

The background features a stylized orange illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. A shield is positioned in the lower left, partially overlapping the sword's hilt. 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

OCTOBER 1, 2021 | VOLUME 2 | NUMBER 7

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Sword and Shield is a monthly periodical published by Reformed Believers Publishing.

Editor-in-chief

Rev. Andrew W. Lanning

Contributing editors

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

Rev. Martin VanderWal

All quotations from scripture are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Quotations from the Reformed and ecumenical creeds, Church Order, and liturgical forms are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), unless otherwise noted.

Every writer is solely responsible for the content of his own writing.

Signed letters and submissions of general interest may be sent to the editor-in-chief at lanning.andy@gmail.com or

2705 48th Ave
Zeeland, MI 49464

Sword and Shield does not accept advertising.

Please send all business correspondence, subscription requests, and requests to join Reformed Believers Publishing to one of the following:

Reformed Believers Publishing
325 84th St SW, Suite 102
Byron Center, MI 49315
Website: reformedbelieverspub.org
Email: office@reformedbelieverspub.org

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Think not that I [Christ] am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. — Matthew 10:34–36

“**C**onfess me before men! Whoever confesses me, I will confess in heaven before God and the angels.” Whoever denies Christ—fails to confess him when called; fails all this weary life long—Jesus will deny before his Father.

How clever man can become in denying Christ, deceiving many and himself that he is, in fact, following Christ. Such a man does not fool Christ, who sees the heart. And when that clever confessor comes before Christ, that man will hear these terrifying words that seal his eternal destiny: “Depart from me, wicked evildoer. I know not whence ye are. I never knew you.”

Confession of Christ—and denial of Christ—is the inevitable result of the coming of Jesus Christ. When he comes, he lays hold on the hearts and thus on the souls, minds, mouths, tongues, and the entire existences of his elect people. He makes them his own by his indwelling Spirit, so that it is not we who speak but the Spirit of the Lord that is in us; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the Lord himself. His people are engrafted as branches into him, the vine, and they produce the good fruit of confession. And when Jesus comes into the believer, he confesses Christ before men. The believer confesses Christ before men; he confesses Christ at work, in his home, with his wife and children, with his father and mother and sisters and brothers, with his grandfather and grandmother, and before the whole world. He confesses Christ where he has his church membership. He confesses Christ in word and in deed, both in the confession of the truth of Christ and in the ordering of his life according to that truth and the law of God.

Oh, if for a time the believer does say that he will not speak Christ’s word, then he will be as a boiling pot that cannot be contained.

Yes, if he sinfully and shamefully denies his Lord—what a wretch man is—he, too, will go out like Peter and weep bitter tears of repentance; and his Lord will come to console him and will ask him whether he loves Christ. Surely, the believer will respond, “Thou knowest, Lord, that I love thee!”

He will confess Christ.

The believer cannot do otherwise. For Christ has come, come into him, and made him new. Christ sounds out through him at work, in his home, with his family,

in his church membership, among his friends, and before the world. He is a living testimony to Christ in all he says and does.

All who confess Christ will Christ confess in heaven. All who deny Christ will he deny.

But when you confess, do not think that Christ is come to send peace on the earth: he came not to send peace but a sword!

Painful, sharp, hard—divisive—confession of Christ.

How common, how dreadfully common is the thought that Christ is come to bring peace on the earth! How varied are the forms of this terrible misconception! Jesus’ disciples themselves were guilty of thinking that when Jesus came—and indeed when he had come—he would establish an earthly kingdom of peace and riches.

The world and the false church sing of Jesus’ coming in lyric strains about peace on earth and goodwill toward men. They suppose Jesus came for earthly peace, earthly justice, earthly happiness, and for the benefit of their earthly lives. It never crosses their minds that the disciples of Christ are killed all the day and all history long and that justice is rarely served in this life. If the idea does cross their minds, they react viscerally against the idea with hatred and venom. They labor for a carnal kingdom and call for this kind of kingdom in their books and writings. Urgent calls are issued for churches to lay down their swords and to join with others to labor for peace on earth.

But this carnal misconception of Jesus Christ comes much, much closer to home. “Do not think that I am come to bring peace in *your* life—among your acquaintances, your family, and your friends, at your church, in your school, in your home, at your coffee hour, on your job site, or in your email inbox.” Not peace but a sword!

But does not this contradict the rest of scripture, which speaks of peace in Christ’s coming? Yes, Jesus brings peace. He is the revelation of the God of peace. God is the God of peace not only because he makes it, but also because he is peace in himself. He lives in perfect harmony with himself. In him there is no contradiction, no struggle, no warfare, and no frustration—not the least ripple of disharmony mars his being. He lives in perfect, blessed covenant fellowship and friendship in himself among the three persons of his divine being. Blessed God of peace.

His peace he gives. He gives it in Christ. In Christ God

made peace. When Christ was born, the army of angels sang of peace. The night sky was filled with angels, and the hills around Bethlehem and the sacred halls of heaven reverberated with their song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men of God's goodwill."

The Old Testament prophets from Moses to Malachi also spoke about peace, and none more eloquently than Isaiah, who sang the song of the new heavens and new earth. He sang of the everlasting reign of the Prince of Peace; of a world of perfect righteousness; of a creation in which the ox, the ass, the lamb, the lion, and the wolf all lie down together in peace, so that the whole creation lives in everlasting, uninterrupted peace. Lovely peace.

There is only peace in righteousness, so there is only peace in Jesus Christ. He alone has righteousness, the very righteousness of God worked out at Christ's cross for God's people. So the apostles, as the heirs of the prophets, spoke of God's people being justified by faith, of their sins being forgiven, of their warfare being accomplished, and of divine righteousness being freely imputed to all and everyone who does not work but believes the gospel. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By his gospel he establishes peace in his church. Jesus has broken down the middle wall of partition and established peace between Jew and Gentile in his church, out of two making one new man and so making peace. He brings peace to believers, a peace that passes all understanding and that keeps our hearts and our minds in every circumstance. For if God be for us, then who or what can be against us? In all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Jesus brings peace. He is peace. He establishes peace. He perfects peace in his kingdom and forever.

But peace on earth Christ does not send. Not peace but a sword! A sword is an instrument of war, division, and death. The sword is the power to take away a man's property, liberty, and life. The deep cause of the sword is hatred. Because one man hates another man, he takes up the sword against the one he hates in order to kill him. The sword is the weapon of warfare, suffering, division, and death, which arises out of an intense hatred. Defining the sword, Christ says, "To set a man at variance." Christ comes to send division, warfare, and strife. "Do not think that I come to bring peace on the earth."

Not peace but division!

It is division that takes place in nations of the world, so that certain members of the nation drag other members of the nation before kings and counselors in order to try them, condemn them, and kill them.

It is division that comes into churches. Jesus warns that men will deliver you up to the councils and scourge you in the synagogues. These were the councils, consistories, and churches of his day. Members falsely will charge

other members before the consistory. Ministers wickedly will charge other ministers. Elders deceitfully will charge their ministers with crimes beyond belief. Members will hate other members. The back of church will be a killing gallery of evil whispers and murderous looks. The assemblies of the church will be viper pits, where if one as much as twitches he is a dead man. There is division in the council, in the consistory, at the classis, and at the synod; so that there is no unanimity, no comradery, no mutual affection, but hatred and division. There is unrest in the congregation, members leave, and families are divided on the same church question. This division might begin with simple dissent. The division progresses until the votes pass by a smaller and smaller margin, and consistory meetings drag on with endless discussions. Then, perhaps, motion after motion fails on a tie vote. Much evil is hidden for many years by smooth words. But when the carnal element has the majority, the truth is cast out by vote.

It is division that comes into families. "Oh, confess me before men!" They will hate you! The world? Yes, the world will hate you. The false church? Yes, it will malign you. But so will your brother. A man's enemies will be those of his own household. Lord, but my wife, my children, my parents, my brothers and sisters, my friends? "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth!"

Not peace but a sword!

Christ's coming into one and not another divides a son against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Christ divides between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, between cousins and uncles and aunts, between grandchildren and grandparents; so that there is strife, arguments, disagreements, hatred, enmity, and warfare. Christ rips apart Sunday coffee hours, birthday party gatherings, and family get-togethers. He divides in the home, church, and school.

Christ does!

When he comes.

Not peace but a sword!

In the family.

There is no righteousness in many, so that there is treachery against the truth. There is the treachery of a wife against her husband, a child against his parents, or parents against the children. *Treachery* is the breach of a sacred trust, so that the most intimate bonds of human fellowship and relationship are violated. A brother delivers up his brother to be killed. A child betrays his parents to the authorities, or the father rises up against his children to cause them to be put to death. In order to save their lives, officebearers betray their sacred trust to love the truth and to defend it at all costs. Secret meetings are held, and open rebellions are fomented.

There is no love of the truth in many, so there is hatred of the truth. Men put other men who confess the truth on trial, condemn them, scourge them, slander them, and shake their heads at them.

For those who are so spitefully used, there is disappointment, discouragement, trouble, and affliction of every conceivable kind: indescribable, excruciating, crushing psychological and spiritual anguish; numbing bewilderment; terrible, paralyzing, agonizing fear.

The husband confesses, and the wife of his bosom tells him, "I do not believe what you believe, and I hate you for what you believe. I am angry at you for bringing this trouble into our marriage. I am leaving you because of what you believe and confess." The father tells his daughter who sacrifices all for the truth's sake and who leaves the apostatizing church and joins the true that she is sinning. The mother-in-law—if she will talk to her at all—lays all the blame for the family troubles on her daughter-in-law. The friend forsakes his friend, and the brother shamelessly kills the brother.

This sword brings death into the mind, heart, relationships, and life of the child of God. Jesus says that. "He who finds his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it." If only all that Christ talked about was physical death; for in such a circumstance, death would be a relief that at last brought an end to the suffering of the child of God from this painful, devouring sword that has devoured his marriage, his family, his livelihood, his relationships, and seemingly all his former life.

When Jesus comes, the devouring sword of division, hatred, and warfare comes. All history long in his coming, this is true.

He came into the garden of Eden, and what was the word of God concerning his coming? Enmity! Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, yes. Then warfare with the devil and all his seed. There was peace on earth for a few awful moments between Adam and Eve and Satan, and thus there was war between Adam and Eve and God. War with God is terrible. War with God means that the holy and righteous God in all the fullness of his perfectly glorious and good being stands against the sinner to destroy the sinner so that his whole earthly life and all that he receives in that earthly life stand against him and serve his condemnation. In Eden the human race in Adam stood at war with God. Better war with the whole

world than war with God. Better peace with God and warfare with the world.

And into Eden God himself personally came and preached peace. God preached Jesus, and God established peace in the hearts and lives of Adam and Eve by the preaching of Jesus. God forgave their sin—terrible sin—and he imputed to them righteousness, the promised righteousness of Jesus Christ, and there God made peace between them and him and reconciled them in their hearts and minds with him by faith in Jesus Christ.

And with that act of God's grace, massive, history-long enmity and division came into the earth.

The whole history of the Old Testament bears witness to the coming of the sword in the coming of the promised

Jesus. Old Testament history is nothing more and nothing less than the history of the coming of Jesus Christ in all the promises and prophecies and in all the types and ceremonies.

What a bloody history! Cain and Abel. Enoch would have been killed, but the Lord took him. Noah and his family had to be saved from the threatening world by water. Jacob and Esau warred in the womb. The whole wretched history of Joseph was one of this murderous sword.

The bloody history of Israel. Nation rising against nation, city against city, kingdom against kingdom, people against people, and family against family. The persecution of Israel in Egypt and the Lord's destruction of the Egyptians. The Levites' killing their own brethren within the nation and Israel's killing the Canaanites in the wars of the conquest: city after city, army after army, people after people destroyed. The wars of David; the division of the kingdom; the captivity; the hatred of Haman, the Edomite.

Then Christ came in the flesh. He came and more blood. The babies of Bethlehem at the hands of Herod's murderous soldiers: a terrible judgment at Christ's coming. He came preaching, and there was division among the people because of him. There was division among his disciples because of him: one betrayed Jesus with a kiss; they all forsook him and fled; another denied him with cursing and swearing. The church council tried Jesus and condemned him in secret and in the dead of night. The false church betrayed him to the world, and the world executed him as a common criminal.

Not peace but a sword!

Everything is peaceful until Christ comes! War with God but peace on earth. Peace among nations, peace among

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Christ comes!...
Many convivial coffee hours,
happy get-togethers, fun
vacations, and pleasant beach
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the apostate, peace in families, peace among brothers and sisters, peace among husbands and wives, peace among parents and children, and peace among grandparents and grandchildren. Many convivial coffee hours, happy get-togethers, fun vacations, and pleasant beach days.

Until Christ comes; then a sword, and all is torn to shreds.

Salvation!

He himself personally is the realization of the promise of peace. In him God and man are perfectly and permanently united together. As God and man in perfect union, Christ also suffered the sword himself. In suffering that sword, he also accomplished salvation. He earned and merited perfect righteousness, holiness, satisfaction, and redemption. He established peace by his cross. He accomplished the reconciliation of his people and brought them to God through the blood of the cross.

And Christ comes in the preaching of the truth of the gospel. Not just preaching but the *preaching of the truth of the gospel!* Preaching, mere words of men—sometimes moving, sometimes emotional, and sometimes full of earthly wisdom and earthly power, but always and only the words of men—never bring a sword. Under such preaching there will be peace on the earth; peace in congregations and at classes and synods; peace on job sites; peace in families and in marriages; peace at coffee hours and during vacations; peace between the church and the world and between the church and the apostate church. There will be no division and no warfare. And everyone in that peaceful relationship—coexistence—shall perish. They will perish in their peace and in all their conviviality, for they are without God and without Christ and without righteousness and truth in the world.

But when the gospel comes, then Christ comes and confesses about himself; then he lays hold on his people, draws them to himself, and saves them. Then the Spirit of Christ speaks in them, and they confess him before men.

Then not peace but a sword!

When Christ comes, he always comes for the salvation of his people. When he comes, he calls them out of the world and unto himself. In himself he gives them his peace. When he comes, he changes them in the depths of their beings, in their hearts. They were at peace with the world because they loved the world, and the world loved them. When Christ comes, his people are at peace with God, and the world hates them, and they have war with the world. The love of God is enmity with the world, and the love of the world is enmity with God.

When Christ comes, he creates division between his people and the world. He does not bring peace on the earth because there is no peace between him and the god of this world, Satan. There is no peace between Christ

and the world. There is no peace between Christ and the ungodly, false church; and thus there can be no peace—only warfare—between his dear church and the ungodly world and the apostate church.

This means that the only thing that can gain the believer peace in the world is conformity with it. Conform with the world, and you will have peace. Conform with the false church and all her lies, all her murders, and all her wickedness; and you will have peace. Conform, and you can have peace with all who love the world, the things of the world, and the life of the world and whose hope is in this world. Conform with the world-loving spouse, and you will have peace. Conform with the world-loving child, parent, brother, or sister; and you will have peace. You, too, can share together superficial friendship and superficial fellowship.

But you will be without God.

The church can only conform with the world out of love for the world and hatred for God. That is the deep source of world conformity: love of the world, an unholy love of the world that God hates, and an unrighteous toleration of that which God will not tolerate.

There is perfect peace between Christ and his church. The true church confesses his truth. The true believer joins the church where the truth is confessed. The church and believer live contentedly under the truth of Jesus. But that truth will never bring peace on the earth. That truth will always bring a sword, so that that truth is the occasion of divisions in nations, churches, schools, families, and right within the heart of a man. The only way to have peace on the earth is abominable silence about Christ, abominable world conformity, and making an abominable peace with wickedness. The confession of Jesus, if that confession be a confession of Jesus, does not bring peace but a sword. The preaching of Jesus, if that preaching be the preaching of Jesus, does not bring peace but a sword. If Jesus has come to a man and saved him, he will have not peace in the earth but a sword, and if that man will have peace in the earth—in his family, home, school, and church—then he must cast out Jesus.

Oh, it is not as though those who cast out Jesus never mention his name again or do not have some preaching about Jesus. But they will not have the Christ of the sword of division. They cast out Jesus precisely at the point at which Jesus brings division. Whatever is the specific point of the sword that is piercing their lives or the edge of the sword that is dividing in their families, then Christ must be gotten rid of at that precise point so that they might have their abominable peace.

When Jesus comes and where Jesus is, there is no peace on the earth but a sword!

Do not think, then, that Christ comes to bring peace. Such thinking imperils confession of Christ and thus

imperils the soul. Thinking that Christ's coming is to bring peace and supposing then that it will bring no sword, that man is offended when Christ—not men but Christ—brings a sword. Being offended that Christ brings the sword—in the preaching, in his church, among his friends, at coffee get-togethers, with his wife and children, and on the job—he denies Christ, falls silent, or heaps all manner of blame on Christ.

Do not say, "That wretched minister. If only he would stop preaching this or that subject, we could have peace." Do not say, "If only my brother, my mother, or my daughter would stop bringing up this or that question, we could have peace." Then you blame *Christ* and heap blame on him for his sword. You will not join your confessing brother, mother, or daughter in the confession of Christ, and you will not suffer Christ's sword to come into your life either. Do not say, "Let us sit down together and have a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, and let us talk about business or the weather, and let us *not* talk about these doctrines and issues that divide us." Then you have fallen silent about *Christ*. Not to confess Christ is to deny him. Not to confess Christ at the point he must be confessed is itself a denial of him, but that is also where it inevitably leads. Peter went to the high priest's residence just to observe quietly, but God revealed Peter's heart. His quietness about Christ was a denial of Christ. Not to confess Christ inevitably leads to a denial of Christ.

To think that Jesus brings peace on the earth, which is to deny that he sends the sword, is already a denial of him, for Christ said without any doubt that he brings a sword.

To think that Christ brings peace on the earth will imperil the church's militant confession of the truth at those specific points where that confession brings division. Because she thinks Christ brings earthly peace, for the sake of that earthly peace in her midst or even with other churches, she will cease to confess militantly the truth of Christ. Thinking that Christ comes to bring peace, church members will be offended by the division that he brings. Thinking that Christ comes to bring peace, they will carefully craft their writings so that they do not bite or chide and offend anyone—not even the enemies of the truth. Thinking that Christ comes to bring peace, they will demand that the preacher speak smooth words to make their church foyers more comfortable, their coffee get-togethers more pleasant, their family gatherings more convivial, their work environments easier, and their fellowship with the deniers of Christ more enjoyable. Thinking that way, churches, professors, ministers, elders, deacons, husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters will be offended by Christ and those who bring him. They will not confess him and bring that division, and they will hate those who do.

Division is not at all difficult to explain. Christ says that he comes to send a sword; and in sending the sword, he creates division in the most intimate human relationships; and families, churches, denominations, and whole nations are torn in pieces. We are forbidden by Christ to suppose that our confession of him or our preaching of him will do anything else in the earth than send out a sword that divides in the most painful ways and brings suffering and sorrow into our lives.

This corrects our naïve—carnal—thinking. Maybe the disciples were naïve. Ministers fresh out of seminary; they had learned from Jesus, and then they were going to preach Jesus in the synagogues. Perhaps they counseled themselves that if they preached Jesus, Israel would listen and the multitudes would grow. They were mistaken. Jesus brought a sword. People left, and the disciples were beaten. Friends and family turned on them and hated them.

Do not think that Jesus will bring peace. Not peace but a sword!

It is his work. When he comes, he sees to it that a sword comes. That not only teaches the believer that this will happen and that Christ is the author of it, but it also comforts the believer. It comforts him in the division for which he is invariably blamed at Christ's coming. The believer confesses Christ in a world that hates him, and the believer takes the blame: you are an evil Christian; you are a divider of brethren, husbands and wives, and parents and children. You are an evil church for teaching those things. You are harsh and unloving for saying those things. You are to blame for the division! You, *you* are!

Christ claims that work for himself.

More still, this division is God's will. God determined Christ's coming and his work. Not peace on the earth but the sword is God's will. He takes one of a family and two of a city. "I come not to bring peace on the earth. Not peace but a sword because God sent me for this purpose—a purpose that is ultimately the revelation of God's eternal counsel of election and reprobation. When I come, I come to bring a sword because in my coming I save God's elect people, and I harden the reprobate.

"No, no, no, dear confessing believer. Do not be depressed and cast down. Do not be offended at the sword that I send, so that you stop confessing me. Confess me, and do not deny me. He who confesses me will I confess. He who denies me, I will deny. Do not love your earthly family more than me, do not love anything more than me; he who loves his father or mother or sister or brother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever saves his life shall lose it. Whoever loses his life shall save it.

"Confess me!

"He who confesses me, I will confess before my Father and his holy angels in heaven."

—NJL

REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING

Reformed Believers Publishing 2021 Annual Association Meeting

Thursday, October 21, 2021

The meeting will be livestreamed

Location: Wonderland Tire

Address: 1 84th St SW, Byron Center, MI 49315

Time: 7:00 p.m.

1. Opening devotions—Henry Kamps, board chairman
2. Introduction of the speaker—Henry Kamps
3. Speech—Rev. Nathan Langerak: “Reformation, Not Schism”
4. Announce the names of the new association members
5. Announce the names of the retiring and new board members
6. Secretary’s report—Nathan Price
7. Treasurer’s report—Jason Cleveland
8. Remarks—Rev. Andy Lanning
9. Remarks—Rev. Martin VanderWal: “Reading for Discernment”
10. Closing prayer—Reverend VanderWal
11. Refreshments and fellowship

325 84th St SW, Suite 102, Byron Center, MI 49315
office@reformedbelieverspub.org
reformedbelieverspub.org



THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL AS DEMAND OF THE COVENANT

The burden of this editorial is that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. The covenant of God with believers and their seed requires that those believers work together to establish, maintain, and use a Christian school for the rearing of their seed. A Christian school is not merely an option for a believer but is an obligation for him. His obligation is to have a Christian *school* with other parents, not merely Christian *education* for his own children, which is also his obligation. Although the form of a Christian school may vary according to circumstances, God's covenant demands that there be a Christian school.

The Christian School

What is a Christian school? What is the *essence* of a Christian school? A Christian school is believers' (especially parents') working together in the covenantal rearing and instruction of their covenant seed.

This definition attempts to pare a Christian school down to its essence. About the *who* of the Christian school, the definition says only *believers* (especially parents). About the *what* of the Christian school, it says only *the covenantal rearing and instruction of their covenant seed*. About the *how* of the Christian school, it says only *working together*.

This definition of a Christian school does not include elements that are often included. For example, it says nothing about the organizational or institutional aspect of a Christian school, such as the formation of an association, the appointment of a school board, the securing of a building, and the adoption of curricula. Of course, of necessity there will be organization as believers work together in the covenant rearing and instruction of their children. The instruction cannot proceed without organization. Father Bill cannot wake up on Monday and decide that he will teach chapter 5 of the algebra book to the neighborhood children, wake up on Tuesday and decide that he will teach chapter 3, and wake up on Wednesday and decide that he will teach chemistry from now on. There must be organization in the rearing and instruction, and that organization will require some level of association and oversight on the part of the parents. The parents will undoubtedly establish a formal institution as the most efficient way to work together in the rearing

and instruction of their children in the necessary subjects, and they will secure a building where the instruction can be carried out. But this organizational and institutional aspect is not the essence of the Christian school.

The above definition also says nothing about the hiring of teachers through whom the parents in part fulfill their calling to rear and instruct their children. The hiring of godly, qualified teachers is the most important thing that the parents will do in their working together to rear and instruct their children. The teachers will stand in the place of the parents in the classrooms and train the children in all of the necessary subjects in the light of God's word. Parents need such assistance from godly, qualified teachers in light of the breadth and depth of instruction that children need to fulfill their God-given callings today. By Thursday father Bill will realize that he can teach neither algebra nor chemistry, and, with the other parents, he will set about to find a fellow believer who can. But as necessary as is a qualified Christian teacher, even this aspect of the Christian school is not its essence.

What then is the essence of the Christian school? The essence of the Christian school is the *togetherness* of the endeavor to instruct the covenant seed. The Christian school is the covenant parents' and other believers' *working together* in the covenantal instruction of the covenant seed. Wherever you have the parents' and other believers' joining *together* for the instruction of the covenant seed, there you have the essence of the Christian school.

The Christian school is a distinct work from the parents' other work of rearing and instructing their children privately in the home as part of their daily calling. Family devotions around the dinner table, the provision of sound reading material for the children and youth, conversations about the glory of God in his creation and the mercy of God in Christ to his church, and the discipline of the children are all part of the private instruction in the home. But this private instruction in the home, which is good and necessary, is for that family. There is no working together with other families in it. The instruction profits only the children of the one family but does not reach the children of the other families. Therefore, in addition to the private rearing and instruction of the children in the home, parents also have the calling to work together with

other parents and believers in the rearing and instruction of their covenant seed. In the working together for that rearing and instruction, there you have the Christian school.

Because the essence of the Christian school is parents' working *together* in the rearing of the covenant seed, the opposite of a Christian school is *independentism* on the part of a family. Rather than working together with the other parents in the rearing and instruction of their children, a family keeps itself apart from the other families. The parents see to the rearing and instruction of their own children, but only their own children. Probably they even give competent academic instruction to their children through the use of the multitude of homeschool curricula that are available today. Perhaps they even give outstanding academic instruction to their children, so that their children far outshine their peers. Being believing parents, they also undoubtedly strive to see to it that the instruction is spiritually sound and godly. They labor to raise their children in the fear of the Lord, and the faith and godliness of their children are evident to all. But in this good, sound, godly instruction of their covenant seed, the parents are independent of the other believers. Even if they regularly send a check for financial support to the Christian school, the family itself is separate from and apart from and independent of the other families in the rearing of its covenant seed.

A Christian school, on the other hand, is the opposite of such independentism. A Christian school is believers' (especially parents') working together in the covenantal rearing and instruction of their covenant seed.

Demand of the Covenant

The Christian school is a demand of the covenant. The covenant of God with believers and their seed requires that these believers work together in the rearing and instruction of their covenant seed.

In the covenant of God with believers and their seed, the issue is not only that the content of the instruction be covenantal. Covenantal content of the instruction certainly is a requirement of the covenant. The children who are being instructed are God's covenant children, as many as he has called. By the gospel of Jesus Christ and by his Spirit, according to his gracious decree, God has brought these children into his own fellowship. Therefore, they must walk before God in gratitude and service. Their lives in the world must be governed and illuminated by the word of God in every sphere. They must be instructed in this life from the scriptures, and the light of God's word must be shined upon all their subjects. The content of the Christian education must be biblical and covenantal.

But the covenant of God with believers and their seed governs more than the *content* of Christian education. The covenant of God also governs the *manner* of Christian education. The manner of Christian education must be *together*. The covenant of God requires that parents labor together in the covenant rearing and instruction of their children. Therefore, the Christian school, the essence of which is the togetherness of the endeavor, is a demand of the covenant. The covenant demands Christian education, and the covenant demands the Christian school.

Inasmuch as the covenant of God requires a Christian school, the covenant also forbids independentism in the rearing of the covenant seed. The family that gives its own children a Christian education has not exhausted the demands of the covenant. Rather, the covenant demands that that family must also work together with the other believing families for the covenant rearing and instruction of its own seed and of the other families' seed.

Scripture

It must be demonstrated that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. In our day there is growing opposition to the truth that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. The most powerful challenge comes from those who say that scripture does not require the Christian school. The argument goes that scripture often explicitly requires Christian education for the covenant seed but that scripture nowhere explicitly requires the Christian school. Appeal is made to passages like Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The passage obviously calls for Christian education but says nothing about the Christian school. Further, the argument goes that scripture lays the responsibility for the Christian education of the children only upon the parents of those particular children. Whether the argument states it explicitly or not, the argument means that the responsibility for the children's instruction belongs exclusively to the parents of those children *independent of any other parents and independent of any other children*. Appeal is made to passages such as Deuteronomy 6:7: "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children." The passage, so the argument goes, speaks only of the parents' teaching their children and does not give that responsibility to any other believer.

This form of opposition to the Christian school is powerful and has a strong effect on the thinking of godly parents. Godly parents love the Bible and want to govern their lives by God's word. They are persuaded by the argument that the Bible only requires Christian content in the

rearing of the children but does not require a Christian school, especially when they notice that the Bible does not use the word *school*. But the argument is in error. The Bible does require the Christian school, even though it never uses the term *Christian school*.

God's word requires the Christian school explicitly. God's word does this by explicitly requiring the whole church to teach the children. The much-beloved and oft-quoted passage in Deuteronomy 6 is not addressed to individual parents, as is often thought. The passage is addressed to the whole church. The grammar of the passage is unmistakable on this and can easily be tested by anyone with a King James Bible. The KJV uses *thee / thou* to refer to the singular and *ye / you* to refer to the plural. In Deuteronomy 6:4–9, God is addressing all Israel. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (v. 4). God continues to speak to his nation, Israel, as "thou." "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (v. 5). We could read it this way: "And thou, Israel, shalt love the LORD thy God." In the passage God never changes the one whom he is addressing. He never leaves "O Israel" to address "O parent." All of his commands to teach the children are still addressed to "thou," which is Israel. "And thou [Israel] shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou [Israel] sittest in thine house, and when thou [Israel] walkest by the way, and when thou [Israel] liest down, and when thou [Israel] risest up" (v. 7).

Yes, it is true that the individual parent in Deuteronomy 6 bears the primary responsibility for the rearing of the children. The parent is the one sitting in the house with the children and walking by the way with the children and lying down and rising up with the children. Nevertheless, God's address is unmistakably to "O Israel" throughout. Israel together has the responsibility to teach God's precepts diligently to Israel's children. This togetherness in the teaching of the children is the essence of the Christian school. When God says, "O Israel, teach thy children," he is saying, "O Israel, teach thy children together."

Psalm 78 also requires togetherness in the instruction of the covenant seed. The fathers are to make known to their children the works of God. "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children" (v. 5). About this, the fathers say that they will show these things not only to their own children but to others as well. "We will not hide them

from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done" (v. 4). The togetherness of the endeavor to instruct the children is the essence of the Christian school.

Heidelberg Catechism

The teaching of this editorial that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant is the doctrine of the Reformed confessions and Church Order. This doctrine of the confessions and Church Order has been opposed, confused, weakened, and changed by Reformed churches who are not satisfied with their own confessions and Church Order on this point. Nevertheless, the confessions and Church Order are plain and unambiguous that God in his covenant with his people demands that they establish and use Christian schools together for the rearing of their covenant seed.

Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains the fourth commandment of God's law, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." The Catechism asks, "What doth God require in the fourth commandment?" The Catechism answers, "First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 128). The schools that the Catechism mentions are not primarily the seminaries, where the seminary students learn theology. Rather, the schools are the day schools, where the boys and girls are taught the arts and sciences. Some of these boys may be ministers someday, and their training in the arts and sciences will serve their ministries. Zacharias Ursinus, the primary author and the authorized expositor of the Heidelberg Catechism, writes this about the meaning of "the schools" in Lord's Day 38: "The maintenance of schools may be embraced under this part of the honor which is due to the ministry; for unless the arts and sciences be taught, men can neither become properly qualified to teach, nor can the purity of doctrine be preserved and defended against the assaults of heretics."¹

In the fourth commandment, requiring the keeping of the sabbath day, God requires his people to maintain schools where the arts and sciences are taught. The boys who will become ministers need to be educated in the arts and sciences in order to learn to think and to apply the word of God to every branch of earthly knowledge and every facet of earthly life. Training in the arts and sciences equips these boys to be teachers themselves, who will someday teach the church of God the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Training in the arts and sciences also

1 Zacharias Ursinus and G. W. Williard, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 570.

prepares them to defend the faith against learned heretics, who are the apostles of Satan but who deceptively transform themselves into apostles of light. To see through the heretics' deception and to ward it off so that God's people do not bear patiently with the heretics, ministers must be educated and equipped in the skills of thinking, understanding, and teaching.

In the Reformed explanation of the fourth commandment, the maintenance of the schools is first! The Reformed explanation of the fourth commandment does not begin with diligently frequenting the church of God on the day of rest, although this also is the Reformed explanation of the fourth commandment. The Reformed explanation of the fourth commandment begins with the maintenance of the schools, which schools stand in the service of maintaining the ministry of the gospel.

The Heidelberg Catechism does not make the maintenance of schools optional for the Reformed believer, so that he may maintain a Christian school or he may not maintain a Christian school. For the Catechism this is a matter of God's holy law. It is required. The confession of every Reformed church member in Lord's Day 38 is that God demands Christian schools. "What doth God require...? First, that...the schools be maintained."

Church Order Article 21

The Church Order also requires the establishment, maintenance, and use of good Christian schools. The Church Order establishes the demand for good Christian schools in three places. First of all, and most powerfully stated, in article 21: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 387).

The matter being treated in article 21 is good Christian schools. This is the plain teaching of the main clause of the article: "The consistories shall see to it that there are *good Christian schools*." The matter being treated in article 21 is not Christian education in general. Then the article would read, "The consistories shall see to it

that there is *good Christian education*." Rather, the entire article is about good Christian schools. Everything that the article says, it says about the good Christian schools. Article 21 is not saying anything about private Christian education in the home. It is not saying anything about official Christian education by the church in catechism classes. Article 21 is strictly about the good Christian schools.

The fact that article 21 is about good Christian schools and not Christian education in general is evident from the original article 21 as adopted by the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19: "Everywhere Consistories shall see to it, that there are good schoolmasters who shall not only instruct

the children in reading, writing, languages and the liberal arts, but likewise in godliness and in the Catechism."² The Synod of Dordt was not speaking about Christian education that may take place in the home or anywhere else. The synod was speaking about the institution of the Christian school, in which good schoolmasters would instruct the children in their lessons.³

Article 21 as we have it today requires, first, that there be good Christian schools. The consistory is to "see to it." This does not mean that the consistory itself sets up a Christian school. The school is parental. The school is that "in which the parents have their children instructed." The parents establish the school, maintain the school, and govern the school. The consistory's role is not to establish, maintain, and govern the school but to see to it that the parents are doing so. The consistory's role of seeing to it that there are good Christian schools shows that the school is required. It is not merely advisable for parents to establish a good Christian school, or in their best interest to establish a good Christian school, or optional for them to establish a good Christian school. Then article 21 would read, "The consistories shall promote and advise and encourage the establishment of good Christian schools as much as possible." Article 21 uses the language of obligation and duty: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools." In its fulfillment of this requirement, the consistory may certainly promote and advise and

The covenant of God with believers and their seed requires that those believers work together to establish, maintain, and use a Christian school for the rearing of their seed. A Christian school is not merely an option for a believer but is an obligation for him.

2 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 93.

3 Those readers who are interested in reading about why article 21 was changed to its present form in 1914 can consult Van Dellen and Monsma (92–94).

encourage the establishment of good Christian schools, but it promotes and advises and encourages the establishment of good Christian schools as the obligation of the parents. In seeing to it that there are good Christian schools, the consistory does not bring some good advice, but it brings the duty and requirement of the parents. “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools.”

Second, article 21 requires that parents *use* the good Christian schools. “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools *in which the parents have their children instructed.*” The parents, having established a good Christian school, have their children instructed in that school. Of course, using the school was the point of establishing the school. The parents use the school by sending their children to the school. They enroll their children in the school, and then they bundle them up with their lunches, their backpacks, and their pencils, and they send them to the school. The parent’s obedience to his obligation is not finished once he has established the school, but the parent must also have his children instructed in the school.

This, too, the consistories shall see to as part of the obligation of the parents. “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed.” If a parent does not have his children instructed in the good Christian school, the consistory shall see to it that he does. The consistory’s method for seeing to it is not through coercion, force, or threats as lords over God’s heritage, but through the steady and unflinching application of the word of God to the parent to call him to his duty, to rebuke him for his neglect of his duty, and to encourage him in his life of gratitude in that duty.

God in his providence may prevent a particular family from being able to send a child to the school. The unique need of the child laid upon him by God may make it impossible for that child to go to school. This is God’s will, and it is no neglect of the parents’ duty when they do not send that child to school. Just as the Lord in his providence may make it impossible for a saint through age or infirmity to attend worship on the Lord’s day, so the Lord may make it impossible for a particular family and a particular child to use the good Christian school. In such a case the parents are right not to use the good Christian school. But in such a case let all the other covenant parents see if they might assist their brethren by including teachers and curriculum in their good Christian school that would accommodate the needs of that child.

For all of those who are able to use the good Christian school but refuse, impenitence for their neglect may lead to Christian discipline by the consistory. The parents have

a duty to use the good Christian schools, and the consistory has a duty to see to it. Reformed consistories have always trodden softly here in the past, preferring not to discipline for the fact of a parent’s failing to use the good Christian schools. Instead, the preferred method of consistories has been to instruct, urge, and exhort the parent to his duty. In light of the long, long history of treading softly on this issue, perhaps it is to be recommended. But let the consistory remember three things.

First, the consistory must remember to keep on instructing, urging, and exhorting the parents to use the good Christian school. The soft approach can often become no approach at all as the consistory gets busy with all its other work. In addition, both consistory and parents quickly grow weary of a back and forth with no resolution in sight. Both consistory and parents find it easier simply to peek through their fingers at the problem without regularly addressing it. On the way to family visitation, the minister and elder can all too easily assure themselves, “We already talked about that with them last year” or “They know where we stand on this.” That is not seeing to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed.

Second, the consistory must remember that its instructing, urging, and exhorting the parents to use the good Christian school must be from the word of God. The officebearer’s urging is not a matter of his own preference or opinion but of the word of God. The only right that the officebearers have to insist on the parents’ duty is found in what God himself has made the parents’ duty. When the officebearers bring the word of God, they have a solid foundation upon which to stand. That word gives them the confidence that even if it is unpleasant to their own flesh and to the flesh of the parents to bring this admonition, it is nevertheless the word of God. The word of God is what makes the urging and exhortation so serious for the parents as well. It is the most serious thing to neglect and reject the word of God.

Third, when the consistory allows impenitence regarding the parents’ duty to use the good Christian schools, it fills up a keg of gunpowder in its pulpit. The minister, the consistory, and the congregation all know that there are families who neglect or refuse to use the good Christian school. The moment anything is prayed or preached about good Christian schools, the families who do not use them feel singled out, and the entire congregation feels uneasy. The moment any command is brought from the pulpit to use the good Christian schools, and the moment any rebuke is made to the congregation for its negligence regarding the good Christian schools, the fuse is lit. The wisdom of man in dealing with a powder keg is to tiptoe around it, not to

light it. The minister (to his shame), the consistory, and the congregation all prefer that the pulpit just remain silent about the Christian school. Let the pulpit say something about Christian education, fine, but let the pulpit be silent about the Christian school. If the soft approach has the effect of filling up a powder keg in the pulpit, then it turns out not to be a soft approach after all. Rather, it becomes an approach that threatens to blow up the church. The blowup might not take the form of a big to-do, but it might take the quieter form of enervating the preaching and cultivating in the congregation an atmosphere of mutual silence about some of the things of God. This quieter blowup is no less damaging. Rather, let the elders in their work and the minister in his preaching not neglect to bring the word, however it may pierce and wound the congregation to its benefit.

Although the soft approach may be advisable in general, it may not be used in the case of parents who reveal carelessness toward their covenant seed or in the case of parents who have carnal, earthly reasons for refusing to use the Christian school. For example, if the parent not only refuses to use the Christian school but also neglects any meaningful Christian instruction of his children by other means, that parent reveals carelessness toward the covenant seed and even hatred of the covenant seed. He destroys the seed that God gave him by neglecting to bring up that seed in all things in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Or, for example, if a parent refuses to use the Christian school because of mammon, he reveals that he is an idolater who worships filthy lucre. Either he refuses to pay for a Christian education though he could, or he is too proud to receive help from the body of Christ when he cannot pay. For the sake of his dollars, he does not use the Christian school.

Article 21 grounds the Christian school in the covenant of God. “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.”

The covenant of God with his people in Christ is togetherness. It is the fellowship of God with his people in Christ, and his covenant with them establishes fellowship among his people. The covenant is the foe of

independentism. The demand of the covenant is not only that parents have their children instructed but also that they have them instructed in the good Christian schools.

Church Order Articles 41 and 44

The second and third places where the Church Order requires Christian schools are articles 41 and 44, in questions that are regularly put to consistories.

Article 41 requires that the president of the classis ask each consistory at every classis meeting, “Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 393).

Article 44 (and the questions appended to article 44) requires that the church visitors ask each consistory each year, “Does the consistory see to it that the parents send their children to the Christian school?” (*The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 2020 edition, 134).

Liberty

The demand of the covenant to rear and instruct our covenant seed together is a glorious demand. It is not an onerous burden but one that makes the child of God glad. The doctrine behind the command is the gospel of God’s unconditional covenant of grace with believers and their seed. The gospel of that doctrine is that the covenant children belong to God and not to us. God has given our children, as many as he has called, to Jesus Christ, who is responsible for them. The rearing and instruction of my covenant children and your covenant children are accomplished by him, just as much as the salvation of our children is accomplished by him. In the matter of the rearing and instruction of our covenant seed, he uses our instruction as means. But he accomplishes it, not at all dependent upon the means; rather, the means depend upon him. Therefore, we take up the rearing of our seed with relief and freedom and peace and zeal in humble thanksgiving to our covenant God. And we join together with fellow believers who have that same freedom and zeal to see to it that all of the covenant seed know their covenant God.

Something must be said yet about the form of the Christian school. Next time, God willing.

—AL

We have some exciting news to report. The annual association meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing will be held October 21, 2021, at the Wonderland Tire shop on 84th Street in Byron Center, Michigan. The keynote speaker for the evening will be Rev. Nathan Langerak, who will speak on the topic “Reformation, Not Schism.” Rev. Martin VanderWal will also be in attendance in person to speak on the topic “Reading for Discernment.” It is hard to believe that the last meeting was a year ago already. I don’t know whether that seems like so, so, so long ago or like it was yesterday. Whatever the case, God worked a tremendous reformation of his church since then, and this year’s annual meeting will be a fine occasion to commemorate it. A full-page announcement and agenda appear elsewhere in this issue.

In other news, you may notice that *Sword and Shield* has put on a little weight recently. The magazine is still lean and mean where it counts, that is, in its determination to engage in the theological issues of the day on behalf of the truth and against the lie, God helping us. But it has been a challenge to squeeze all of the articles into each issue lately. If it weren’t for our diligent copy editors and typesetter, the magazine would look a mess, and a word of thanks to them for the hours and hours that they put into each issue. This being a believer’s paper, we are determined to give God’s people space in the magazine. Therefore, the board has approved the addition of pages as needed for each issue. If you see a 28-page or a 32-page issue now and then instead of the usual 24 pages, you will know why.

In related news, the magazine continues to be run on a donation basis, and the donations have been generous. This has allowed us to send the magazine free of charge far and wide to many interested readers, both friend and foe alike. The magazine goes to many who otherwise would not be able to subscribe and to many who otherwise would not be willing to subscribe. The feedback indicates that there is still a wide readership for the magazine, even if the occasional household throws it on the kindling pile. A hearty thanks to all who have donated to the magazine and made its publication possible. Although the magazine is free of charge to the readers, it is not free of charge to publish. Therefore, with hat in hand, we ask that our readers consider making a donation to Reformed Believers Publishing through the website or at the address on the masthead. Please, and thank you.

We are thankful to God to be able to present to you the content of this issue. In commemoration of the great Reformation of October 31, 1517, Miss Evelyn Price has submitted a stirring poem about Martin Luther. We also have an article by Rev. Stuart Pastine, emeritus minister of the United Reformed Churches. Rev. Pastine lives in Kansas City, Missouri, and has been an avid reader of *Sword and Shield*. His article in this issue is filled with exegetical insights that demonstrate that James did not contradict Paul on forensic justification by faith alone and that, therefore, Norman Shepherd is wrong in his theory of “working faith,” as promoted in his book *The Way of Righteousness*. The second part of Reverend Pastine’s article will appear in the November issue of *Sword and Shield*, the Lord willing. Finally, in addition to the regular rubrics, we have an article from Mr. Philip Rainey. The occasion for Mr. Rainey’s article and its history are explained in an introduction to the article by the board of Reformed Believers Publishing.

It is October, and reformation is in the air. The board’s letter, Mr. Rainey’s article, Rev. Pastine’s article, and the regular rubrics all “take a battle stance,” to lift a line from Miss Price’s poem. This is as it should be, as is also explained in the poem:

The doctrines that Luther taught in his way
Were attacked just as they are today.
With God’s strength alone, we can advance
And, as Martin Luther, take a battle stance.

Yes, for *Sword and Shield* and for the believer, a battle stance, indeed.

As part of that battle stance, the editors are planning a special October 15 issue of the magazine regarding Professor Engelsma’s latest email article, an edited version of which was published on the blog of the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Keep an eye on your mailboxes around the middle of this month.

As always, those who are referenced in the articles in this issue, whether Rev. Martyn McGeown or Prof. Ronald Cammenga or Prof. Norman Shepherd or anyone else, are invited to reply for publication in the magazine. We believe the doctrines involved are of utmost importance, and we will give you space in the paper regarding them.

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

PROFESSOR SETTLED AND BINDING (1): A SHABBY SCREED

Shameless Self-Promotion

Prof. Ronald Cammenga recently released a shabby screed, venting what I can only surmise is months and perhaps years of pent-up choler. His screed is printed following this article.

As a purely formal observation, I would advise that in the future he might consider engaging the services of a copy editor to spare himself the embarrassment of school-boy errors in syntax and grammar. For the rest, the screed reveals how pathetic it is when a little man attempts to sound big and a pedantic one tries to sound grave. This is doubly pathetic when, to make his point, he must twist facts and engage in character assassination and the lowest forms of sophistry, such as empty name-calling and bare assertions.

He did not publish his dishonest rant in the *Standard Bearer* (*SB*). Very odd, considering that he writes “for the sake of our own Protestant Reformed people.” Reformed Protestant people are apparently beyond hope of recovery, and love does not extend to these benighted souls. One could be excused for thinking that what he wrote would nevertheless be important enough for Protestant Reformed members to publish in the *SB*, especially considering that he warns the people about false doctrine, schismatics, and Reformed Protestant harpies.

But we know that publishing such things in the *SB* is not allowed. The *SB* still refuses to engage in controversy. That onetime fiercely independent, fighting paper has become a timid rag that harmlessly parrots the denominational line. The *SB* is such a lazy dog that it will not even rise in defense of the denomination of which it is the “official” periodical. On its pages there may be laments; there may be hand-wringing; there may be generic statements of doctrine; there may be general notices of some error somewhere by somebody; but there may be no controversy.

Recognizing this, Professor Cammenga distributed his shabby email. Writing and widely distributing emails seem to be the favorite tactics of Protestant Reformed ministers these days. They can avoid the annoying censorship of the tone-conscious editors who police the pages of the *SB*. In emails the ministers can be themselves and write what they really think. I confess that their emails make

for more interesting reading than the carefully massaged articles in the *SB*. By his base attacks on the officebearers of Wingham—men more honorable than himself—and on officebearers and members of the Reformed Protestant Churches, especially defenseless women who will have no opportunity to answer him, but more importantly his attacks on the truth, Professor Cammenga has entered the fray. He states that he responds only to what “I deem most important.” So we have in his email a considered response to what Professor Cammenga deems the important aspects of Wingham’s document and by extension of the whole doctrinal controversy that gave rise to the separation of the Reformed Protestant Churches from the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

I disagree with virtually everything he writes, but I do commend him for being about the only Protestant Reformed minister who contended—and still contends—for what many ministers believed but would not say. He was willing to say boldly and repeatedly—some might say shamelessly, like a man wise in his own conceits—that the gospel of Neil and Connie Meyer is antinomian. I say many of them believed that because in my several conversations with ministers of Classis East, they stated plainly that Neil and Connie are antinomians and that their protests proved it. These ministers stated that the Meyers’ theology had to be condemned for the good of the churches and especially so that people would stop listening so critically to sermons. But Professor Cammenga publicly contended for that. He wrote protests about it, slipped it past the censors in his writings, and took some jabs off the pulpit for good measure. He said what everyone else thought and believed, even if they were embarrassed by his approach, his sources, and his words.

He now carries on with his very public *I-told-you-so* to the PRC. His whole email—if it were not so full of falsehoods—could be written off as shameless self-promotion and empty assertions unworthy of a response. Professor Cammenga loudly boasts that he has been proved right and forcefully asserts his case rather than proves it. He, of course, is allowed to instruct and even to criticize as he sees fit; and, while unseemly and unchristian, he may even boast. He is not going to lie and go unanswered. There are many Protestant Reformed people whom I

love, and they should be warned of his falsehoods and that they should take them as more evidence to leave the PRC. This is your leadership.

Vaunting Pride

The professor begins his self-justifying rant by saying, “I have been torn whether or not to respond to Wingham consistory’s document. It is a document in which four former officebearers level serious charges, never having pursued but disdained the biblical and church orderly way of bringing such charges prior to leaving our denomination.”

I take his profession of hesitancy with about the same seriousness as I would take a grubby Chicago ward politician’s profession of being hesitant to appear on camera. Ward politicians stumble over themselves to get their faces on the news, and Protestant Reformed ministers have been tripping over themselves to put out email responses to Wingham’s officebearers. Little Wingham has the PRC and her ministers fired up—mainly about defending their own reputations, but fired up nonetheless, which is a whole lot more than can be said about their reaction to the false doctrine that has plagued the denomination for years. Oh, would there had been so many and such strongly worded emails written against the *lie* of conditional justification and fellowship with God as we receive today to damn the *truth* as antinomian and the reformation of the church as schismatic and to rush to the ministers’ defense of themselves.

Besides, it is laughable that Professor Cammenga says about an email that contains almost nothing except praise for himself that he was hesitant. He was not hesitant. He waited to write because it would have struck the wrong note while many in the PRC were “lamenting” the terrible and unfortunate schism for him to say, “I told you so. I knew all along that the schismatics were antinomians.” Now was the right moment. Many had finished expressing their sham sorrow over the split, and so he could let everyone know that he had been right all along.

I note that Professor Cammenga instructs that the officebearers of Wingham are “former” officebearers. For a man who prides himself on being a church polity expert, he should know that officebearers *are allowed* to leave a denomination. This is the exercise of what is called the *autonomy of the local congregation*. He could have called the men former officebearers *in the PRC*. He could have used his favorite trope, *schismatic* officebearers. But one thing they are not is *former* officebearers. Who deposed them? Did Professor Cammenga take this prerogative to himself? Did he do this now by his shabby email? He should not be so willing, as Peter says, “to speak evil of dignities,” which officebearers surely are, whom Asaph

and Christ called “gods...and the scripture cannot be broken” (2 Pet. 2:10; Ps. 82:6; John 10:34–35). Professor Cammenga should also know that by deposing these officebearers in his letter he puts himself in the place of Christ, which is a dizzying height from which mere men are cast down precipitously for their vaunting pride. But perhaps Classis East of the PRC deposed these officebearers, or perhaps the church visitors made an appearance on the scene again to depose them. If they did, they were hierarchical, and they committed the same error as the Christian Reformed classes in 1924, and they attempted to ascend to the same lordly heights as Professor Cammenga does in his letter.

The reality is that he shows that the PRC pay lip service to the truth of the autonomy of the local congregation, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the denomination neither knows what that autonomy means nor believes it in reality. This is a mark of apostasy, especially in those churches that violate this principle so frequently it is becoming commonplace. This is especially shameful in a denomination whose origin was occasioned by the Christian Reformed Church’s callous and calculated violation of this principle. The autonomy of the local congregation means at its essence that Christ is the head of every congregation himself, without the likes of Professor Cammenga telling Christ whom he may and may not put into office. Christ put the officebearers of Wingham into office, and Professor Cammenga cannot depose them, certainly not by means of his shabby screed.

Protesting Is Finished

I note as well that he accuses the officebearers of Wingham of leaving a denomination without pursuing the biblical and church orderly way of bringing charges prior to their leaving. He charges that they “disdained” that way. In this he is either ignorant or malicious, neither of which is commendable in one who takes to himself to instruct the people of his denomination.

First, there have been scads of protests in the PRC. Just a compilation of the various protests would take several books. One of these days, if the Lord permits, I am going to answer those protests that have been so shamefully treated in the denomination. Members of Wingham wrote more than one of those protests. All of the protests, in some way or another, centered on the doctrinal controversy that once troubled the PRC and that she has finished by savagely suspending, deposing, and driving away one side in that controversy. I say yet again that the doctrinal controversy is finished in the PRC. The denomination has shown where she stands. Those who agreed with those protests need not protest themselves. Those protests are *their* protests. I have agreed with virtually

every doctrinal protest that has been written in the PRC, except Professor Cammenga's disgraceful protest against antinomianism. Those protests are expressions of what I believe. I need not write my own protest. The denomination's answers to those protests are her answers to me, just as they are answers to Wingham.

Second, when a denomination shows herself hostile to the gospel, begins killing officebearers routinely, and venomously drives out the truth, the Lord says, "Come out of the apostatizing church!" Here, too, Professor Cammenga is to be commended. He is willing to make this issue about *the truth*. Everyone in the PRC and elsewhere had better understand that the reformation of the church that has taken place was about *the truth*. The elders of Byron Center with the complicity of the consistory of Trinity and the hiss and fangs of Classis East lied and said the issue was only about a magazine editorship and statements in sermons they considered schismatic. But the controversy and the reformation were about *the preaching and the truth*. The elders of Crete, aided and abetted by the consistory of Peace, were unwilling to attack their minister's preaching openly but did so in secret and then publicly lied against the truth and said that the issue was about writing in a magazine with a schismatic editor. The controversy and reformation were about *the preaching and the truth*.

Read his letter, and you will understand that Professor Cammenga believes this too. He is happy that "this schismatic group as a whole" is gone because this means for him that *false doctrine* has been driven out. The controversy and reformation were about *the truth as the truth condemns the lie and is intolerant of that lie*. Professor Cammenga, to his credit, does not use subterfuge here; he does not supinely and ignorantly chalk up the separation to the misbehavior of some ministers somewhere somehow. Nothing that has happened can be construed in this way so as to give many an excuse for their evil if they were directly involved, their inaction if they were witnesses, their lack of involvement if they were sleeping, or their indecision now that the facts are coming out. Professor Cammenga's position and my position are the same in this regard: the split was about *the truth and the lie*. We disagree on what that means, but we can agree on this: the separation was about *the truth*.

Concerning the matter of protest and appeal, then, when a denomination makes clear where she stands on issues and that where she stands on issues is contrary to scripture, the Church Order, the gospel, and the creeds; when she is so utterly confusing—one would be tempted to say schizophrenic—in her explanation of the simple and pure gospel; when she persecutes the faithful by corruption of the mark of discipline, then officebearers have the *calling* to leave, as do all of God's people. Officebearers

do not have the calling to protest and appeal *ad infinitum*, especially to a denomination that has mishandled so many other protests. Officebearers have the *calling* to judge the denomination and what she believes by what she preaches and how she acts in discipline and to lead God's people out if the officebearers judge that the denomination is apostatizing and dangerous.

What Professor Cammenga writes is really a denial of the free association of churches in a denomination and the autonomy of the local congregation. When so many protests have already been written, officebearers may withdraw from a federation without protesting yet more. Their grounds may be criticized. Their reasons may be judged. But they may not be called *schismatics* as such for doing so, and neither may the officebearers be deposed, even by so towering a figure as Professor Cammenga.

Does the PRC no longer believe in the autonomy of the local congregation? Is her view of the federation really that once a congregation or members join they are there in perpetuity? May a congregation withdraw from the PRC with grounds? Has Professor Cammenga not read Belgic Confession article 29 and what it says about true believers' separating themselves from the false church and joining themselves with the true? Does he not believe what that article says, or does he suppose that there is an exception clause for the PRC? Perhaps this exception clause is included in a very small footnote that I have been unable to find. Perhaps Professor Cammenga can point out this exception clause to his readers.

What he confuses—ignorantly or maliciously—is the *right* to protest versus the *calling* to protest. It is the believer's right to protest. It is a solemn and sacred right that the PRC has been busy undermining these past few years by delay, procedure, technicalities, intimidation, and character assassination—to name a few of the disreputable political maneuvers that have become *du jour* in the Protestant Reformed assemblies these days. A man writes a protest against a sermon and submits it to the consistory. He is bombarded by emails from the minister. Prominent ministers are called to weigh in on the merits of the protest. Committees from the consistory are appointed to meet with the protestant, and in efforts at intimidation, the elders call into question the protestant's motives, his leadership, his qualifications for elder, and—most devastating to the types of men on these kinds of committees—tell him that he does not appear to be a team player because he had the audacity to write a protest without first having fruitless and interminable discussions in the consistory room and with the offending minister and because he protested against—gasp—a seminary professor!

The *right* of the believer is to protest; the *calling* to protest is another matter. I grant that when false doctrine first rears its head, then congregations, officebearers, and believers ought not immediately withdraw. They have an obligation—calling—to protest, if nothing else for the love of the truth, the honor of Jesus Christ, and the good of the denomination. The people whom Professor Cammenga so lovelessly assassinates did that, as he well knows, Wingham among them. When they did protest, he was one of the ministers who complained endlessly about how long the protests were, how complicated they were, how mean the language was, and how improperly the protests were written. He is still complaining about the supposed way people listen to sermons and the critical way they come to church. He writes, “It is clear that they are scrutinizing sermon after sermon in order to find fault.” Without a shred of evidence, he writes off the members of a whole denomination as petty faultfinders. And he admonishes, “We may not listen to sermons that way.” If only the sheep would stop baaing, the wolves could get on with their mauling.

But the professor confuses—whether ignorantly or maliciously—listening critically and being a chronic complainer. A chronic complainer brings nothing of substance except his own likes and dislikes or complains just because he is a complainer—who, if you gave him a thousand dollars, would bellyache because it was in fives. He does not scrutinize anything but rattles off his complaint instinctively and without reflection. Listening critically—“scrutinizing,” in the language of Professor Cammenga—is the calling of all God’s people. Critical listening where the spoken word is concerned is an aspect of critical thinking. Critical thinking is the skill of objective analysis in order to form a judgment. It is the right of God’s people—their honor, their glory, their dignity—to listen critically because the Spirit makes them spiritual people who can judge all things and who must try the spirits, especially in this evil age when many antichrists are in the world. Critical listening to the preaching is especially necessary, lest by sleight of hand and cunning craftiness false teachers deceive their listeners. Critical thinking removes all considerations about faces, relationships, positions, denominations, and the rest and asks only one question: Is this the truth?

It is the right of God’s people—their honor, their glory, their dignity—to listen critically because the Spirit makes them spiritual people who can judge all things and who must try the spirits, especially in this evil age when many antichrists are in the world.

If you do not want people to listen critically to your sermons, get out of the ministry. Indeed, if you do not want people to listen critically to your sermons, I suspect that you have nefarious intentions because if you, the apostle Paul, or Gabriel bring any other gospel than that of scripture, then I must say, “Anathema!”

The Holy Ghost and Paul commended the Bereans for listening critically to sermons. Paul opened his Bible, and the Bereans opened theirs to see if what he had said was so. Professor Cammenga contradicts the Holy Ghost and says that “scrutinizing” sermons—listening critically—is shameful and wicked.

I have a piece of advice to ministers: if you stay in the ministry and you *do* want people to stop scrutinizing your sermons, then stop preaching a fictitious antinomianism (Cammenga), an available grace that is distinguished from the sovereign grace of regeneration (Koole), two rails to heaven (Van Overloop), Christ is not enough (Cammenga), the regenerated and sanctified believer is not totally depraved (Bruinsma and a pile more), and all the other false doctrine that makes Reformed believers’ antennae not only quiver but also go into seizures.

Then there is this consideration: if we do not listen critically to sermons so that we can form a judgment and say “Amen” at the end of them, there never will be any of Professor Cammenga’s vaunted protests, about which he chastises the officebearers of Wingham for failing to bring. He is a Janus. He says, “Protest,” but he bellyaches and complains about what is precisely necessary in order to protest, namely listening critically to sermons to determine if the things preached in the name of Christ and on the authority of Christ are actually the gospel of Christ. This he writes off as petty faultfinding. Judging by the examples that Wingham gave—a grace that is available (Koole) is not the gospel; Christ not enough (Cammenga) is not the gospel; works confirming faith (Cammenga) is not the gospel; believers no longer being totally depraved (Bruinsma) is not the gospel—there should be a lot more critical listening—“scrutinizing”—not less. What Professor Cammenga is in fact pleading for is silence from the pew and from officebearers in the face of massive ministerial malfeasance, of which he has been a leading player for years, both as a minister and as a professor.

Thus his charge that Wingham “disdained” the way of protest and appeal is a false charge.

When a denomination has had many, many, many protests, and in answer to the issues has shown where she stands and what it means to be a part of her federation, the people of God may judge that she has departed and that further protests and appeals are not only futile but also injurious to themselves and to the gospel by further exposing it to ridicule. In such circumstances officebearers may withdraw without exhausting the process of protest and appeal, in obedience to Christ, not only as watchmen who warn but also as shepherds who lead the sheep of Christ out of such dangerous circumstances. Such is their obligation. By remaining they expose themselves and the flock to incorrigible false teachers and the terrible judgments of God that come on the apostatizing and bloody church. Coming out of an apostatizing church without exhausting the *process*—and that is what protesting has become in the PRC these days, an exhausting, destructive, and useless process—of protest and appeal is exactly what Professor Cammenga’s forefathers did. He now unceremoniously tramples on their memory, all the while building their tombs in defense of his own doctrine.

Doctrinal Lawlessness

These all are church political observations about his email. The doctrinal lies are worse.

In his panegyric to his own prophetic abilities and faithful labors as a watchman to warn about the antinomians that were swarming in the PRC like a plague of locusts—and ignoring the biblical dictum to let another man praise thee—Professor Cammenga assaults recently departed members of the PRC, one in particular. In fact, one gets the sense that this diatribe of Professor Cammenga is not so much about Wingham as himself and Neil Meyer, indeed, to exonerate himself and to beat Elder Neil Meyer again. The professor outdoes himself in mercilessly thumping this dead horse, as though to make sure there really is no life in him. As I said before, no one can ever say that Professor Cammenga does not make the split about *doctrine*.

I will also say that in light of all the vicious slander both publicly and privately against Neil Meyer, I want a front-row seat in the final judgment when the Lord declares that the cause of Neil Meyer, now condemned as heretical and impious by many judges—Protestant Reformed professors, ministers, consistories, classes, synods, and members—is the cause of the Son of God. The chagrin of these pompous and unrighteous judges will be a sight to behold!

Prior to issuing his graceless broadside, Professor Cammenga had been going around the Protestant Reformed churches shouting at the top of his lungs, “Settled and binding!” He has become Professor Settled and Binding. He was not so interested in the truth of article 31 of the Church Order as he was in crafting a club from article 31 to silence opposition to false doctrine. But he does himself what he does not allow in others, and he is not the only one. He feels compelled to lecture everyone else that they *must regard synodical decisions as settled and binding*, but he gives himself wide latitude—lawlessness—to disregard synodical decisions and even to rewrite them. He also lets the cat out of the bag that he and his colleagues never agreed with Synod 2018 and its release of Neil Meyer from the false charge of antinomianism and thus that they would never have let the issue rest until they had their way. They were going to crucify Neil Meyer by hook or by crook; and if it was not Neil Meyer, it was going to be somebody else because there was definitely a horde of antinomians that had to be handled. The very fact that anyone would criticize the preaching of Professor Cammenga and his colleagues as a denial of the gospel had to mean that the critic was antinomian in doctrine.

Antinomianism has been the bogeyman of Professor Cammenga for some time. For him antinomianism is virtually the only enemy of the Reformed faith. Sometimes he identifies the enemies as hyper-Calvinists and radicals, from time to time he hammers on rebels and schismatics, but mainly he calls them *antinomians*. These are all the same for him.

No one, ever, for any reason, could possibly charge Professor Cammenga with anything remotely approximating antinomianism. Paul drew the charge. Luther did. Calvin did. The Reformed ministers of the Synod of Dordt did. De Cock and Van Velzen did. Abraham Kuyper did. Hoeksema and Ophoff did. Professor Cammenga never did, nor will he ever. He will never be accused of being one-sided, or of being an antinomian, or of emphasizing the grace and sovereignty of God too much. In his relentless assault on antinomians, he shows himself a vigorous opponent of the gospel that *always* draws this charge and that can be revealed to be the gospel by drawing this charge. For salvation is not of the godly but of the wicked. God justifies the ungodly. This is the gospel. Professor Cammenga, terrified of antinomians, is likewise petrified of the gospel.

I will take up his lawless militancy against his synod and his charges about antinomianism next time.

—NJL

Response to Wingham's "A History of the Controversy," by Prof. R. Cammenga

I have been torn whether or not to respond to Wingham consistory's document. It is a document in which four former officebearers level serious charges, never having pursued but disdained the biblical and church orderly way of bringing such charges prior to leaving our denomination. And it is a document that they have circulated widely, as is evidently their intent. Once again, this group and its supporters make themselves guilty of schism, which is public, gross sin. What aggravates their sin of schism is the mischaracterization, misrepresentation, and slander that have become a hallmark of this group and its leaders in their magazine, blogs, and other forms of propaganda.

Not so much for the sake of these men, but for the sake of our own Protestant Reformed people, I have chosen to respond. I do not intend to respond to everything that they raise, but to the matters that I deem most important.

Charge of Antinomianism against Mr. Neil Meyer

I am troubled by the mischaracterization of the charge of antinomianism against one of the leaders of the schismatic group, Mr. Neil Meyer. The contention has been made repeatedly that Mr. Meyer was vindicated of the charge of antinomianism and that once having been vindicated, apparently, he is henceforth free of that charge. It is alleged that the charge of antinomianism is a "red herring."

First, even if it were true that synod vindicated Mr. Meyer against this charge, this does not mean that from henceforth and forever he and the group with which he is associated are free of the error of antinomianism. I maintain and have maintained for some time that antinomianism is very much at the root of the errors of this group. Even those who did not see this earlier, have to see that recent developments in the schismatic group make it very plain that they are antinomian in their theology. From the time that it was publicly defended that God and not Noah built the ark, disparaging the good work that Noah performed by the grace of God over the course of 120 years, the issue has been the injection of antinomian error on the part of those who belong to the schismatic group.

Second, Synod 2017 judged that a number of Mr. Meyer's statements were contrary to Scripture and our Reformed confessions (Art. 88, B., 1., p. 88). Synod 2018, it is true, judged that it should not have entered into a protest that had not been upheld. On purely technical and legal grounds, therefore, the decision of 2017 was set

aside. In reality, however, it does not change the fact that a number of Mr. Meyer's statements are indeed contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. One example is his charge that to say that after Adam and Eve fell the way to the tree of life was barred is to make the covenant conditional, conditioned on their obedience.

Third, Synod 2017 did not sustain the charge of antinomianism because it was not demonstrated that Mr. Meyer "embraces some coherent and consistent form of the heresy." That was 2017. I seriously doubt that given developments since then, synod would make the same judgment today. Soon afterwards, in the agenda for Synod 2018, Mr. Meyer made the statement: "A command necessitates conditions to be kept in obedience" (Acts 2018, bottom of p. 349). That statement is blatant antinomianism. The antinomian contends that commands necessitate conditions that we must fulfill in our own strength and that therefore there may not be commands in the preaching of the gospel. That is antinomian theology, pure and simple.

Mr. Meyer and the group in which Mr. Meyer is a leader are antinomian. I will not list all the evidence now to substantiate this charge. But there ought to be no doubt that this is the case given what they are presently writing and preaching.

Sermon entitled "Saving Faith as Assurance"

Wingham's consistory takes issue with a Heidelberg Catechism sermon that I preached on Lord's Day 7, "Saving Faith as Assurance." Although in the last part of the sermon, which is the section to which they object, I repeatedly spoke of good works as "confirming" faith, election, and salvation, never as the ground, reason, or basis for our assurance of faith, election, and salvation, they contend that I make man's work the basis for assurance. Wingham's consistory alleges that what I taught "threatens to replace the true ground of our assurance (God's work) with a false one (our Christian walk)." (p. 30 of their unnumbered document.) I note the tentativeness of their charge: "threatens." Further, "Prof. Cammenga implies that the assurance of the Christian is in his observance of outward fruits, such as 'a life lived in obedience to God's ten commandments' and the activity of the Christian life." I note again their tentativeness: "implies."

In the sermon, I demonstrated clearly from II Peter 1:10 that our good works, as the fruits of faith, are used by God to confirm our assurance. This is the only possible and

honest interpretation of II Peter 1:10. In many ways, it is in their objection to this sermon and their interpretation of II Peter 1:10, that the schismatics show that NOT the Protestant Reformed Churches, but THEY have departed and embraced teaching that is not historically PR, nor historically Reformed. I will attach to this response what the Reformed and Protestant Reformed have always said about II Peter 1:10, as well as the confirmatory role of good works. Please read that attachment to see that what I said is also what Calvin said, Rev. Herman Hoeksema said, Rev. Marinus Schipper said, Rev. John Heys said, what Prof. D. Engelsma said. What I said is historically and confessionally Reformed. It is Reformed and it is Protestant Reformed. If indeed it is the case that what I said is heretical, the Protestant Reformed Churches have embraced this error for a very long time, really from the beginning of their existence. When will the schismatics be honest and acknowledge this? Their selective quotations of the confessions and of PR ministers and professors is dishonest. We have not changed; they have changed. That is simply the historical fact. The objections raised against the sermon also serve as further indication of the schismatics' antinomianism.

Sermon Entitled "His Name 'Jesus'"

What I taught in this sermon is that L.D. 11 does not mean that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity in our flesh, accomplishes every aspect of our salvation. I maintained that the contrast in L.D. 11 is between the work of Christ *and the work(s) of man*. Jesus does everything that is necessary for our redemption, so that we cannot and may not attempt to add to His work. That is the gospel. The contrast is between what Jesus has done and those "who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else," 30th Q. This is the point of the quotations from the creeds that the consistory of Wingham cites. Lord's Day 11 is not teaching that Jesus (the Son of God incarnate) accomplishes every aspect of our salvation. The Heidelberg Catechism has itself recently attributed our sanctification in a special sense (not to the absolute exclusion of the other Persons) to the Holy Spirit: "God the Son and our redemption...God the Holy Ghost and our sanctification." That is the only point that was being made. It's simply dishonest to twist what was said and to contend that I was introducing another savior than the only Savior, Jesus Christ. And giving the Holy Spirit His due was also the point of the quotation from Calvin that I made in the sermon, which the Wingham consistory conveniently does not include in their document—another indication that they do not stand in agreement with Calvin (just as they do not agree with him on II Peter 1:10). Calvin says at the very beginning of Book Three of his *Institutes*: "We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us,

and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us." (3.1.1; 1:537) Calvin is right.

Conclusion

The aggressive attempt to find widespread error in the PRCA is clearly an exercise in self-justification on the part of those who are sympathetic with the schismatics. It is clear that they are scrutinizing sermon after sermon in order to find fault—not for edification but to find fault. That is wrong. We may not listen to sermons that way, sermons of fellow officebearers, which was the case when this was done by the members of the Wingham consistory. And that, too, indicates their avowed purpose to "prove" that the PRCA are on the road of apostasy, and have actually become false churches, from which the members must flee as Lot did from Sodom. At all costs this is what they are determined to prove.

There are so many troubling things about this schismatic group as a whole that by themselves ought to convince church members that they ought not be a part of such a group. Besides the doctrinal errors, there are a number of unsettling factors.

First, their schismatic behavior and their ongoing attempts to sow the seeds of discord. One of the seven things that the Lord *hates* is "a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren," Proverb 6:19.

Second, the glaring dishonesty, twisting of facts and truth, half-truths, misrepresentation, and slander that characterize so much of what they put into print. It pervades nearly everything that they write or speak. The prophet Jeremiah condemned the children of Judah because "they are all grievous revolters, walking with slanders," Jeremiah 6:28.

Third, the vitriol and venom, the malicious, personal attacks that are also the nature of many of their writings. I have never seen anything like it in over forty years in the ministry. Something is wrong, seriously wrong, when this is the way in which a group promotes itself. This is true even of younger men and women in this group, who ought to have respect for age and office. It makes me wonder what kinds of homes in which they were brought up. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man," Colossians 4:6.

And fourth, I have been troubled from the very beginning of this movement on account of the dominance of strong-willed and outspoken women. That ought to be another indication that something is seriously amiss. The apostle counsels the women concerning their true adornment, "Let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price," I Peter 3:4.

The origin of the following article was a statement made by Rev. Martyn McGeown on the blog of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) regarding Peter's act of repentance after he had denied Jesus.¹ A brief, private email was sent to Reverend McGeown by Philip Rainey, in which he said that the statement made Peter's repentance a condition to his assurance.

In December 2019 McGeown published this email as an introduction to his own lengthy blog article, in which he responded to the email and emphatically defended the statement regarding Peter's act of repentance.²

Philip wrote a response to that article and sent it to McGeown and to the RFPA and requested that it be published on the blog. The RFPA's membership and marketing committee decided the response should be published. In communication with McGeown to clarify details with him prior to publication of the response, it became clear he was unwilling to work through this committee that had oversight of the blog.

Instead, in apparent collusion with the Protestant Reformed hierarchy, McGeown wrote a letter to the RFPA board and urged the board *not* to make the response public. The board unfairly sided with McGeown and denied Philip the right to reply. It was bald censorship. That was part of a rampant history of censorship that had begun with the RFPA's magazine, the *Standard Bearer*—a history that made the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing and the publication of *Sword and Shield* necessary.

Sword and Shield is a believer's paper that arises out of the office of all believer. The magazine detests all cen-

sorship and silencing of doctrinal discussion and especially the squelching of the office of believer. Unlike the *Standard Bearer*, which merely purports and pretends to be a free paper not under the control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Protestant Reformed Churches, *Sword and Shield* is in *actuality* free and not under the control of any church institute.

So now, finally, *Sword and Shield* is pleased to publish this response to Rev. McGeown. The article is a believer's witness to the truth in spite of the stifling censorship that was orchestrated against him.

This is a related article to Philip's previous article, "Faith and Repentance as Conditions: A Return to the Mire," which was published in the September 2021 issue of *Sword and Shield*. Both articles are a defense of election theology that teaches only one principle of activity necessary for salvation, namely God's, over against the twin-track theology that teaches two principles of activity necessary for salvation: God's and man's.

The original purpose of the following article was to show how Reverend McGeown taught twin-track theology when he stated and then assiduously *defended* his statement that clearly made Peter's act of repentance a prerequisite for his restoration to God's favor. The theology of prerequisites is always twin-track. It is so because instead of making man's activities of faith and repentance flow from election and thus be part of salvation, twin-track theology always places faith and repentance in a relation of contrast to election and thus makes them conditions to salvation.

—Board of Reformed Believers Publishing

ELECTION AND REPENTANCE: A LONG-DELAYED RESPONSE

Introduction

I offer the following as my response to Reverend McGeown's answer to my question about a statement he made in his blog post entitled "Abiding in Christ's Love (3)." The statement in question reads: "Jesus loved Peter, but Peter had to weep bitterly with tears of repentance—

which were the fruit of God's grace—*before* [emphasis is his] he came to the renewed assurance of Jesus' love for him."

McGeown's statement is clearly conditional. It is so because he makes Peter's act of repentance a condition to salvation, specifically that aspect of salvation we call

1 Rev. Martyn McGeown, "Abiding in Christ's Love (3)," November 18, 2019; <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/abiding-in-christ-s-love-3>.

2 Philip Rainey, "A Reader Asks: 'Was Peter's Experience Conditioned on His Repentance?,'" December 19, 2019; Martyn McGeown, "Answer," December 19, 2019; <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/a-reader-asks-was-peter-s-experience-of-fellowship-conditioned-on-his-repentance>.

assurance. Nothing that he wrote in his reply removes that objection. Moreover, McGeown's prolixity—he wrote almost eight pages in response to a letter of four paragraphs—is partly to be explained by his impossible quest to reconcile sovereign and particular grace with conditions in salvation.

We need only to analyze the statement to see that it is conditional. We have no need to go outside the statement, and we certainly have no need—nor should we attempt—to explain it within the context of other statements he has written. What I mean is that the brother's erroneous statement is not justified by his orthodox statements. But I will go further than the statement itself, and I will do so because part of our discussion concerns the Canons of Dordt and what it says about the restoration of Peter and others from "lamentable falls."

The Statement Itself

In his article McGeown discusses how believers can lose the enjoyment of Jesus' love due to disobedience. As an example, he appeals to Peter's sin of denying the Lord. Peter is an example of one who lost the consciousness of Jesus' love. How can Peter be restored to the blessing of assurance? McGeown's answer is, "Jesus loved Peter, but Peter had to weep bitterly with tears of repentance—which were the fruit of God's grace—*before* he came to the renewed assurance of Jesus' love for him."

There are three elements in the above statement: Jesus loved Peter; Peter repented; Peter was renewed in assurance.

There is a fourth element—repentance as the fruit of God's grace—which is parenthetical and as such is not part of the main thought of the sentence. Grammatically, it could be omitted and not affect the meaning of the sentence. With such an incidental clause, McGeown claims to have explained "the precise relationship" between Jesus' love and Peter's act of repentance. To make the main relationship in the sentence, that between Jesus' love and Peter's repentance, a mere parenthesis is no sufficient ground for such a crucial relationship. This fourth element then need not detain us. We must analyze the brother's statement in terms of the relationship of its main elements.

Let us see how the elements of McGeown's statement are connected. The first element is Jesus' sovereign love for Peter. Sovereign love is the origin and power of the gospel. In sovereign love God chose those whom

he would save: "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people... But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers" (Deut. 7:7–8). This is a beautiful statement of the doctrine of election—God's choice of his people in love.

Included in election is all the salvation that flows from it: "Election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects" (Canons of Dordt 1.9, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 157). As such, election includes repentance as one of the "gifts of salvation."

The first element is therefore a statement of sovereign election. As such, all Peter's salvation, including his repentance and assurance (and his restoration to assurance after his sin), is included in this first element, namely "Jesus loved Peter." There you have the explanation for Peter's restoration from his sin of denying his Lord.

The second element is Peter's repentance, specifically his act of repentance. How does the brother relate this element to sovereign election? He does so by way of opposition. He uses the adversative *but*, so that Peter's act of repenting is placed in a relationship of opposition or contrast to election. However,

that is not all, for the contrast is accentuated by the preposition *before*. McGeown wrote, "But Peter had to weep bitterly with tears of repentance *before* he came to the renewed assurance of Jesus' love for him." There is simply no other way to read the statement than that its first and second elements stand in a relationship of opposition or disjunction. In fact, from a grammatical viewpoint this is precisely what the word *but* is supposed to do. *But* is what is called a *disjunctive conjunction*, a word that relates elements or clauses in composition but divides them in sense or meaning.

The relationship of opposition or disjunction between the first two elements leads to McGeown's uncoupling repentance and its accompanying assurance from election. The use of *before* between the second and third elements accentuates the disjunction by making the restoration of Peter's assurance contingent upon something he does, namely his act of repenting. Words have a certain objective meaning, and the meaning of McGeown's statement is that Peter's act of repentance was a prerequisite to his assurance. And since assurance is a benefit of salvation and as such is part of salvation, at this point

Sovereign love is the origin and power of the gospel. In sovereign love God chose those whom he would save.

McGeown makes Peter's act of repenting a prerequisite in his salvation.

This is a serious matter. It is so because the gospel of sovereign grace is at stake. McGeown's complaint notwithstanding, I am not quibbling over words. This is why I wrote in my original question to him that, according to his statement, "Jesus' love is one thing; Peter's act of repentance is another." That is also why I wrote that McGeown should have written, "Jesus loved Peter, AND or THEREFORE Peter *wept* bitterly with tears of repentance."

It is simply impossible to relate the second element to the first in the way McGeown does and still claim the first is the reason for or explains the second. To put it another way, it is impossible to place the two elements of his statement in opposition to one another and still claim that Peter's act of repentance flows from election. Far from the beautiful unity of sovereign grace—that all our salvation, including our repentance, flows organically from election in Christ—we have instead the establishment of two separate principles of activity necessary for salvation: election *and* Peter's doing.

The Canons of Dordt

That McGeown uncouples or separates Peter and his repentance from election is also clear from his treatment of Canons of Dordt 5. What he writes in this respect shows how out of step he is with the Canons. He begins with a criticism of my quotation from the Canons. I quoted Canons 5.6–7 to show that the Canons ascribe a believer's restoration to God's activity alone. McGeown wrote, "He quotes from the wrong part of the Canons, overlooking the section most pertinent to the present discussion."

According to McGeown, I should have quoted article 5, which speaks of the way of repentance as the way of restoration. Moreover, in his quotation of article 5, the brother highlights the words *until* and *their*: "UNTIL on THEIR returning into the right way of serious repentance." I find the brother's approach here interesting. The present discussion is about the relationship between Jesus' love and repentance in the restoration of Peter. Canons 5.6–8 clearly teach that the reason for a believer's restoration from lamentable falls is God's election. Article 4 describes the reality of temptation and the possibility of a believer's committing great and heinous sins. Article 5 teaches the way of repentance as the way of restoration. No one denies that repentance is required; no one is saying that one who continues impenitently may have the sense of God's favor. Why then does McGeown insist on beginning with article 5 to find the explanation for restoration, when the Canons explicitly state the explanation in articles 6–8?

The subject of articles 6–8 is God and his activity: "God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election" (5.6); "in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing...and again, by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance" (5.7). Article 8 even goes as far as saying, "With respect to themselves [true believers, those who are elect, regenerated, and have faith] [it] is not only possible [that they would totally fall away and perish], but would undoubtedly happen." Mark well, the article is saying that no activity of a *believer* (including the activity of faith) is in any way or respect a reason that he perseveres. Rather, article 8 gives as the reason—and the only reason—the sovereign activity of God: "With respect to God, it is utterly impossible [that a believer could fall away totally], since His counsel cannot be changed, nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated" (Canons of Dordt 5.6–8, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 174).

But McGeown insists that this approach is wrong and that I overlooked the section most pertinent to the present discussion. For him "the section most pertinent" to answering the question how Peter was restored from his lamentable fall is, "UNTIL on THEIR returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines on them." In other words, not God's activity but man's is "most pertinent to the present discussion." I find the brother's approach not only interesting; I also find it revealing.

The brother then proceeds to Canons 5.7 to back up his emphasis on man's responsibility. This is surely ironic in the face of my supposed blunder in going to this same article for "the present discussion." Doubly ironic, I would say, given that articles 6 and 7 taken together are one of the strongest statements in the Canons of God's sovereignty in salvation.

Be that as it may, what does he want to do with article 7? He acknowledges (how can he do otherwise?) the sovereignty of God in repentance. But that is not at all where the brother wants to go with this article. Rather, he wants to find in it the same thing he thinks he found in article 5, namely "UNTIL on THEIR returning into the right way of repentance." In his thinking, these words about man's responsibility are the explanation for Peter's restoration; NOT "God...according to His unchangeable purpose of election (5.6), nor God "by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renew[ing] them to repentance" (5.7). Remember, he quotes the words from article 5 in order to contradict me when I said the

Canons ascribe a sinner's restoration to God's activity alone. In bringing forward the words of article 5 (man's responsibility to repent) in order to contradict what I said, McGeown contradicts the Canons' own explanation of Peter's restoration.

Now regarding Canons 5.7 he develops his contradiction of the Canons' own explanation of Peter's restoration. Articles 6 and 7 belong together. Article 6 makes God's election the reason for the restoration of Peter (and others) from their lamentable falls: "God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election." The connection between 6 and 7 is that 7 explains how election accomplishes the restoration. This is clear from the connecting word *for*:

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

According to article 7, the first reason that election accomplishes restoration is God's activity of preserving in the elect the incorruptible seed of regeneration. The second reason is God's activity of certainly and effectually renewing them to repentance. Article 7 also makes clear that with that repentance God also gives them all the other things belonging to restoration. These things are listed. These things (benefits or graces) are not separate or different in kind as to their origin: they all belong to God's one work of restoration; they all come with repentance; and crucially, *they are all ascribed to God's activity alone!*

How does the brother treat article 7? Does he find in it God's activity alone as the explanation for the sinner's restoration? Does he find in it restoration as one beautiful work of God's certain and effectual renewing? He does not. He is bound and determined to find a sequence, a sequence that separates what God has joined together. And before proceeding any further with the Canons, I need to say something about the brother's doctrine of sequence.

The brother loves sequences; the problem is that his

sequences always place God and man's activity in salvation in a relationship of contrast and opposition. We see this in his reply to me when he speaks of the sequence of "A" (repentance) happening before "B" (renewal of a sense of God's favor). He claims that he does not make "A" a condition to "B."

There are a couple of things to say about this. First, he certainly makes repentance a step to assurance, so that assurance is not *in* repentance, but rather repentance is *unto* assurance. Second, in answering my criticism of the contrast made in his original statement between Jesus' love (election) and Peter's act of repentance, the brother doubles down and declares, "They are two very different activities, performed by two very different persons." His sequence is one in which repentance is uncoupled from election and stands independently of it—by his own admission "a very different activity."

I believe that it is at this point of the brother's sequence that he and I part ways. In his original statement he placed election and Peter's activity over against each other; he admits that in his answer and steadfastly refuses to retract it; he also declares in his answer that election and Peter's repentance are sharply differentiated activities. Where does the brother's doctrine of sequence leave us?

For one thing, it leaves the brother completely contradicting the whole point of the parable of the vine and the branches that he's writing about on the blog.³ The whole point of that parable is to teach the essential unity of the vine (Christ) and the branches (believers). There is only one principle of life that flows through the vine and its branches. The reality taught in the parable is that there is only one principle of life or activity in salvation, namely Christ's. The activity of the branch is not a separate or contrasting activity to the activity of the vine. Christ did not describe the vine and its branches as sharply differentiated activities.

For another thing, it means repentance is either a gift worked in me—"effectually renewing them to repentance"—or a separate activity from God's and as such alongside God's. Repentance is either a gift and fruit of election *in* which is the experience of God's favor, or it is something that is a step—in contrast to God's activity—*unto* the experience of God's favor. To make repentance such a step unto the experience of God's favor, as the brother does, is to make it a prerequisite.

But getting back to the Canons, specifically 5.7, after paying lip service to God's activity, the brother commences his uncoupling of man's activity from election.

3 Rev. M. McGeown is writing concerning John 15:9–11: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." For the first and second posts, see <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/abiding-in-christ-s-love> and <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/abiding-in-christ-s-love-2>.

He claims to be merely finding purpose in God's work when in fact he is introducing separation. He writes, "But do not overlook the words that come next: 'THAT they may seek and obtain remission...[AND THAT] they may again experience the favor of a reconciled God.'" You will notice the common thread in his explanation of Peter's restoration is to put Peter's activity of repenting in contrast to God's activity. You will also remember that in writing this he is contradicting my explanation of Peter's repenting, which is election. My point is that what McGeown introduces here in his treatment of article 7 is introduced by way of contrast with election. And this was my point in drawing attention to his original statement that "Jesus loved Peter, but Peter had to weep bitterly with tears of repentance—which were the fruit of God's grace—*before* he came to the renewed assurance of Jesus' love for him."

McGeown takes that which belongs together in article 7 and turns it into a sequence of steps or stages so that God does something (renews Peter); then Peter does something (he repents); then Peter does something more (he seeks and obtains remission); then as a result

of his acts of repentance and faith Peter gets something (the renewed experience of God's favor). That the brother is teaching a series of steps that Peter (and we) must take, of requisites that we must fulfill, is clear for two reasons. First (and as I already alluded to), from the fact that he sharply contrasts the sequence with election. Second, from his commentary on this sequence, in which he says, "First, God effectually renewed Peter, *then* Peter had sincere sorrow, and *then* Peter experienced God's favor."

I highlighted the word *then* in the above because that word does not appear in the Canons. The brother separates into steps or stages that which is essentially *one work of God*. And these are steps of man's activity, steps in contrast to election—even in separation from election—and, as such, steps that make man's activity another principle of activity for salvation alongside of God's. The brother is on a twin track, for all conditional theology is twin track. But the Canons are on a single track; the Canons are on the single track of election theology. And thank God they are, for in that is all our comfort.

—Philip Rainey

CONTRIBUTION

MARTIN LUTHER

There once was a monk named Martin Luther,
Who by God's grace loved and taught scripture.
God used him to reform the church,
Which to false doctrine did shamefully lurch.

He taught that scripture was the only authority
And thereby disproved the pope's infallibility.
God gave us the Bible, his perfect word
As the two-edged sword with which we are girt.

Luther taught that Christ alone saved us from sin
And won the victory we could not win.
Further, he taught that we can do nothing
But fall deeper in the sin that our old man is craving.

The doctrines that Luther taught in his way
Were attacked just as they are today.
With God's strength alone, we can advance
And, as Martin Luther, take a battle stance.

—Evelyn Price

DEBATING WITH THE DEVIL (1)

How This Debate Began in Genesis

A brief allegory introduces the characters that appear in this article. It begins with the devil's walking to and fro in the earth and running into Mr. Shephood. Having a keen interest in what Shephood wrote, Satan asked, "Yea, hath God said, A man is justified by faith only?" Struggling, Shephood said, "Yes, we are justified *only* by faith, but God has said that we must also keep his commandments." Satan quickly responded, "So God has said there *is* something a man must do to be justified by faith? Why not call that justification by faith and works?"

End of allegory; go to Genesis, another garden scene. Repeating the same procedure, Satan approached Eve and said, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1).

Lesson 1

At the very outset it should be asked, how did Satan know what God had said to Adam? How could he question Eve about that unless he had been listening to God?

Already in Genesis 3 we learn that a dialogue with the devil is always begun by Satan's creating a diabolical debate that tests the church's confession of God's word. Satan's debate is always a solemn test. Did Eve have God's word in her heart, and would she hold to it above all? We know the answer. What I want to observe carefully is Satan's method because I intend to show that the father of lies is using that method today in the debate about faith and *doing*. Therefore, I will scrutinize the devil's question to Eve very carefully. "Yea, hath God said...?" Note every word.

The particle "Yea" expresses emphasis. It can be translated as "Has God *indeed* said...?" That emphasis is designed to create interest in what he said: "Did God *really* say that you may *not* eat of every tree in the garden?"

The faithful answer is, *No*, God never said that! "*Not eat of every tree*" was the devil's diabolical perversion of what God really had said! Satan's questions are always lies.

God had said, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" (Gen. 2:16). Note very carefully that God had said, "*Every* tree." "*Freely* eat." *No negative!* That pinpoints the evil. What God had said was positive: "freely eat"; what the devil said was negative: "not eat."

Lesson 2

Expect much interest to be created around the devil's questions; expect also that each one will be the opposite of what God had said!

Therefore, at that very first moment, Eve should have rebuked Satan for corrupting God's word. But she didn't. She entered into the devil's debate! From that moment Eve was sinning against the first commandment. She did not love the Lord her God with all her heart. She forsook him by forsaking his word. That is the great evil not recognized.

Lesson 3

Because there is no truth in him, Satan's questions are always lies, and that is the reason they cannot be debated! Because a person is always debating the wrong question, the debate will always end in disaster. Those holding to God's word and their confessions will recognize immediately Satan's falsehoods and offer not one word of attempted debate; but by rebuke they will avoid defection of heart, as Jesus rebuked Satan (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10), the unclean spirit (Mark 1:25; 5:8; 9:25), and a dumb spirit (Luke 11:14). He said, "Silence!"

I note also how the devil created his lies. Just a simple change from positive to negative, from yes to no, and it was no longer what God had said. We will meet that subtlety again when considering faith and works.

"You may freely eat of *all* the trees" is what God had said. God: "Eat from all." Satan: "Eat from none."

We note particularly that "Eat from all" is covenant fellowship. God had fully and generously opened his whole creation and particularly the garden of his intimate presence to be fully enjoyed, understood, and treasured by his people.

Lesson 4

God's second statement was this: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (v. 17). There was no negative qualification pertaining to all the trees. The second statement was an exceptive command pertaining to only one of the trees because there was a special circumstance about it.

But the devil, abusing that exceptive statement with demonic intent, corrupted both statements of God. "*Eat of every tree*" became "*Not eat of every tree*." Not a simple

deception but a complex one designed to corrupt all God had said and also sufficient to overcome Eve.

Lesson 5

The devil's lie will not be simple but complex. Many will be enthusiastic about it, and many will be overcome by it; but most critical of all, it will be designed to deny *all* that God has said, not merely a part of it.

Consider this current example: "There is something a man must do if he is to be saved: he must repent and believe!" Sounds like Satan's reply to Shephood. Yes, scripture says, "Repent and believe the gospel." Satan needed to add only one word to corrupt it: *do!* "Something a man must *do*." Sounds good, but it's no longer the gospel. It implies that a man can repent and believe the gospel. If so, the gospel is lost. The gospel demands repentance, faith, and trust in Christ, things that a man cannot do. There's the perversity: man's depravity being changed into man's implied ability.

4. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works [that is, without doing!]. (Rom. 4:4–6)

Lesson 6

Satan's twisting of God's word (yes to no) should have been understood by Eve and rejected, but it wasn't. Her sin started right there, and her compound failure was thus inevitable: a conversation that should never have begun, followed by debating what was never said, leading to a blasphemous confession that denied God's word. God never said, "You shall not touch it" (Gen. 3:3).

Is the church today debating the devil's question? Consider this example: "In the way of obedience, man enjoys fellowship with God." A simple statement or an insidious debate starter designed to overthrow salvation by grace alone?

I ask this question specifically because the theme of Norman Shepherd's book is similar: "In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality. Proverbs 12:28 (NIV)."¹

According to Norman Shepherd's book, the epistle of James teaches justification by faith and works. However,

by subtly joining faith and works, as in *faith that works*, Shepherd believes he has avoided an obvious clash with Romans and Galatians. I will show that Shepherd's "adjusting" of James' words is very much like Satan's "adjusting" of God's words in Genesis 2:16–17. In both cases it is no longer what God and James said.

For Shepherd faith involves doing. But according to the church's confession, faith is *not* doing. Faith is knowledge of and trust in Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21).

That faith is not doing can be seen if one considers our Lord's examples in the gospels. Almost all of his instruction about faith is connected to his miracles of healing (Matt. 8:1–4; 9:1–8, 20–22, 27–31; Mark 1:23–26). Accidental? No. Deliberate because the need for healing reveals the true nature of man and faith and the sovereign power of Christ to save. All those needing healing—the blind, the lame, the dumb, the demon-possessed—could not heal themselves. There was nothing they could *do!* That's why Jesus said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." It was the opposite of doing. Their faith did nothing but believe that the Lord Jesus Christ could heal them. Jesus' healing pictured salvation by sovereign grace. Man's helplessness in sin is the perfect condition for God to demonstrate his sovereign grace and covenant love for his people.²

Forgotten also today by the "sons" of the Reformation is that God's commands do *not* imply ability (doing). Therefore, no faithful servant of the word would make them imply ability. God's commands are meant to reveal inability, hostility, and depravity! In that way the totally gracious character of salvation in Christ is revealed for God's glory. But those "sons" of the Reformation, just as Eve, have abandoned their confessions by debating man's obedience to commands.³

I now quickly examine God's fellowship with Adam—it shines a bright light on this present debate—before I examine Mr. Shepherd's adjustment of James.

God set Adam in the garden of "paradise" (LXX translation). How rich: "The tree of life" is there. How beautiful: "Every tree that is pleasant to the sight" (Gen. 2:9). But there was far more than earthly beauty. God walked with Adam and talked with him. Adam was created as God's covenant friend, having fellowship with the Lord. That was how he was created. Adam didn't do anything to gain or to enjoy God's fellowship. He was "born" in it. Since the beginning of creation, God creates and sustains the fellowship his people enjoy with him; they don't.

1 Norman Shepherd, *The Way of Righteousness: Justification Beginning with James* (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2009), cover and title page.

2 See Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*, John H. Kerr, ed. (New York: American Tract Society, 1903), 95.

3 See Andrew W. Lanning, "I Don't See It," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 4 (August 1, 2021): 6–13.

Lesson 7

This is true for all Christians. We are born again in fellowship with God (1 Cor. 1:9) by the renewing work of the Spirit (John 3:5–8). Born of the Spirit, we “are having *access unto the Father*” (Eph. 2:18; present tense denotes continuing action), and the love of God “is being shed abroad” (same present tense) in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). The believer, as Adam, is born into continuing fellowship with God by grace alone. But as demonstrated, caution is warranted. Satan has overheard this theology and is determined, by his one-word-switch pattern, to corrupt it! “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished” (Prov. 22:3).

While Adam enjoyed his fellowship with God, God said to his friend, “Of *every* tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.” Note well: God gave full permission! “*Every* tree.” “*Freely* eat.” What encouragement. That was God’s first statement. God encouraged and advanced their fellowship: “You may eat freely of *all* my trees.”

We note this particularly: there were no conditions attached to that fellowship in God’s first statement. God said, “*All...freely eat!*” Neither was there any required behavior or obedience stipulated to enter into or to continue in that fellowship. “*Freely eat of all the trees of my garden*” was God’s first declaration. It was God’s sovereign guide for the enjoyment of the covenant fellowship in progress. It was unconditional. “*Freely eat of all!*”

Lesson 8

There should be no questioning of, or qualifications placed on, God’s sovereign, freely given, ongoing fellowship. However, if debate arises that there are conditions for fellowship, God’s people should know immediately who would be promoting that issue of conditionality!

In God’s second declaration in Genesis 2:17, that issue appeared. “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” This statement must also be carefully understood, because many have gone astray at this point. The wording of this second declaration was a solemn warning about something. Plainly stated, God warned his friend-servant of the very severe consequences of eating from a certain tree. The statement was a warning.

Carefully note God’s words because we have to defend them against Satan. It was a strong statement, expressing both solemn warning and dire consequences. As stated by God, the consequences were the reason not to eat of that

tree: “In the day you eat, you will die.” That truth cannot be overstated. The consequences were the reason not to eat. The wages of sin is death. That was a dire warning, not a condition.

Therefore, it must be stated clearly that the reason given by God in his second statement was *consequential, not conditional!* God stated a certain definite result of a specific action. He did not state nor establish any *conditions* for Adam to obey to remain in the garden or to remain in his fellowship. God only warned of consequences because of his righteousness. God did not say, “*If* you do that, you will not have fellowship with me anymore.” We find no conditional construction—no *if*—in those declarations; neither may we turn God’s dire warning about death into a condition for fellowship or to continue that fellowship. Satan would do that; he has done that; but Christ’s church should not!

We know the devil did effectively twist those two declarations into a condition for fellowship. After much debating with the devil, men made Genesis 2–3 a covenant of works! Again, another example of a simple twist, changing “in the day you eat” to “*if* you eat.” That began the long history of the covenant-of-works debate, finally ending in the Westminster Confession!⁴ However, as I will demonstrate in what followed, Satan’s highest priority was not a separate covenant of works but that he labored mightily to smuggle conditions into the covenant of grace. Conditionality was Satan’s first priority because it mocked everything that God had said is of grace.

God’s declaration to Adam was not conditional and not a covenant of works. His speaking with Adam was covenant fellowship. God explained that the knowledge (experience) of good and evil was dangerous because Adam could not experience (commit) sin without experiencing death. God’s warning was an expression of his goodness and his righteousness. He loved his friend-servant, but the wages of sin is death. That is all that may be deduced: fellowship with God is graciously given and maintained by God but overshadowed by sin.

However, in the history of the church—which I trace because it bears on my subject—there were those who added conditions: they made obedience to the law of Moses the way to justification and fellowship with God.

The Pharisees demanded that the new Gentile Christians had to submit to the law of Moses to be fully saved. For the Pharisees, salvation was by *faith and works*. As we shall see, they invented that heresy.

Because the same controversy has reappeared in Norman Shepherd’s book *The Way of Righteousness*, I will

⁴ See Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 214–20, especially his conclusion: “Hence, we cannot accept the theory of the covenant of works, but must condemn it as unscriptural” (220).

consider how the Pharisees' invention was resolved by the church.

How This Debate Continues in the Church

The position of this article is that Norman Shepherd is completely wrong about James, Paul, and Jesus; that there is no such thing as *working faith*; that Shepherd's work is basically an invitation to debate with the devil; and that those who follow him are guilty, as Eve, of forsaking God and his word.

Because Norman Shepherd in his book is almost completely dependent upon his faulty interpretation of James 2:14–26 (20–32), I will examine James' writing in detail and demonstrate, first, that James *would not* write that a man is justified by faith and works; second, that James *could not* write that a man is justified by faith and works; and third, that James *did not* write that a man is justified by faith and works.

To begin we must go to Acts 15, which records the council at Jerusalem, where the apostles and elders met to decide the Pharisees' issue of *faith and works*. Peter and Paul spoke. Then James, as president of the council, summarized and offered a motion, which the council unanimously approved and sent to the churches (vv. 13–21).

Paul had first declared "the conversion of the Gentiles" and "all things that God had done with them" (vv. 3–4). They were converted. But at that point "there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (v. 5).

That was the problem for the council (v. 6). The Gentiles had been converted to Christ. They had believed on the Lord Jesus. Now, inspired by the devil, the Pharisees said, "We must *command* them to keep the law of Moses." We must keep that in mind. The Pharisees' doctrine is specifically *justification by faith and works*. For them it was necessary to believe and to obey the law to be justified and saved. That was the debate—the devil's debate—that was treated at the council of Acts 15, which reappears in the devil's debate today.

At that point James presented his motion. It was *no* to the Pharisees' doctrine. James said, "My sentence is, that we *trouble not* them" (v. 19). That's what he called the Pharisees' doctrine of *faith and works*: "trouble." Their doctrine troubles—*kills*—the soul! James concluded

that the church must not go in that soul-troubling direction.

Peter called it something worse. He asked, "Why tempt ye God?" (v. 10). Why tempt God with that doctrine? Tempting God is blasphemy! Justification by faith and works is blasphemy, according to Peter.

Peter said that God had given those believers the Holy Spirit and had purified their hearts by faith (vv. 8–9). We may not put that heavy burden (the law) "upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (v. 10). Peter argued in favor of justification by faith alone: "God purified their hearts by faith" without works. Therefore, the church cannot put that unbearable burden of the law on their necks!

The Pharisees' doctrine of *justification by faith and works* was seen as a blasphemous burden and rightly rejected by the Jerusalem Council. Note well: James himself authored the motion that forcefully rejected it (vv. 13–21)!—a motion that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and agreed upon by the whole council at Jerusalem (v. 28). That fact must be remembered when considering James 2:14–26.

Regarding the Pharisees' demand of *justification by faith and works* for salvation, James, the apostles, the elders, and Paul stated in their letter to the brethren, "We gave *no such commandment*" for that soul-killing doctrine (Acts 15:24). Again, notice carefully: "*We gave.*" That was the authoritative verdict of James, Peter, Paul, the apostles, and the elders! James' judgment was negative on the Pharisees' doctrine of *justification by faith and works*.

That is the reason I say, first, that James *would not* write *justification by faith and works* in his epistle (2:14–26). If he and the Jerusalem Council had been led by the Spirit to reject *justification by faith and works*, realizing it was a blasphemous, soul-killing doctrine, why would James write that in his epistle? He *would not*.

Next I explain why James *could not* write that. To understand what James meant by the words "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (v. 24), we go back to the council. From the council's decision I may conclude that when James wrote, "by works a man is justified," if he meant by those words that he was agreeing with the Pharisees' doctrine of *faith and works*, he would be reversing his own decision and backtracking on the council's decree, just as Peter did at Antioch

The devil's lie will not be simple but complex. Many will be enthusiastic about it, and many will be overcome by it; but most critical of all, it will be designed to deny *all* that God has said, not merely a part of it.

(Gal. 2:11–13). Remember, James had said, “We gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24).

From those momentous words of James and the council, I may reasonably conclude that James had something else in mind when he wrote about justification in his epistle. That is a fair assumption considering what took place after the council of Acts 15.

The Pharisees’ view did not die with the Jerusalem Council’s decision. Those teaching justification by faith and works continued to upset the faith of believers in Galatia. However, by that time there was greater authority than James and the Jerusalem Council. Paul’s gospel, given him “by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12), resolved the issue by condemning the pharisaic view as *another gospel* and publicly stating that *anyone* promoting it should “*be accursed*” (vv. 7–8). Would James, then, promote it?

It should be remembered that Paul had previously revealed this same gospel, which he had received by direct revelation from the Lord, to *James*, Peter, and John (vv. 18–19; 2:2, 9). Having heard Paul’s gospel, *James*, Peter, and John fully agreed with his teaching (2:9). We would not expect James, then, when he wrote his epistle, to suddenly disagree with Paul’s divinely inspired gospel and his own agreement with the Jerusalem Council. Confirming this assumption is the matter of Peter’s dissimulation (hypocrisy) when certain persons “came from James” to Antioch (v. 12).

These men were not of the opposing Pharisee party. They were James’ associates in the church at Jerusalem, and the proclamation of the Jerusalem Council would have been known to them as well as to Peter. But Peter, “fearing them which were of the circumcision,” hypocritically denied the council’s decision and his own experience (Acts 11) by withdrawing from eating with the Gentiles (Gal. 2:12).

Why did Peter fear James’ associates? They had all agreed with the council’s decision. The Mosaic dietary regulations were optional then. It was a matter of Christian liberty to eat or not to eat kosher or with Gentiles (Acts 11:1–18). What, then, was Peter afraid of? It wasn’t merely his personal uncertainty either, because all the Jews “dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation” (Gal. 2:13).

We may not go too far in answering this question, but this much is certain: at the time of this event, there was still considerable fear and confusion regarding the status of the Mosaic law among the Jewish leaders (Peter and Barnabas) and Jewish believers in the church.

It would be conjecture to include James in this uncertainty. However, this much is certain: if James had “dissembled” as Peter had done (v. 13), James would certainly

have been included in Paul’s public rebuke. Having not been included in Paul’s rebuke, it may be assumed that James, the author of the council’s decision in Acts 15, was *aware* of but not involved in or responsible for Peter’s failure.

However, knowing of this remaining post-council confusion, James could very well have decided to do something about it. That would have been a good reason for his epistle. Hearing of the ongoing confusion from his delegates to Antioch, and having previously proposed the circular letter of the Jerusalem Council’s resolution—which brought joy to the churches (Acts 15:31)—James took it in hand to follow that regional letter with another, broader, circular letter of his own. Then, as president of the Jerusalem consistory, to clarify the confusion about the law, James addressed all the Jewish believers who had been scattered from Jerusalem after the persecution of Stephen (Acts 8:1).

It would be startling—even betrayal—for James to then publicly change his mind when he wrote James 2:14–26. If he had, he would certainly have been rebuked by Paul, as was Peter, for betraying the council’s decree (Gal. 2:11–14). But no such rebuke appeared. James did not change his mind.

Therefore, prior to writing his epistle, these were the facts:

1. James’ doctrine of justification was no different than Paul’s; it was by faith alone.
2. James had added the scriptures supporting the position of Peter and Paul against the Pharisees’ doctrine at the council (Acts 15:15–17).
3. James joined in that decision to condemn the Pharisees’ *faith and works* doctrine; namely, “*We gave no such commandment.*”
4. When he wrote his epistle, James still believed the Jerusalem decree, would have supported it, was aware of the confusion about it, and wrote to remove that confusion.
5. James had not been rebuked by Paul for changing his mind about the council’s decree.

For these reasons, I may say, second, that James *could not* write that justification before God was by faith and works (the Pharisees’ view) because, up to the time he wrote, he did not believe that. Neither was it his purpose to teach that. Neither was there any need to write that; there was already division in the church over it (Acts 15:24), and if he had written that, it would have only added to the confusion.

There must, then, be some other explanation of what James wrote in James 2:14–26. That explanation is this: First, when James wrote his epistle, he was seeking to

advance the council's decree, given the confusion of Peter and the others. Second, if so, we should expect some clarification of that issue in his epistle, which clarification we do find in James 2:14–26. Third, James' clarification, we may assume, is in agreement with the Jerusalem Council's decision and Paul's gospel received by direct revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12), which James had agreed to (Gal. 2:9).

To see that total agreement of James, we go back to the Jerusalem Council. At the council the only works required of the Gentile brethren were to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication” (Acts 15:29). That abstaining was not considered a condition or required obedience for their salvation! Rather, the council's instructions were “if ye keep yourselves [from such things], ye shall do well” (v. 29). The council's instructions were given to Gentile Christians to “do well”—not as works to be justified. They were practical guidelines given to Gentile Christians because there was urgent need of such guidance in the church. For that reason the council advised that Gentile believers should abstain from certain things in order to live “well” with their Jewish brethren's scruples. In other words, the council's guidelines were for fellowship with each other—to love their neighbors—not for justification, salvation, or fellowship with God.

For that reason the double response of the Jerusalem Council—decree and advice—must not be misunderstood as adding conditions or works to faith in Christ for justification, salvation, or fellowship with God. That doctrine had been rightly rejected because it was “subverting [the] souls” of believers at Antioch (v. 24). These guidelines were simply intended to bring peace in the church between Jew and Gentile at the time many Gentiles were joining the Jewish congregations.

We see that the church from the beginning understood that saving faith must always be separated from works; that there are no conditions to be met for justification or any part of salvation; that all the salvation of the covenant is by grace and is unconditional. This, the council, including James, guided by the Holy Spirit, labored to preserve (v. 28).

That is exactly what we find when we consider the structure of James' epistle. First, his writing is all concerned with authentic Christian living, not doctrine. Luther at first rejected James' epistle because it contained no doctrine. Second, none of James' exhortations speak explicitly of obeying any requirements for justification or salvation. For example, earlier in his

epistle, when correcting his readers' partiality, James had exhorted them to fulfill the “royal law.” Notice, it is not the Mosaic law but the *royal law*: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” James' epistle is promoting love to the neighbor in the church. To which he added, “If ye fulfil the royal law...ye do well” (2:8). Those are the exact words the Jerusalem Council advised the brethren at Antioch: “Ye shall do well” (Acts 15:29). So here we find an echo of the Jerusalem Council's advice in James' epistle. James taught that *doing well* will end partiality in the church. The council taught that *doing well* will end division at Antioch. It's the same admonition: love thy neighbor.

We should also notice James' words for what they do not say. *Not*: “You will be justified.” *Neither*: “If you do not obey the royal law, you cannot be saved.” Never said!

It would be contradictory at that point in his epistle (2:8) for James to change his mind and write, “In addition to your faith, you must obey the law of Moses.” That would be equally contradictory in verses 14–26, where James wrote about *faith and works*. To write that would have been a very radical, council-rejecting, revelation-denying change of mind for James.

So I must ask, did James have something else in mind when he wrote verses 14–26? I answer, most definitely, yes!

At this point, it helps to remember that James was probably the earliest New Testament writer; and, therefore, he mainly had the words of the Lord's earthly ministry and the events of the gospels for his understanding of the faith. No gospel truth had been given to him by revelation, nor had anything been written at the time by Paul. Also, notice the similarity of James' introduction and the council's letter. James greeted with the salutation, “*χαίρειν*” (*greeting*) (James 1:1), the earliest form of greeting, which was used also in the Jerusalem Council's letter in Acts 15:23.

Given that fact, we look in the gospel narratives and in the words of Jesus for James' understanding of the faith. Also, it should be kept in mind that the Greek verb James used—to *justify*—is used only six times in the gospels (Matt. 11:19, 12:37; Luke 7:29, 10:29, 16:15, 18:14). For example, after Jesus had finished speaking of John the Baptist, “all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John” (7:29). “Justified God”? God does not need to be declared innocent of sin (that is, forensic justification) by men. The Greek word used for “justified” in this passage means *to vindicate, to treat as just*. Also, “The tax collectors acknowledged God's justice.”⁵ The

5 Walter Bauer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 196.

people rejoiced in Jesus' vindication of the ministry of John the Baptist. They had believed it was of God and submitted to it. Jesus' testimony affirmed that John's baptism was of God, not of men. So God (who had sent John) was justified (vindicated) by the people and the publicans.

Another example is Luke 7:35. Jesus said, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." In this passage also, wisdom was not declared innocent of sin by her children. Rather, she was vindicated by her offspring. They followed her counsel, and it proved to be great wisdom in them. In that way wisdom was vindicated. She was recognized as the "mother" of her disciples' wise actions.

From these examples James' use of the word *to justify* in James 2:14–26 can be understood. He used a Greek Old Testament (LXX) sense of the word *to justify*, meaning *to vindicate, to establish as right, to validate*, which was still prevalent during our Lord's earthly ministry. (See Gottlieb G. Schrenk, TWNT, 2:212.) Professor Schrenk cites Job 33:32: "I will vindicate thee" (212). He also states that the usage "to vindicate God...is found in Matt., Luke, and Paul," citing Luke 7:29 and Matthew 11:19 and saying, "In both these passages [*to justify*] should be rendered 'acknowledged to be righteous'" (214). Again, in 1 Timothy 3:16, "Jesus was justified in the sphere of the Spirit, i.e. that His claim to be Christ was demonstrated and validated by the resurrection" (215). Additionally, Professor Schrenk says, "It must be admitted that the statement [by James] that Abraham was justified on the basis of demonstrable works associated with his faith represents a view which Paul could hardly have advanced" (201).

However, there is another passage of even greater importance: Luke 18:14. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Jesus clearly taught that forensic justification with God is by faith alone, apart from works. Notice, in the temple the Pharisee prayed, listing all his *good works*. Jesus said that the Pharisee prayed to himself (v. 11), indicating that his prayer was not heard of God. Then the publican prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (v. 13). No works are mentioned. His plea was literally, "God be propitiated toward me." (The Greek verb is "ἰλασθητι," *to be propitious*, not *merciful*.) The idea of propitiation is to cover sin by the blood of the temple

sacrifices. The publican begged God for the blood of the temple sacrifice (which was a type of Christ's sacrifice) to cover and blot out his sin, as the Old Testament had taught God's people to believe. The publican's only hope and plea was the free mercy of God (in Christ) apart from any works, as pictured by the sacrifice on the altar in the temple, namely faith in the substitutionary atonement and full satisfaction of Christ alone.

To this plea—faith without works—Jesus said that the publican went down to his house "justified" (v. 14). The perfect participle indicates completed action before the main verb. Jesus taught that the publican was forensically justified before God by faith alone, without works, prior to leaving the temple. James would not

contradict his Lord when later writing about justification. James *could not*. His words were inspired of the Spirit.

To this we may add Paul's confirmation in Romans 3:10–28, particularly verse 25: "Whom [Christ] God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." The whole section seems to be written to support and clarify—not to correct—James 2:14–26. Consider that when Paul wrote, "None righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10), he, as James, was mainly addressing converted Jews, who were the majority in

the Roman church at that time. Particularly to them he wrote verse 19: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped." Why "stopped"? Because at that time the Jews would be the ones to be "boasting" (v. 27) in their deeds of the law (Luke 18:9–12) and of having Abraham as their father (Matt. 3:9). The Gentile believers had nothing to boast about but were equally sinful: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified" (Rom. 3:20). The Gentiles were included: "All have sinned...being justified freely by his grace through...Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (vv. 23–25). Exactly how the publican had been justified: through faith in the blood of the lamb (Luke 18:13). To his believing Jewish readers, Paul alluded to the same temple ritual and blood sacrifice alone for propitiation of sin and forgiveness, which they, rather than the Gentiles, would have been familiar with: "Where is boasting then?" (Rom. 3:27). Having excluded works, Paul gave

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the inspired conclusion: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (v. 28). Romans 4, then, using the same example James used, explains in detail Abraham’s forensic justification: while in uncircumcision (without works), facts no Jew would have disputed. Then, Paul clarified James’ justification (vindication) of Abraham by faith and works by making clear that Abraham’s soteric justification was by faith alone apart from works, before Isaac was born; being vindicated later by offering Isaac (vv. 18–22).

Therefore, I conclude that James was explaining the council’s decision concerning *faith and works* by teaching his Jewish brethren that their faith in Christ and their works according to the royal law will *vindicate* (justify) them in the church as the true Christians, because there were many “false brethren” at that time (Gal. 2:4). Over against the many false, antinomian Christians, who have *no works*, they will be vindicated (justified) as the genuine believers in Christ by their faith and their works, just as Abraham, their father, was. That is what James was teaching concerning justification in James 2:14–26.

It is clear. He was promoting the message of the Jerusalem Council. To those saved by faith, James said, “You do well to fulfill the royal law.” In what way? Faith in Christ and *doing well* will vindicate (justify) you as the true believers and promote peace in the church.

James did not revert to the Pharisees’ doctrine but emphasized his Lord’s instructions to his disciples: “Ye are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14–16).

That was James’ intention: *Let men see your good works!* Let your faith shine before men; then they can *see* your good works! Why? To be justified by faith and works? Absolutely not. James didn’t believe that! Rather, to “do well,” to glorify your Father in heaven! Remember, James had voted against justification by faith and works at the council. He would not teach that, but he did need to correct the confusion in the churches. James’ purpose eluded Luther, and many others, who have misunderstood James’ words in 2:14–26.

We may conclude: There is no basis whatever in James for any difference between James and Paul concerning

forensic justification. It has been demonstrated sufficiently that what James believed about forensic justification was clear, authentic, authoritative, and *identical* to the teaching of Paul in Romans 3:21–28 and of Jesus in Luke 18:14 and John 8:11, which James affirmed at the council and never denied.

His example confirmed that. Abraham was “justified” (vindicated) when he offered up Isaac (James 2:21). You could *see* his faith by his action (v. 22).

However, this is *conclusive*: Abraham was forensically justified by God long before he offered up Isaac. Abraham was forensically justified without works when he believed the word of God’s promise in Genesis 15:6, long before Isaac was born, which Paul made abundantly clear in Romans 4:18–22.

James’ point in calling attention to Abraham’s offering Isaac was that it was an exceptionally clear example of faith being authenticated by works for his intended readers, who were all Jews, and they would immediately recognize that event in the history of Abraham and not confuse it with his justification in Genesis 15:6.

Hence James’ example confirms the thesis of this article. James chose that example because it would be well known to his Jewish brethren, suited his purpose of *vindicating* true faith to them, and would instantly be distinguished by them from Abraham’s earlier forensic justification by faith alone in Genesis 15:6; which was fully in accord with James’ purpose in writing to his scattered Jerusalem brethren.

Unfortunately, many readers of James’ epistle have misunderstood his use of the Greek verb *to justify* as *to vindicate*. Perhaps the foremost of those who have misunderstood is Prof. Norman Shepherd, who in his book *The Way of Righteousness* has wrongly based his whole theory of *working faith* on his misinterpretation of James 2:14–26 (20–32).

Once the truth of James’ epistle is understood—that there is not a word in it about forensic justification—Norman Shepherd’s conception of *working faith* should be rejected as a malevolent scheme imposed on scripture, denying, contradicting, and rejecting what the Lord Jesus himself said in Luke 18:13–14; and through his Spirit, what Paul wrote in Romans and Galatians.

—Rev. Stuart Pastine



Reformed Believers Publishing
325 84th St SW, Suite 102
Byron Center, MI 49315

FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another:
for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. — Romans 13:8*

Owe no man anything. Not merely your money debts! True, the wicked borrow oft and pay not back; the righteous show mercy and give. But the command is all-encompassing. Let officebearers pay their debts to the congregations by instructing, comforting, exhorting, and rebuking with the word, loving the word and defending it at the cost of their lives. Let husbands pay their debts to their wives by cherishing them and wives pay their debts by submitting to their husbands. Let parents pay their debts to their children by teaching them the truth. Let children pay their debts by showing all honor to their parents. Let employees pay their debts by giving an honest day's work for an honest day's pay and employers pay theirs by giving an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. Let citizens pay their debts by paying their taxes and submitting to the government. Let the magistrate pay his debts by rewarding the good and punishing the evil. Do you see how comprehensive the command of the Lord is? It touches every area of life. None are exempt. You owe the debt as really as he who borrows must pay his debt. So says the law.

And the apostle makes the admonition very sharp when he adds, "but to love one another." Love is the esteem of another as precious and dear and the determination to do good to the beloved. Love works no ill to the neighbor, thinks no evil, and rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. Love is perfect! All our paying of our debts must have their origin in love, or we have not paid them. Owe no man anything but to love one another means that love is the deepest motivation for all our behavior in the various relationships of life. And thus paying that debt in love means that love can never be this for that. Paying that debt is never dependent on whether someone deserves it or does not deserve it. Does not the world love that way? For the world, love is not a debt but a transaction.

The debt of charity is permanent, and we are never quit of it. We must pay it daily and yet always owe it. This is the end of discussion about whether our love gains richer experience, more assurance, more favor, or more of anything whatsoever. You can never even discharge the debt. Surely, you do not discharge your debt with God. God did that in Christ, both your love-debt to him and your love-debt to your neighbor. And God left you with an abiding obligation that you cannot discharge. You can never love enough. You can never stop loving. Always you must love. No matter how often and in what way you pay your love-debt, it remains.

For love is the fulfillment of the law. Do you believe that? Love is the fulfillment of the law? Perfect love of God and of the neighbor *is* the fulfillment of the law. If you believe that, you know that your payment of the love-debt can never be the ground of your blessing, your salvation, or your righteousness. It is not perfect love and never will be in this life. It hardly even approximates love very often; it is mingled and defiled with the works of the flesh. To see love as the fulfillment of the law, you must look to the cross. There Jesus Christ loved God perfectly and his neighbor perfectly, paid God what God was owed, and restored what he did not take away. There Christ fulfilled the whole law for righteousness to everyone who believes. There he revealed love: God's love, the love that saves and does good even to his enemies. And it is your abiding love-debt that you love the neighbor in thankfulness to God for his love of you.

—NJL