ. Because of his theology and stubborn defense of it, he more than any other is responsible for the split in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Immediately after Synod 2018, when Reverend Koole taught that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do,” we realized that the Protestant Reformed hierarchy was committed to conditional theology in the covenant. There is no discernible difference between Koole’s theology and the theology of the conditional covenant theologians of the past, such as Witsius, and the conditional covenant theology of Rev. H. De Wolf that split the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1953.

When Reverend Koole taught his conditional theology that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do,” we realized that the Protestant Reformed hierarchy was not going to trumpet whatever good there was in the decision of Synod 2018, but it was going to teach the theology that obedience is the way to the Father. That obedience was the way to the Father was the theology of Rev. D. Overway and Hope church’s consistory. That is what the Protestant Reformed hierarchy believed. One of the delegates said on the floor of Synod 2018 immediately after the decision condemning the doctrinal statement, which taught the same error as the sermons of Rev. D. Overway, that he believed the condemned theology, and he intended to continue teaching it.

Reverend Koole shamelessly denied what Canons 3–4.14 teaches in almost exactly opposite words from what he confesses: God “produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.”

Reverend Koole showed that this was true of the hierarchy of the PRC generally. The PRC was going to teach that works are the way to the Father and now in this form: “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.” They were going to cover that theology by appeals to man’s regeneration and man’s spiritual activities and man’s responsibilities. All of those things were only camouflages for their doctrine that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.”

There is no difference between the theology of Reverend Overway and the theology of Reverend Koole. Overway taught that Christ is the way to the Father through the obedience that he works in you. Koole taught that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do,” by grace of course. These two statements are the same theology. They are a theology of salvation, of covenant fellowship with God, and of assurance by man’s works done by grace.

That is what I, Rev. A. Lanning, Rev. M. VanderWal, and other men who started Reformed Believers Publishing contended against Koole’s article about what man must do to be saved. I cannot help but quote from the letter of a group of men concerned with Reverend Koole’s articles. These men wrote to the board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) before the formation of *Sword and Shield* in

an effort to get the men on the board to see the necessity of a forum for the free discussion of these doctrinal issues. The editors of the *Standard Bearer* were busy bullying the RFPA board to take down articles that had been written on the blog and stonewalling or refusing to publish letters written to the *Standard Bearer* editors. There was an orchestrated effort by them to shut down debate of the doctrinal issues. I include the quotation here so that everyone can read what we said already in 2019.

Concerned Men’s Brief Analysis

We disagree with Rev. Koole’s analysis of the Acts 16 passage about the Philippian jailor that he first printed in the Oct. 1, 2018 *SB* and with his later criticism of the explanation of that passage by Rev. Herman Hoeksema as that is contained in a well-known sermon on that passage preached during the heights of the 1953 controversy in our churches. We understand that to obey the gospel

is to believe, but we understand that activity of the sinner as wholly unique—indeed a resting on Christ crucified alone for salvation. We disagree that faith is a doing by the sinner—even if he does it by grace—for salvation. We do not believe that the purpose of the passage or the Holy Ghost’s inspiring the record of the Philippian jailor’s question about what he must do to be saved was to teach

about faith as an activity and certainly not in the sense in which Rev. Koole explains it. The Philippian jailor was an elect sinner whom God brought to the brink of hell and despair and not an antinomian who had to be disabused of his antinomian tendencies.

Rather the passage reveals the wonderful sovereignty of God in the salvation of a heathen sinner. The text is about *the calling*, the calling as a wonder of God's grace by which God saved the jailor without any of his works. That is what Rev. Hoeksema was preaching in that sermon over against the theology of that day that used passages like this to teach conditions in salvation by an emphasis on faith as an activity and on man's responsibility. Not all the ministers were as bold as Rev. De Wolf, and Rev. Hoeksema notes that in the sermon and elsewhere in the literature of the day. There was a trend and an emphasis. *Activity* and *responsibility* were the watchwords of the day in the preaching and writing of the ministers. That trend and emphasis led to the explicit preaching and defense of conditions and the gospel was lost to many. When Rev. Hoeksema preached that sermon he did so as that controversy had come to a head. When he preached that sermon, he preached the gospel, the full gospel, the glorious gospel of grace, a kind of distillation of his preaching his entire ministry long and the kind of preaching for which he was contending in the PRC and for which he would occasion a split in the PRC.

About that preaching Rev. Koole says,

When it comes to H. Hoeksema's sermon on the Philippian jailer, I understand quite well what HH was doing. He was magnifying God's sovereign grace over against the incipient Arminianism in conditional covenant theology. I esteem him for that. But in this instance, he went about it in an unnecessary manner, one that can easily lead to improper doctrinal conclusions and charges. HH's explanation of the salvation of the Philippian jailor in this one sermon is not the *full* Hoeksema. In order to condemn conditional covenant theology, one does not have to say that the apostles were calling regenerated men to do nothing.

That is not in fact what Rev. Hoeksema was doing. He was not merely magnifying the grace of God against Arminianism. He explicitly rejected Arminianism. He was not merely against "incipient Arminianism," which is Arminianism in seed form, but he was rejecting the actual, developed Arminianism of the conditional covenant theology of the Liberated churches. He was not merely rejecting that abstractly, but as it had infected the Protestant Reformed Churches in the form of conditional covenant theology.

He did not reject that by preaching against a caricature of that false position, but as it really was preached and as that false theology defended itself by appeals to faith's activity and man's responsibility. Rev. Hoeksema exposed the subtlety of that theology, which claimed to express Scriptural and Reformed ideas, but in fact rejected them and did so under the guise of emphasizing faith's activity and man's responsibility.

About what Rev. Hoeksema was doing Rev. Koole says that "he went about it in an unnecessary manner, one that can easily lead to improper doctrinal conclusions and charges." This is an astounding statement. We find nothing wrong with Rev. Hoeksema's manner, but love him exactly for that preaching and receive it as the gospel. We do not find that that gospel "can easily lead to improper doctrinal conclusions and charges," as Rev. Koole contends. We find Rev. Koole's statements particularly troubling in light of the fact that it was exactly HH's preaching and teaching of this kind that was set down in the declaration of principles and that led to the rejection of conditions—any and all conditions in the covenant—and that finally led to the charges of false doctrine against a PR minister. These were not improper doctrinal conclusions or charges, but right and necessary.

He also makes mention of "the heart of the issue in our present controversy, namely, when it comes to the wonder of irresistible grace, what historically has Christ's church meant to establish by this confession?" We agree with Rev. Koole that there is a present controversy and are thankful that he will finally admit what was so consistently denied throughout this issue that has plagued our churches, namely, that we have a controversy.

We disagree with his assessment of it. By this statement Rev. Koole is continuing to do what he has done from the beginning with his original article in the October 1, 2018 issue of the *SB* and what was done at the assemblies and that distracted from the real issue: he is attempting to reframe the controversy as between those who deny that man is active and those that teach that man is active. Consequently he is framing this controversy as an issue between those who will not or cannot preach the warnings, callings, and admonitions of Scripture and those that will and can. Thus the matter is framed as an issue between those that are antinomian and those that are not. This is to confuse the matter, mislead, and sound a false alarm.

Most troubling is that we see such a position is used to accuse brethren who maintain a position that represents the historic Reformed faith and Protestant Reformed position, a theology [that] at one time was found

on the pages of the *SB*, of antinomianism. Rev. Koole writes about the letter writer and by implication of the theology of Rev. Herman Hoeksema that the man is espousing,

I am convinced that while you want nothing to do with hyper-Calvinism, antinomianism, or labeling regenerated men stocks and blocks, you are heading in that direction by your failure to give full glory to what irresistible grace makes of a man, what it enables us as new creatures to do in response to the Word of God in law and gospel. That's what becomes consistent with your view. Not staying out of the hyper-Calvinist ditch, but sliding into it.

He writes later,

It is the view you are espousing...that in the end seriously underestimates and diminishes the true power and work of the indwelling and sanctifying Holy Spirit. And that, in turn, will have an adverse effect on what the preaching can and must expect of regenerated, confessing men and women in Christ's church.

The theology of Rev. Herman Hoeksema as it was preached in that sermon is now viewed as a threat and danger to the PRC, and those that espouse it are considered hyper-Calvinistic and antinomian.

The issue is not as Rev. Koole explains. The issue is whether man's activity worked in him by the grace of God is that upon which his salvation depends. The question is whether God saves a man wholly by his grace, from beginning to end, or whether God saves a man by the activity of man that God works in him. Is man's activity the gift of his salvation, or is man's activity the means of his salvation? To put it bluntly the new sound coming from the *SB* is that man does—by God's grace of course—for his salvation! If a man will be saved, there is something that he must do!

We conclude our analysis with a warning to you as the Board of the RFPA:

In this connection I cannot refrain from issuing to all of you a word of warning. I'll do it. You know, we talk about so much in our day, and in our churches,—we talk about responsibility. We talk about the activity of faith. And similar things. I'll warn you that on that basis and in that line we're going to lose the gospel. We're going to lose the gospel. We're going to lose election. We're going to lose reprobation. We're going to lose the gospel, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. O yes, we must preach the activity of faith. But by the activity of faith I mean not something that you and I must do, except that first of all, by the activity of faith we cling to Christ, and embrace Him and all His benefits. That is the activity of faith. Responsibility? Don't you ever forget that the accusation that Reformed people cannot maintain responsibility has always been brought against,—Reformed people have always been accused of denying responsibility by those that are Arminians and moderns. We do not deny responsibility. We do not deny the activity of faith. Of course not. But I warn you that with the emphasis that is laid upon these things, upon conditions, upon activity of faith, and upon responsibility, you're going to lose the gospel. That's my warning (Herman Hoeksema, Transcript of Address and Question Hour, *SB* 1958, issue 21).

That warning has been ignored and now we are in danger of losing the gospel. The main burden of this letter is that there must be a forum for the free discussion of these issues. Those that will speak on one side of the issue are being silenced. As a board you may not countenance that, acquiesce in that, turn a blind eye to that, or allow that to continue.

The Cause of Schism

Reverend Koole wrote, "If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do." That was not a mere slip of the tongue or a mistake of the pen. It was the expression of his theology and an expression of his theology as he had developed it, having consciously and deliberately rejected the theology of Herman Hoeksema as that theology found expression in Hoeksema's explanation of the Philippian jailor passage in Acts 16:30–31.

Reverend Hoeksema said that when the apostle responded to the jailor's question, "What must I do?," the apostle was saying, "Do nothing, nothing but believe," in which statement Hoeksema explained faith as a doing nothing for salvation and as God's work in the sinner.

Reverend Koole told his readers that he regarded that explanation as "Nonsense!" He claimed, "I was well aware of the sermon prior to writing the October 1 editorial. I have had that sermon (typed out by C. Hanko)

for some time.”³ Reverend Koole never preached the sermon or the theology of the sermon. He let the sermon sit; and finally, when he thought the time was right, he pitched Herman Hoeksema’s explanation overboard as nonsense.

Reverend Koole’s defense of his false doctrine that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do”; the stubborn protection of him by the other *Standard Bearer* editors; and the shameful failure of the Reformed Free Publishing Association to let the doctrinal debate happen in the *Standard Bearer* and, in fact, their aiding and abetting of Koole’s false doctrine, showed that this was the theology of the Protestant Reformed hierarchy. It was this theology that led to the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing and the publication of *Sword and Shield* in June 2020.

As soon as the first issue of *Sword and Shield* was published, there began an orchestrated attack on the names, reputations, and offices of the men involved. That led to the suspension of Rev. M. VanderWal, the suspension and deposition of Rev. A. Lanning, and the suspension of Rev. N. Langerak. That led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. It was Reverend Koole’s theology more than any other that led to these things.

His apology for Witsius shows that when he taught that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do,” he knew what he was doing and what that theology taught. His apology for Witsius also shows that when Reverend Koole was called out on that heretical theology, and he denied that he was teaching salvation by works and that he was militating against synod, he was lying. We had condemned his theology, and he had defended it.

Then suddenly he fell silent.

Shortly thereafter, Reverend Koole reappeared on the pages of the *Standard Bearer* with a series of articles on Herman Witsius to teach from the mouth of the dead Witsius that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.

Now he apologizes for Witsius. Having exhumed him and having found that the body stinks of Arminianism and Pelagianism, Koole quickly buries Witsius again. But Koole’s own stinky theology, he does not address.

This theology has been vigorously and publicly contended against and just as vigorously and publicly

defended by Reverend Koole and privately defended by his colleagues.

I know it to be true that when troubled members of the Protestant Reformed Churches went to their ministers to ask them whether it is true that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do,” those Protestant Reformed ministers defended Reverend Koole and explained that he was right and that this statement is Reformed orthodoxy.

I ask, where are their apologies? Professor Dykstra and Professor Gritters were both involved in protecting Koole and defending him. They played as though each editor had acted independently, but they were Cerberus, hell’s three-headed hound, and together they stymied debate by refusals to publish letters or by endless meetings or sought to wear out any opposition by false charges of sin. Where are their apologies?

Reverend Koole’s theology is the theology of the *Standard Bearer*; it is the theology of the RFPA; and it is the theology of the Protestant Reformed hierarchy.

Now Koole appears on the pages of the *Standard Bearer* to apologize for the dead Witsius and to tell us that Witsius’ statement that there is that which a man must do to be saved is false theology. But Koole taught

the same exact thing. And his theology is to blame for schism. He gives no apology for that, and neither do any of his defenders.

Still Preaching It

And Reverend Koole is still preaching his heretical theology that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.” He recently preached a preparatory sermon to the congregation of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church on the text that the righteous are scarcely saved (1 Pet. 4:18), in which he said,

Now it speaks here of the “righteous.” When it speaks of the “righteous,” it is not speaking *primarily* of the justified. There are some who have that view, and you can have that view of the text. But that is not, I’m convinced, the real view of the text. It is not speaking simply of the justified. It is speaking of those who, having been justified, *walk in an upright way, and as such they are the righteous*, you see, as Matthew 5 speaks of

3 Kenneth Koole, “Response [to Rev. Andy Lanning],” *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 12 (March 15, 2019): 279.

the righteous. “Blessed are you when men persecute you for righteousness’ sake.” Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and that does not have to do with justification. It has to do with *uprightness, you are living in the upright way, and their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees* because the scribes and Pharisees just put on an outward show. They kept the law from a certain outward point of view, but it was only what they didn’t do. “I didn’t do this; I didn’t do that; I didn’t do the other.”

Christ says, “You didn’t do this, didn’t do... but what did you do? Did you love your neighbor as you ought in your so-called love of God? Did you do good to the neighbor? Or did you despise the widow and those who have no status? Were you like the good Samaritan, or were you not like the good Samaritan?”...

Did you have love? Were you interested in ministering to the needy in the church? Did you treat your spouse with consideration, loving your neighbor as yourself?

If not, refrain from the table until you are walking in the way of love, and your righteousness, your uprightness, exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, who despised others and would get rid of their wives left and right. That is why you had so many divorces and so many prostitutes—women cast off by the scribes and Pharisees in their outward righteousness, and they had no wherewithal but to sell their bodies. And Christ ministered to them, not to approve of their adultery but to call them from their adultery and fornication and to restore them to godliness.⁴

Those who came to the Lord’s table the following Sunday revealed much about themselves. Reverend Koole had defiled the table of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church with the error of works-righteousness. He had robbed the people of the comfort of the gospel and thus the assurance that is theirs through Christ’s righteousness. Those who came to the table after that preparatory sermon testified thereby that they were worthy partakers because of their righteousness—their obedience to the law of God—which exceeded the obedience of the scribes

and Pharisees. Apart now from the monstrous pride in the statement, there is the total displacement of Christ’s righteousness—Christ himself—as the only ground of our coming to God, our sitting in fellowship with God, and our eating and drinking of the Lord’s supper.

This sermon also shows that Reverend Koole is still teaching that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.” Now men have to do the whole law and do the law better than the Pharisees, of all people.

But no one did the law better than the Pharisees. Paul was a Pharisee; and if someone could have entered heaven by law-keeping, it would have been Paul. Touching the righteousness that is in the law, he was blameless! In his blameless righteousness he was without God and without hope in the world, an unbelieving persecutor of the church and ignorant of the righteousness of God, which is Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Reverend Koole teaches that we must be better than the Pharisees, or we had better stay away from the Lord’s table. The way to the Father is what we do by grace. There is, after all, that which man must do to be saved.

Some will say to me, “But he mentions Christ in the sermon.”

He does. He even mentions Christ’s righteousness. He does. I want everyone who listens to Protestant Reformed preaching to understand this: the righteousness of Christ in the Protestant Reformed Churches only serves the purpose that God can deal with you again on the basis of your works. Christ serves the law. The new work, the new obedience, is faith and that you at least obey the law better than the Pharisees. If you fail, which the ministers tell you that you will, then the righteousness of Christ makes up your lack and bails you out of hell. But what you do is the important thing. “If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.” Your works in Christ are the way to the Father.

Protestant Reformed ministers will tell you and anyone who will listen that they do not believe and never have believed that good works merit or earn salvation or any benefit of salvation. But that is not the issue. They do believe and they do teach that good works are the way to covenant fellowship with God. This means that good works are the way to the Father. And this means that good works earn some blessing of God. They believe yet to this day, and they teach yet to this day, what Reverend

As soon as the first issue of *Sword and Shield* was published, there began an orchestrated attack on the names, reputations, and offices of the men involved.

4 Kenneth Koole, “The Righteous Scarcely, but Surely, Saved,” sermon preached February 16, 2022, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermon-info.asp?SID=1182233043840>.

Overway preached at Hope church and what Classis East defended throughout the controversy. Reverend Koole taught that, and he still is teaching it.

Now he apologizes for Witsius and condemns him, having first lauded him and having appealed to his theology as the way forward for the Protestant Reformed Churches. By Koole's apology he at the very least tramples on the grave of Witsius and violates the dictum *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. He lets the dead Witsius take the blame. But Reverend Koole taught the same thing. And he has never, not once, anywhere apologized for his theology, which he taught and still teaches to this very day. He knows no other gospel than the gospel that is no gospel: "if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do."

An Apology

So his apology is an apology. *Apology* is an English word that comes from the Greek word *apologia*. It means to offer a defense or an excuse. The Oxford English Dictionary gives four possible definitions of *apology*.

The first definition is "the pleading off from a charge or imputation, whether expressed, implied, or only conceived as possible; defence of a person, or vindication of an institution, etc., from accusation or aspersion."

Surely this is what Reverend Koole does. There is a serious charge against him. Having quoted Witsius and pleaded that Witsius was going to help extricate the Protestant Reformed denomination from her doctrinal woes, he instead approved of false doctrine, taught false doctrine, and recommended false doctrine to the churches. It is the very same false doctrine that was condemned by his synod in June 2018; that he taught in his October 1, 2018, *Standard Bearer* article; and that he defended over against objections from several ministers and members of the PRC. The charge against Reverend Koole is that he is an impenitent teacher of false doctrine who has corrupted the gospel of grace and who is bringing a damnable error out of hell into the churches and by doing so caused schism in the churches and made himself worthy of suspension and deposition and excommunication from the church of Christ.

And he pleaded off the charge: I never meant what I clearly meant; I never taught what I clearly taught and taught repeatedly and over against many objections and which teaching caused schism in the church of Christ.

The second definition of *apology* is "less formally: Justification, explanation, or excuse, of an incident or course of action."

An excuse. That is all he gives. A stupid, transparent, insincere excuse. A silly explanation that is not believable and does not even pass muster on the most cursory reading of his many articles defending his theology that "if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do."

The third definition of *apology* is "an explanation offered to a person affected by one's action that no offence was intended, coupled with the expression of regret for any that may have been given; or, a frank acknowledgement of the offence with expression of regret for it, by way of reparation."

He gave an expression of regret? Surely, he would not do it again. He is very sorry for the confusion. But he wrote nothing but confusion for years. He is the confuser-in-chief. To this day he is confusing. His sermons are mostly unfollowable and unintelligible. One wonders whether this stems from incompetence or laziness, or whether it comes from deviousness so that in the smoke created by the run-on sentences, the unfinished remarks, the parenthetical references, and the anecdotes, he can slip in his false doctrine. His

expression of regret is false because he is still teaching the false doctrine.

The fourth definition of *apology* is "something which, as it were, merely appears to apologize for the absence of what ought to have been there; a poor substitute."

That is it! He gave a poor substitute. He merely appears to apologize. There was something absent in his apology. What was absent was repentance. There is no repentance in the whole piece, and there has not been a stitch of repentance in him for the role that he has played in the destruction of the unity of the Protestant Reformed Churches by teaching and defending his false theology of works, his displacement of Christ, his denigration of God, and his glorification of man. He is one of the chief reasons the Protestant Reformed denomination has experienced another split.

In the great day it may be revealed that he was the chief reason. He apologized for—in the sense of defended—false doctrine for years. He was the man of the hour to defend false doctrine. He was on the classical committee that approved of Professor Cammenga's shameful denial of Christ. He was the chairman of Grandville's consistory

Now [Koole] apologizes for Witsius. Having exhumed him and having found that the body stinks of Arminianism and Pelagianism, Koole quickly buries Witsius again. But Koole's own stinky theology, he does not address.

that deposed a faithful officebearer for defending the gospel. He led the way among those who hurled the slanderous charge of antinomianism against the gospel of grace. He was a leading speaker at the classis meetings that likewise approved false doctrine and damned the true doctrine as the wicked error of antinomianism. He militated against Synod 2018 publicly and repeatedly and then lied and said he did not. He taught and defended false doctrine in the *Standard Bearer*. He preaches the same false doctrine from Protestant Reformed pulpits yet today. Then he has the shameless temerity to apologize for quoting Witsius? He is a schismatic, just like Reverend De Wolf was. Koole's doctrine is the same. His apologies are also the same.

Not Repentance

The Protestant Reformed Churches are making a good case for a fifth possible definition of *apology*: “a carnal substitute for repentance that makes one appear sorry in order to allow him to continue his offensive behavior in another form.” The Protestant Reformed denomination is up to her neck in apologies. What she does not and will not show is repentance. Reverend Koole shows no repentance. Thus his apology is meaningless; and worse, it is deceptive. It gives the appearance of repentance, and for the simple it passes for repentance, but it is only an excuse that allows him to continue his offensive behavior in another form.

Reverend Koole's letter in the *Standard Bearer* is an apology. That is all it is. In the church of Jesus Christ, from a minister of the gospel who taught false doctrine and then sought support for that false doctrine from a dead theologian, an apology is not what is required but repentance. Since his theology was the occasion for the split in my churches that I loved, as part of his repentance he should recommend his own suspension and deposition as one of the most damaging teachers in the history of the PRC.

His apology is a lie. It is a public, demonstrable lie. One of the statements of Witsius, which Reverend Koole disapproves of in his letter, is the statement that led to the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing, the printing of *Sword and Shield*, and the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. I want the record to reflect that these things are all related. When Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield* appeared on

the ecclesiastical scene, an orchestrated campaign of slander, sin-charging, and destruction began. The Protestant Reformed Churches hated our preaching, the churches hated the one-sidedness, the churches hated our doctrine of total depravity as applied to regenerated man, they hated that man was nothing and that God was everything, and they hated the condemnation of their theology as a corruption of the Reformed faith. They did not dare attack the content of our preaching because they would have exposed their own theology as corrupt. They lied and said that we all believed the same thing and that they were concerned only about our behavior. They slandered us behind our backs. They met, they lurked, and they watched. And they latched onto the convenient handle with which to attack us: *Sword and Shield*. The result of all their machinations was schism. They would not repent. And today two denominations exist. And let the record show that Reverend Koole led the way.

What the PRC needs is not another apology. The churches need discipline. It will never happen, but what the Protestant Reformed denomination needs is that Reverend Koole be put out of the ministry now also for lying. He taught false doctrine,

and he has publicly now perjured himself by apologizing for theology for which he is not sorry, which he continues to preach, by which he corrupted the truth, and by which he continues to corrupt an entire generation and to destroy a denomination.

It is a source of mystery to me, as I have studied church history, that the false church, let us say Rome, lectured Luther on the necessity of good works and warned how Luther's doctrine was antinomian and would make people careless and profane. Through it all Rome was—and is to this day—an Augean stable of corruption. Every sin known to man—from homosexuality to brutal ecclesiastical politics to the denial of the gospel—flourished in the Roman Catholic Church and does to this day. Yet she had such a whore's forehead that she would instruct anyone who would listen about the need for good works and how only Rome's doctrine of man's doing to be saved would make the church holy. She was drunk on the wine of man, and, as a reeling drunkard who insists that he can drive, she insisted that she knew about holiness, and her insistence was as laughable as the drunkard's.

Rome's doctrine never makes anyone holy, and neither

Reading Koole's apology, one could be excused for thinking that he did nothing more serious than burp at a polite social gathering.

will Reverend Koole's doctrine. They are of a piece. And their fruits are the same too. The Protestant Reformed denomination, as Rome, is a cesspool of corruption. The leadership will not deal with sins in its own ranks. The hierarchy covers up the sins of influential or well-heeled members until a scandal breaks and it is impossible to cover it any longer, at which point the ministers flee like rats from a sinking ship. They tolerate false doctrine among their colleagues and excuse it as that which they really do not believe or as that which is crooked but can be made straight. They harbor knowingly every sin from homosexuality to abuse of children and spouses. They exalt vain and worldly men to office and honor among themselves those who are the most ignorant of the truth. Yet they lecture the world on the need to defend against antinomianism.

Now add to the list of tolerated sins their false apologies in the most serious matter with which the church of Jesus Christ can deal—doctrine. In these too they are unholy and hypocritical. The PRC lecture all on the necessity of repentance and that fellowship with God is in the way of repentance. By the measure of the denomination's own theology and in light of many patently insincere apologies, the people do not have any fellowship with God.

Reverend Koole, those who let him publish his apology, and those who have swallowed it hook, line, and sinker know nothing of true repentance. Nothing of what he wrote bears the slightest resemblance to true repentance, which is a sincere sorrow of heart that one has offended God; an actual acknowledgment of the gravity of the offense; and a clearing of oneself by militancy against one's own false doctrine.

His theology is a monstrous offense against God, against Christ, and against the gospel. But in the whole

apology, he is concerned only about people. Nowhere is God mentioned, and nowhere does Koole acknowledge the fact that he ran the name of God and the name of Jesus Christ through the mud by displacing Christ as the only savior. Nowhere does he mention that he taught and that he still teaches the theology that he damns in the mouth of Witsius. Nowhere does he mention the reality that his theology as much as anyone else's led to schism in the church. He should at the very least say that his stubborn teaching and defense of the theology that there is that which a man must do to be saved split the churches. Even if the breach can no longer be healed, one would think that he would acknowledge the central role that he played in the breach.

Reading Koole's apology, one could be excused for thinking that he did nothing more serious than burp at a polite social gathering.

What rot! I am glad I am gone. This turns my stomach. And to think that people buy this garbage. No wonder we could not get anywhere for years in this controversy. There was no sorrow anywhere, among anyone who was involved. There were only these kinds of apologies. Hope's elders gave them; Reverend Overway gave them; now Reverend Koole gives another one.

Be warned. God is not mocked by this mockery of true repentance. A man like Reverend Koole, being in his position in the denomination, is already a judgment. His apology is a judgment, a snare by which many will be entrapped. That his apology could be printed, that it could be received, and that it even could be lauded are sure signs that many have been smitten with the spirit of blindness.

I say again to anyone who yet has ears to hear, "Get out quickly, lest you be ensnared to your own sorrow in this ungodliness."

—NJL

DEBATING WITH THE DEVIL (6)

My allegory steadily progresses. Shepsema, shocked by the scolding of Thames and Spaulus, stammers, “My salvation is by faith! It’s dynamic!”

But Spaulus skillfully salvos, “Your faith is dialectic! You conditionalize it.”

Stung, Shepsema squabbles, “It’s by grace!”

Stouthearted, Thames and Spaulus stonewall: “Your justification is a process. It’s Roman Catholic! This is grace: Those whom God predestinated, he called; those whom he called, he justified; those whom he justified, he glorified.” Succeeding, Thames and Spaulus straightaway sing their sonnet, “In Christ’s coach we sweetly sing, as we to glory ride therein!”

Dear brethren and readers, here is another dissection of Shepherd’s diatribe about justification. I must confide that I am both weary and glad. Weary because it seems like I am reading the diary of Judas Iscariot; glad because God’s word is being vindicated. We are more than conquerors in unscrambling Shepherd’s sabotage of scripture. His work is basically refuted. *The Way of Righteousness: Justification Beginning with James*¹ can be retitled as *The Way of Wretchedness: With Many There Be That Go Therein*.

Some Housekeeping

Before I continue with my critique, let me first do some housekeeping. Here are some things I should polish.

First, Shepherd claims that James wrote of forensic justification in James 2:14–26. I demonstrated from scripture that Shepherd is wrong.²

Second, Shepherd claims that James referred several times to the last judgment. I demonstrated from scripture that Shepherd is wrong. James never wrote that either.³

Third, Shepherd claims that Matthew 25:31–46 teaches a forensic judgment by faith and works at the last judgment. I demonstrated from scripture that Shepherd is wrong. Matthew never wrote that.⁴

Fourth, Shepherd claims that 2 Corinthians 5:10 teaches that the last judgment will be by faith and works. I demonstrated from scripture that Shepherd is wrong. Paul never wrote that.⁵

Fifth, Shepherd claims that Paul’s justification is “the forgiveness of sins grounded upon the imputation of the righteousness of Christ” (33). I demonstrated that Shepherd is wrong because he falsifies the righteousness of Christ.⁶

Sixth, Shepherd claims that Christ’s righteousness is *only* his death on the cross and his resurrection. I demonstrated that Shepherd is wrong because Christ’s righteousness is also his *lifelong* divinely perfect obedience to and fulfillment of all God’s commandments, as explained by Christ’s “spotless” offering (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19) and symbolized by the high priest’s wearing pure white linen from head to toe—the symbol of perfect purity—only on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:4; 23:26–32; Num. 29:11; Ezek. 9:2; Dan. 10:5; 12:6; cf. Zech. 3:3–4).

Seventh, Shepherd claims that Paul’s justification is only the forgiveness of sins. I demonstrated that Shepherd is wrong. Justification—based on Christ’s lifelong active and passive obedience unto death—is the imputation of our sins to Christ and Christ’s *lifelong* righteousness and substitutionary atonement imputed to the believer (2 Cor. 5:21), God then forensically declaring the believer forever forgiven of all his sins and eternally righteous before God (Rom. 8:1), thus providing permanent, bold, unconditional fellowship with God (Heb. 9:14; 10:19–20; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 John 3:16; Rev. 5:9–10).

All Works of the Law Excluded from Justification

I have arrived at Shepherd’s last questions relating to Paul’s doctrine of justification. Shepherd asks, *What works does Paul exclude* from justification? Commenting on Romans 3:28, where Paul says, “A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,” Shepherd says,

1 Norman Shepherd, *The Way of Righteousness: Justification Beginning with James* (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2009), 41. Page numbers for quotations from this book are given in text.

2 Stuart Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (1),” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 31–35.

3 Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (1),” 31–35.

4 Stuart Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (4),” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 12 (January 2022): 25–27.

5 Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (4),” 27.

6 Stuart Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (5),” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 13 (February 1, 2022): 28–35.

By “works of the law,” Paul refers to the Mosaic covenant as such...Paul is saying in Romans 3:28 that we are not justified by clinging to the Mosaic covenant as though it were still operative...

The point Paul is making is that if justification comes by works of the law even after the advent of Christ, then Gentiles cannot be justified or saved. The reason is not that the Gentiles cannot *keep* the law, but that they do not *have* the law...If now, under the new covenant, justification comes by the works of the law, then Gentiles would continue to be excluded from God’s saving purpose. That is Paul’s argument in verse 29. (41)

I believe none of this. But I start with these comments because I believe Shepherd stumbles here and continues to stumble throughout his chapter on Paul. But more important than Shepherd’s stumbling is the nice confirmation of Lord’s Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession 24.

So put on your *large size* thinking cap and enjoy a defense from the Reformed confessions.

Here is Romans 3:28 again: “Therefore we conclude that *a man* is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Focus on the words “a man.” Paul’s argument in verses 28–31 is this: when he writes, “a man is justified...without the deeds of the law,” someone might think that Paul refers only to Jews because they only have the law, as Shepherd claims. But Paul says no. The Gentiles are included in verse 28, even though they do not have the *written* law. How so?

Because Paul has written, “When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew *the work of the law* written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:14–15).

Paul has also written, “That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19–20).

We see quite quickly that Shepherd is wrong. The Gentiles “do by nature the things contained in the law.” They “are a law unto themselves.” They know the works of the law, and they are without excuse for *not keeping* the law. That is why they cannot be justified by the deeds of the law. Shepherd is stumbling already.

Continuing his statement of Romans 1:20, that both Jews and Gentiles are without excuse, Paul lists all the wickedness of men (vv. 21–32). Carefully notice: all that wickedness is sin against the ten commandments!

Then Paul continues in Romans 2:1, “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest.” Paul writes about the sins of Jews and Gentiles, and he refers to both as “O man.” Both are inexcusable—“whosoever thou art”—for transgressing the ten commandments.

Then the statement “thou art inexcusable, O man”—which includes Jews and Gentiles—leads to Paul’s conclusion in verses 11–12: “For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned *without law* shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.”

There you see more of Shepherd’s stumbling. All throughout Romans 1 and 2, Paul includes both Jews and Gentiles. But particularly important is the fact that Paul says—contrary to Shepherd—that *both have the law*. Jews have it written by Moses, and Gentiles have it “manifest in them” (Rom. 1:19).

So far, the teaching of Paul in Romans is that the Gentiles cannot be justified by the deeds of the law, not because they do not *have* the law, as Shepherd claims, but because they cannot *do* the law; they suppress “the truth in unrighteousness” (1:18); “they are without excuse” (v. 20); “their foolish heart was darkened” (v. 21); and “God gave them up unto vile affections” (v. 26), so that they are filled with all unrighteousness (vv. 29–32; 2:12–24).

That leads to Paul’s conclusion in Romans 3:20: “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall *no flesh* be justified.” No flesh is Jews and Gentiles. No flesh can be justified because no flesh can keep the law. And then verse 23: “For *all* [Jews and Gentiles] have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Carefully note, Paul lists the *sins* of the Jews and of the Gentiles against God’s commandments. Then, concerning those sins, Paul concludes: by the *deeds* of the law no flesh shall be justified. The deeds of the law are the deeds that God’s commandments demand, but neither Jews nor Gentiles can do those deeds. They are sinfully without excuse and, therefore, neither can be justified by (doing) the deeds of the law.

That clearly contradicts Shepherd’s claim: “By works of the law Paul means obedience to a limited selection of laws found in the Law of Moses and in tradition” (42). More stumbling.

Blood...represents Christ’s whole righteous life, which alone makes it acceptable to God for a sacrifice of atonement for sin.

Also false are the following statements of Shepherd: “Neither Jew nor Gentile will be justified by following ‘Jewish customs.’ You will not be justified by living according to Jewish religious regulations as prescribed in the old Mosaic covenant as though that covenant were still in force” (42). More stumbling.

At this point we are into some serious word games. Keep your hat on. By the previous statements Shepherd tries to make room for his “obedient faith.” Here is how his game goes: By making the deeds of the law to be some Jewish requirements that Paul rejects for justification, Shepherd introduces some other works that Paul supposedly allows for justification, namely repentance and obedience.

Here Shepherd spells out his word game:

There is a *vast difference* between the works of the law that Paul everywhere condemns and the obedience of faith that Paul everywhere commends and encourages...It is the difference between... works of the law...and doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God. Therefore Paul does not come into conflict with himself when he declares that justification comes by a penitent and obedient faith, and not by works of the law. (45; emphasis added)

I call the reader’s attention to Matthew 23:23. Shepherd refers to this verse, but as usual he misses its importance (43). In this verse our Lord instructed the scribes and Pharisees that the more important *works* required by the law—which they did not do—are “judgment, mercy, and faith.” Remember, “judgment, mercy, and faith” are *works* (deeds) of the law, which our Lord *did not condemn* but *commended*, contrary to Shepherd. More stumbling.

Matthew 23:23 also contradicts this statement of Shepherd: “Works of the law are works *done without faith*” (43; emphasis added). Surely, “judgment, mercy, and faith” are works required of the law as Jesus just said, and surely those Jews whom Jesus addressed did not have faith, and just as surely they did not do those works! The opposite of what Shepherd says is true. Those works of the law *require* faith in God to do them. They cannot be done without faith! Can anyone imagine an unbeliever performing a spiritual work of true, God-glorifying mercy or faithfulness without faith? More stumbling. Shepherd is falling all over himself.

Remember he has said, “There is a *vast difference* between works of the law that Paul everywhere condemns and the obedience of faith that Paul everywhere commends and encourages.”

But this grand illusion is false because Matthew 23:23

instructs us that “judgment, mercy, and faith” are *works of the law*, which Paul would *not condemn*, that Jesus *commended* as works that the law requires. They are works that Jews and Gentiles cannot do; therefore, they cannot be justified by them.

That is precisely Paul’s conclusion in Romans 3:28: “We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Paul has more to say about that conclusion. Having explained that his statement in verse 28 applies equally to Jews and Gentiles, he confirms that with these words of verse 30: “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision *by faith*, and uncircumcision *through faith*.” Sadly, the English translation hides the full meaning of this verse. In it Paul uses very explicit Greek words to dramatize his point, which I will now explain.

Paul writes in verse 30, “God...shall justify the circumcision [Jews] *by* faith [ἐκ πίστεως], and uncircumcision [Gentiles] *through* faith [διὰ τῆς πίστεως].” Why does the Holy Spirit use *two different prepositions* to prove his point?

The first preposition, “by” (ἐκ), refers to the *source* of something. The second preposition, “through” (διὰ), refers to the *means* of something.⁷

The significance is that the first preposition (ἐκ) is used intentionally to contradict all Jewish self-righteousness. How? By using the preposition that distinctly and exclusively tells you the source of something. It is as if the Holy Spirit shouts at the Jews: “Look here! Here is the only *source* of justification. Faith!”

The Jews trusted that they were justified ἐκ circumcision—*by* their circumcision! That was their *source* of justification. Also, *by* their works of the law—ἐκ ἔργων νόμου. They believed that their covenant membership, signified by circumcision, and their (supposed) conformity to the law of Moses were their *sources* of justification (Acts 15:1, 5, 24; Rom. 2:17, 23; 4:13; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:3–6).

Therefore, by using the preposition that specifically indicates the *source of something* (ἐκ), the Holy Spirit contradicts the Jews’ self-righteousness. He uses the very same preposition (ἐκ) to forcefully redirect the Jews to the one, exclusive *source* of justification—*by faith*! Faith alone.

In Romans 3:30 not only are Jewish pride and presumption overthrown, but with them all works of the law are excluded for justification. All works fulfilling the law’s demands, such as “judgment, mercy, and faith,” as well as Shepherd’s penitent and obedient faith—all are excluded because they *all* are works (deeds) that God’s law demands.

⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 233ff.; 178.

Then, continuing with verse 30, because the Gentiles had nothing on which to base their justification—no covenant membership, no law of Moses—the Holy Spirit uses the ordinary preposition of *means*, that is, “through” (διὰ), to teach the Gentiles that their justification is by the simple *means* of faith, hence “through faith.”

Conclusion: justification for Jews and Gentiles is the same. It is by faith *alone*. All Jewish presumption is overthrown, and the truth of justification is established. Justification is by faith alone without doing any deed God’s law requires.

The Meaning of “Without the Deeds of the Law”

Now let us go deeper into the faith of Romans 3:28 that justifies “without the deeds of the law.” Thinking caps on again! From our Lord’s statement in Matthew 23:23, we are certain that “judgment, mercy, and faith” (faithfulness) are deeds of the law. And from Romans 3:28 those deeds cannot be part of—or done by—the faith that justifies because that justification is “without the deeds of the law.”

This is a most critical point in the road, theologically. The question is, in what sense does the word of God mean “without the deeds of the law” in Romans 3:28? Does the word of God mean that faith has done *no* works of the law when it justifies? That faith is *alone*? Without any deeds of the law? Or does God’s word say that in justification faith is *not alone*? That faith is accompanied by Shepherd’s repentance and obedience? Which is it? *Alone*—no works done (Belgic Confession)? Or *not alone*—repentance and obedience are present but *apart from*, that is, not included or counted when justifying?

I believe, with our confessions, that what follows is the true and correct understanding of Romans 3:28 and the meaning of “without the deeds of the law.”

We continue on in Romans because Paul defines what he means by *faith alone* in Romans 4:4–5: “Now to him that *worketh* is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

Notice, there is a comparison of two persons: one “worketh,” and the other “worketh not.” For both, the Greek verbs translated as “worketh” are in the present tense, which means that the verbs denote action in progress. Therefore, we may translate the first verb as “to him

that *is working*.” “To him that *is doing*!”⁸ Then the second person “worketh not.” The present tense with the negative denotes the negation of the same action. This person *is not working*. He *is not doing*. Therefore, the comparison is that one person is working, doing the deeds of the law (v. 4), while the other person is the opposite: he is not working; he is not doing the deeds of the law (v. 5).

Clearly, then, verse 5 means “to him that is *not working*—*not doing* the deeds of the law—*his faith* is counted for righteousness.” The faith that justifies is not working. It is doing nothing! It is not doing any of the deeds that God’s law demands. Faith is alone. This faith justifies “even before we do good works” (Belgic Confession 24, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 53).

Therefore, justifying faith does *not* include works of confession of sin, repentance, and the obedience of faith, as Shepherd teaches, because these also are deeds that God’s law demands, and the faith that justifies is without the deeds that God’s law demands. Faith “worketh not.”

Consider also the reverse: if, when being justified, the justified person would have Shepherd’s working faith—a faith including repentance and obedience, which are works of the law—that person would *not* be justified. That can be concluded also from Romans 4:4: “To him that *worketh* is the reward *not* reckoned of grace, but of debt.” This is the condemnation of Shepherd’s “obedient faith.” If it is working—and he says it is—then it is not justifying faith. If it is working, it can earn only *the reward of debt*, as Romans 4:4 teaches.

Again we see the seriousness of Shepherd’s errors. His justification denies the righteousness of Christ. Shepherd’s justification justifies no one! His working faith cannot justify. It justifies no one! His theory of James’ teaching justification by works, and not by faith alone, is false! Shepherd’s theory of Paul’s teaching justification by a penitent and obedient faith is also false!

Now let us go back to Romans 3:28 and notice another confirmation of the Reformed confessions. So far we have seen that faith, according to Romans 3:28, justifies “without the deeds of the law.” Thinking caps on again. Our Lord’s statement in Matthew 23:23 that “judgment, mercy, and faith” (faithfulness) are deeds of the law confirms to us that those deeds cannot be part of—or done by—the faith that justifies because justification is “without the deeds of the law.” We are justified *before* we do good works.

Justification is by faith alone
without doing any deed God’s
law requires.

8 Bauer, *Lexicon*, “to work,” “to be active,” “to do,” “to perform,” 306.

Now add to that Romans 9:11: “The children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that *calleth*...”

In order for election to stand—*not of works*—God’s *calling* begins the accomplishment of God’s election in his children (2 Tim. 1:9). Notice that Paul’s example of the calling has *no works in it* (“the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil”). This divine calling is an effective work of God through his Word that draws the elect to Christ (John 6:44). This divine drawing creates a spiritual union, which includes the light of the Word (1 Pet. 2:9).

When God draws, the person is passive.⁹ God the husbandman grafts the elect branches into Christ the vine (John 15:1). After God engrafts us into Christ, we have life and light, the life of Christ is flowing in us, and we are enlightened by the Word that God used to call us. Consider now what that enlightening is.

God “hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Our enlightening is Jesus’ face—his identity—that God shined in the heart.¹⁰ Enlightening involves receiving Christ.

The light God shined in us is the effective knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ! By that light—knowledge—the new heart “embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him” (Belgic Confession 22, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 49). That knowing Jesus effectively is “the hearing of faith” that justifies (Gal. 3:5).

Here is Paul’s explanation of that. In verse 5 Paul asks the Galatians if the *source* (again, *ἐκ*) of the Spirit’s working among them is their works or the “hearing of faith.” Then in verse 6 he writes, “*Even as* Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

The words “even as” are most significant. The Greek word *καθὼς* is not a simple conjunction like *and* but is a special coordinating conjunction like *just as*. Therefore, the conjunction “even as” is not simply joining verses 5 and 6. That special conjunction is coordinating two sentences, placing them side by side in meaning.¹¹ Thus the two sentences mean that the *source* of the Spirit’s working among the Galatians was not their works but the “hearing of faith,” *just as* the source of Abraham’s justification was also the “hearing of faith.” That is the doctrine of Galatians 3:6. “Even as” (*καθὼς*) the “hearing of

faith” justified Abraham, the “hearing of faith” justified the Galatians.

God’s effective calling results in a faith characterized by a spiritual hearing of the word of Christ in the heart. That hearing of faith justifies. It is an effective hearing only. Not doing. Not working. Not obedient. Not penitent.

How do we know? We know that because justifying faith “worketh not.” That faith is an effective hearing about Jesus Christ, hearing what the gospel says about him and trusting it. “True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart” (Heidelberg Catechism, A 21, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 90).

Going on, we next observe what Shepherd writes about Romans 4:25: “In 4:25 Paul wrote, ‘[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.’” Shepherd then summarizes,

By his death Jesus paid the penalty for sin. His resurrection on the third day certifies that the penalty for sin has been paid in full and that therefore the justice of God has been satisfied. The death and resurrection of Jesus secure our justification, and that is to say, they secure the forgiveness of our sin. (34–35; emphasis added)

This paragraph exposes another tactic that Shepherd repeatedly uses. He alters biblical statements and then runs the altered version together with his misleading comments to support his theories.

Consider his treatment of the words “Jesus was delivered over to death” in Romans 4:25. Paul’s words “delivered over to death” are paraphrased by Shepherd and become “by his death” (34). Shepherd subtly makes a declarative phrase become an instrumental phrase—a very subtle change of meaning that most readers will miss.¹² But Paul’s “delivered over to death” states *what* happened to our Lord. It is explanatory. Shepherd’s paraphrase “by his death” transforms Paul’s words into the *reason* Jesus died. Jesus’ death becomes instrumental. Then, having made that subtle change, Shepherd uses that reworked expression to support his chain of misleading claims, that is, that Jesus’ *mere* death paid the penalty of sin, that Jesus’ *mere* death paid the penalty in full, that Jesus’ *mere* death satisfied the justice of God, and that Jesus’ *mere* death secured our justification.

9 The verb is *elko* or *elkuoo*, which means “to draw,” “to drag.” Bauer, *Lexicon*, “to haul a net” (John 21:6), “to drag out of the temple” (Acts 21:30), 251.

10 Bauer, *Lexicon*, 728.

11 Bauer, *Lexicon*, 392.

12 Even the English Standard Version has “who was delivered up.”

In that subtle way Shepherd provides biblical support for his false and repetitious claim that Jesus' death *alone* paid the penalty for sin. And by his questionable paraphrasing, he *excludes* Christ's lifelong righteous fulfillment of the demands of God's law. There is no lifelong righteousness included in Shepherd's account of Christ's death and therefore no lifelong righteousness imputed to God's elect in their justification. While his paraphrase sounds good, it is not; it bolsters his system of conditional salvation. The elect have no lifelong righteousness imputed to them. They must secure their own righteousness by living in obedient faith; otherwise they lose their salvation.¹³ Shepherd's transformation of Romans 4:25 lays a foundation for his conditional covenant.

The Meaning of Christ's Blood

After mistreating Romans 4:25, Shepherd moves on to Romans 5:8–9: "God commendeth [demonstrates] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."

Again, under the cover of orthodox language, Shepherd singles out Christ's *blood* as that which *alone* justifies. He is seriously wrong, as my previous article demonstrated. It's a Nadab and Abihu act.¹⁴ But Shepherd repeats this false claim numerous times to cement his theory of justification in the reader's mind. So intent is he on impressing his false notion that the "*blood*" (alone) justifies, that he repeats it five times in one paragraph (37) and thirteen times in four pages (34–37).

This should again be refuted. Therefore, I repeat the biblical explanation of Christ's blood. The basic principle is this: scripture does not refer to the blood in *isolation* from all that Christ is, as Shepherd repeatedly claims, but scripture refers to the blood inclusively as the *consummation* of all that Christ, the Son of God in human flesh, has done. Christ's death represents the completeness, the once-for-allness, the finality, and the ultimacy of Christ's obedience (Isa. 53:10; Zech. 9:11; Matt. 26:28; Luke 24:26; John 3:14–15; 10:17; Rom. 5:8–9; 6:10; 14:9; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 1:3; 2:9–10; 5:8–9; 9:12, 16, 26; 10:10, 12, 14, 19; 12:2; Rev. 5:9–14; 12:11).

Here is more proof.

First, God reckons that the *life* of the sacrifice is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). Blood, therefore, represents Christ's

whole righteous life, which alone makes it acceptable to God for a sacrifice of atonement for sin (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19).

Second, blood represents the satisfying fulfillment of God's whole redemptive plan because God reckons that without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22).

Third, a testament requires death—blood—to be in force (Heb. 9:15–17). Christ's blood signifies that the whole new covenant is now in force. All of God's prophetic word about it is fulfilled, and God is vindicated (Jer. 31–33; Heb. 8:10–13; 12:22–24). Specifically, Christ's blood is "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).

Fourth, after Christ "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, [he] sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12). Blood speaks of the fact that Christ's eternal reign of grace and glory has begun.

As stated before in my previous article, if Christ's sacrifice did not include the lifelong divinely righteous obedience of the Son of God, his sacrifice was *not* a spotless offering but an unacceptable one rejected by God (Mal. 1:7–8). Then there was no propitiation. No atonement. No forgiveness. No display of God's eternal justice and righteousness. Then Satan has mocked God. Satan has defeated the Son of God. There is no gospel. We are still in our sins. That is the seriousness of Shepherd's teaching on justification. It is a victory for the devil. And, as I have said previously, Satan's subtle debating seeks to overthrow the whole truth of God, not just part of it.

Therefore, in the words of the prophet Malachi, "Offer it [your sacrifice] now unto thy governor" (1:8), you who follow Shepherd, and see if the governor will be pleased with your unrighteous offering! Tell Shepherd that he has a faith that does not save! That his working faith does not justify. That it earns the condemnation of debt! Tell him that he is still in his sins! See if the governor will be pleased with your "blood" that does not cleanse! That does not forgive! (vv. 7–8).

A Few More Corrections

Just a few more corrections with Shepherd, and he is finished. After mistreating Romans 5:8–9, Shepherd repeats his theory of the *kind* of faith that justifies: "Justifying faith is not only a penitent faith but also an obedient faith" (38).

As I stated in my previous article, Norman Shepherd basically repeats what the Westminster Confession

13 See theses 20–23, in Norman Shepherd, *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works*, <http://hones.org/theologia/norman-shepherd/the-34-theses>. These theses were presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on November 18, 1978.

14 Pastine, "Debating with the Devil (5)," 30–31.

of Faith teaches: faith alone justifies, but faith is never alone; it is always accompanied by repentance and obedience (XI:2). My disagreement with that has already been stated.¹⁵

He supports his statement in a very shoddy fashion by recalling God's long-suffering of Romans 2:4, which teaches that "the kindness and patience of God are designed to lead sinners to repentance" (37). Then patching that together with verse 7, Shepherd says, "The impenitent are storing up the wrath of God for the Day of Judgment; but the penitent, those who turn away from sin and persevere in doing good, will enter into eternal life" (37). Shepherd then ties it all together with this claim: "On this background it is inconceivable that justifying faith can be anything but a penitent faith" (37).

If we take this mouthful slowly, what are the facts?

First, God's long-suffering is designed to lead sinners to repentance. Second, the penitent enter eternal life. Third, those not repenting are storing up wrath for the judgment day.

Where in these facts is anything stated about justification? The verses say nothing of justification. But Shepherd reads it into them because he supposes that there is forensic justification at the last judgment of Matthew 25:31–46. He assumes (falsely) that the last judgment is about forensic justification and that if the penitent have persevered in faith and enter eternal life, they must have been justified by that penitent faith at the last judgment.

I disagree with that whole fabrication. Why? Because the last judgment is not about forensic justification at all, as I have already demonstrated.¹⁶ There is no forensic justification by penitent faith at the last judgment. The last judgment is about the vindication of God and his divine justice that rewards the elect according to their good works with eternal life and damns the reprobate wicked for their sins with eternal destruction. Shepherd has nothing to back up his illusion of penitent faith.

After that failure Shepherd tries again, this time to prove that "justifying faith is not only a penitent faith but also an obedient faith" (38). He leans on Paul's evangelistic message in Acts 17:30–31. Paul proclaims "a day when he [God] will judge the world with justice" (38). Taking hold of Paul's statement, Shepherd repeats his previous falsehood: "Reference to the Day of Judgment brings us immediately into the sphere of justification. Paul is saying

that if we do not repent of sin we will not be justified in the judgment of God" (38).

This is also false for the same reason as before. The final judgment of Matthew 25:31–46 is not about forensic justification. It is true that Paul refers to the final judgment. It is true that God will judge the world—elect and reprobate—with divine justice. But that judgment is not for forensic justification. That final judgment is about vindicating Jesus Christ, that he is the righteous one who always judges righteously! The elect were forensically justified long before that final day of judgment, as the reprobate were "condemned already" long before that day because they did not believe in Jesus (John 3:18).

Shepherd's last attempt to prove his theory of obedient faith starts with this statement: "As faith and repentance are inseparably intertwined, so also repentance and obedience are inseparably intertwined" (38). He refers to Romans 1:5 and says that Paul was commissioned "to call people from among all the Gentiles to the *obedience that comes from faith*" (38).

But in this instance his Bible version does not help Shepherd. It does not say *when* that obedience comes from faith. Of course, obedience comes from faith, but to support him the text must say *when* that obedience is produced. It does not! No doubt, obedience is produced *after* forensic justification as a fruit of the Spirit because obedience is a doing of the law, and justifying faith is *not doing* works of the law. Also, if Shepherd thinks that obedience coming from faith appears for justification in the day of judgment, he is wrong again because there is no forensic justification in the day of judgment.

From Romans 1:5 Shepherd jumps to Romans 2:7, where Shepherd says, "Paul speaks of the necessity of repentance that becomes evident in doing good" (38). But Paul's statement has nothing to do with justification. Notice that Shepherd says, "He [Paul] says God will give eternal life 'to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality' (v. 7)" (38). Very true, but the action word in Romans 2:6–7 is "render [give]...eternal life" not *justify*! *Giving eternal life* is exactly what I have demonstrated regarding Matthew 25:31–46.¹⁷

Another of Shepherd's "proofs" he hangs on Galatians 5:6. Remember, the Galatians were having difficulty with circumcision. After dismissing circumcision, Paul says that what "availeth any thing" is "faith which worketh by love." Immediately, Shepherd throws this

¹⁵ Pastine, "Debating with the Devil (5)," 35.

¹⁶ Stuart Pastine, "Debating with the Devil (3)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 10 (December 1, 2021): 31–35.

¹⁷ Pastine, "Debating with the Devil (3)," 31–35.

curveball at the reader: “Faith that expresses itself through love is an obedient faith, and this obedient faith is justifying faith” (39).

However, following God’s word—that “love” is the first of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)—we believe that love begins after justification in sanctification. The proof is that scripture has taught us that the faith that justifies *does not work*, and “love” is the first work that fulfills the demands of God’s law (Matt. 22:37–38).

Finally and gladly, this leads to the end, to Shepherd’s last stand.

Here is what he says: “Paul describes true believers as those who repent of sin and who seek to do what is good according to God’s law” (40). With that I agree. Next, he says, “They are recreated in Christ for this very purpose, and they will *inherit eternal life*” (40; emphasis added). With that I agree. But then he says, “This is what Paul declares in Romans 2:13, ‘For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous’” (40). With the words “inherit eternal life” and Romans 2:13, Shepherd has failed in his last attempt to prove that Paul teaches that obedient faith justifies.

Consider the words, “They will inherit eternal life.” These words are exactly the words of the Lord Jesus to his elect in the day of judgment: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you” (Matt. 25:34). Judgment day is the context of these words, and I have repeated numerous times that Matthew 25:31–46 is *not* about forensic justification by faith but is about the vindication of Christ in his righteous judgment of the elect and reprobate.

Next, Shepherd specifically says, “This is what Paul declares in Romans 2:13, ‘For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is *those who obey the law* who will be declared righteous’” (40; emphasis added).

Hats on! Because if works are involved in the words “those who obey the law,” James’ principle of interpretation is involved. Recall from my first article what James taught us: when the Greek word that means either

to justify or *to vindicate* is used, *the context decides the meaning*. If the Greek word is connected with works, as in James 2:24, the word means *to vindicate*.¹⁸

Therefore, because works are involved, the Greek word in Romans 2:13 should be translated as *vindicated*. The verse should read: It is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who *will be vindicated*. We may be sure of this because in that very context Paul is speaking about the day of judgment: “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (v. 16).

Therefore, when Shepherd says next, “Those who believe in Jesus with this kind of faith will be declared righteous” (40), he is wrong again. As noted many times already, in the judgment day there will be no forensic justification by any kind of faith. Christ will be exalted, and believers will “inherit the kingdom” (Matt. 25:34).

Then, finally, we come to Shepherd’s last pathetic words: “Romans 2:13 is really the Pauline equivalent of James 2:24” (40). Ironic justice! His last attempt is twice wrong.

No. Romans 2:13 and James 2:24 both do not speak of obedient faith being justified. Wrong once. Both verses speak of faith being *vindicated*. Wrong twice! What an appropriate ending.

It’s been quite an outing. After scampering though his forest of one hundred verses, what did Shepherd accomplish? A colossal failure! James is gone! Paul is gone! Matthew is gone! Oh yes, “The people imagine a vain thing.” But “he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Ps. 2:1, 4). Exactly. Shepherd’s trail leads nowhere. All the questions were in vain. All the answers were wrong. Like a mighty cloud of witnesses, these verses have testified against him and will be his accusers: Matthew 25:34; Romans 2:13; Romans 3:28, 30; Romans 4:5; Galatians 3:6; Galatians 5:22; Hebrews 9:14, 16–17, 22; and James 2:24.

Next time, the Lord willing, “Dismissing the Debate with the Devil.”

—Rev. Stuart Pastine

18 Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (1),” 33–35.



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

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

The word of our God shall stand for ever. — Isaiah 40:8

All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the Spirit of Jehovah blows upon it.

Man is nothing, and his works are nothing. The Spirit blows on man, and he withers. Man withers especially when the gospel comes, and he and all his works become a seared field before the blast of the Lord. In the world all man's works amount to nothing but damnable opposition to Almighty God. In the covenant all man's goodness—his covenant faithfulness—amounts to so many filthy rags. Man does not bring God's covenant, and God's kingdom does not depend on man's works. When the Spirit blows on man, he and all his works wither before that blast.

This work of the Spirit to make man and his works nothing stands in the service of making God and his word everything. Only in the desolation of the windswept field among the stubble of man and his works is the triumphant proclamation heard that the Word of our God shall stand forever.

Any voice that makes man something is a denial of the Word of our God. Any voice that makes man something is not the voice of a messenger sent by Jehovah. With a word that makes man something, the Spirit does not come and make man nothing. In that place the Spirit does not make known that the Word of our God shall stand forever.

Emphatically, the Word of our God did stand to that point. It stood at that moment; it would stand in every age; it stands now; it will stand forever to the final wonder of grace and the regeneration of all things; and it shall stand age to age, world without end, in the new heavens and the new earth.

The Word of our God is Christ. The Word of our God is his covenant promise to perfect all things in Christ the head with his elect church as the new humanity in a new heavens and a new earth. The Word of the Lord is God's eternal counsel of salvation for the glorification of all things in Christ. The Word of the Lord is God's promise sealed with a divine oath to save his elect people from their sins in Christ and to bring them to heavenly glory. It is the Word that we are partakers of Christ and his righteousness and that we live and can never die.

It is the Word of our God. He was our God in election. He is our God now. He will be our God world without end. As he cannot fail or change and as he stands immovable and eternal, so his Word for the salvation of his people and the glorification of all things must stand forever. While all else fails, while we fail, while all our works fail—exactly in the way of our failing and the failing of our works—the Word of our God shall stand forever and to all generations. So little is our covenant fellowship with God in the way of our obedience that God's Word stands only in the way of our failure and the failure of all our obedience.

It is exactly because we are grass and all our goodness is as the flower of the field that God gave us his Word and bound himself to us by an oath to be our God and to save us and our children. It is his Word. It is of him. It depends on him alone. And it will be perfected by him, even the Word of our salvation.

—NJL