



# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Professor Engelsma Again

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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*Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help,  
whose hope is in the LORD his God. — Psalm 146:5*

**H**appy man you are, who has the God of Jacob for his help! *Happy* means blessed. Blessed man now and blessed from eternity and blessed to eternity. Blessed in all things. Blessed always. He is blessed in all that befalls him in this life; he is blessed in every step of his pilgrim's journey here below. He is blessed in sickness and in health, in riches and in poverty, and in fruitful years and in barren. He is blessed now, and he is blessed forever in heaven.

He alone is blessed. All who have the God of Jacob for their help are blessed. They are blessed in all. None who do not have the God of Jacob for their help—none who are strangers from him and aliens from his covenant, none who are his haters or his enemies—are blessed. They are cursed. That is the implied word of the text. Cursed and miserable are all who do not have the God of Jacob for their help. No matter how they may smile and no matter how their prosperity may blossom in the eyes of men, they are not blessed but are cursed of Jehovah, the living God.

Blessed are all who have the God of Jacob for their help.

He who has the God of Jacob for his help is a truly happy man.

The God of Jacob is Jehovah.

Who is Jehovah? He made heaven, earth, the sea, and all that therein is. He keeps truth forever. He executes judgment for the oppressed. He gives food to the hungry. He loosens the prisoners. He opens the eyes of the blind. He raises those who are bowed down. Jehovah loves the righteous! Jehovah preserves the strangers and relieves the fatherless and widows. He turns the way of the wicked upside down.

Who is a God like Jehovah? Who is so mighty and so righteous and so near unto his people?

Do not put your trust in princes! Who are they? Their breath is in their nostrils, and in a moment their breath goes out of them, they return to the earth, and their very thoughts perish.

But the thoughts of Jehovah are eternal, as he is eternal. He does all his pleasure.

Who was Jacob? He was one of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac was the son of Abraham and Sarah by promise. Rebekah was the granddaughter of Nahor, the brother of Abraham, one of the sons of Terah. Jacob was the younger and weaker of the two boys. Esau was

the older and stronger. Jacob was by nature essentially no different from Esau. Jacob came from the same parents. He was conceived in the same womb. He was born into the same household. He was circumcised with the same circumcision. And still more, he was the less desirable inasmuch as he was younger and weaker. Jacob and Esau, being born of Isaac and Rebekah, were conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins. They were conceived and born outside the kingdom and covenant of God. They were conceived and born subject to all miseries and to condemnation itself. They were conceived and born subject to the guilt of Adam's original sin.

Because they were guilty for Adam's original sin, they were conceived and born with the punishment that Adam's sin deserved, which is death. Physically, they were born dying. Spiritually, they were dead in trespasses and sins. Of themselves and in themselves, they were liable to eternal condemnation. Jacob was essentially no different from his brother. Jacob was a sinner. He was by nature unworthy of the least of all God's mercies and grace.

Jacob showed this sinful nature throughout his life. Oh, you say, "God regenerated him," and indeed that is true. God touched Jacob's heart with grace. God changed that heart and put his love in that heart, so that Jacob loved God. Jacob loved God, while his brother Esau did not and was earthly, carnal, sensual, and devilish.

Yet you cannot say that Jacob was perfect in any way. Though by faith he loved and believed God's promise to him, for a large portion of Jacob's life—almost to the very end—he attempted to fight for God's promise in his own strength and not by faith. Jacob tricked his father Isaac with the help of his mother. Then when Jacob's trick earned him the rage of his brother, Jacob had to run away to his uncle Laban. There in Haran, when Laban unjustly changed Jacob's wages ten times, Jacob tried every subterfuge and superstition to increase the number of his cattle. While in Haran, he took two wives and the two servant women of his wives, so that he had four mothers of his children. The lovely Leah he spurned, and the prickly Rachel he loved. He was by his foolishness the source of endless trouble, strife, discontent, rivalry, jealousy, and sin in his marriages and in his houses. He turned a blind eye to Rachel's idolatry and to Reuben's adultery and gave only the mildest rebuke to the treachery of his sons in Canaan. He forgot his vow to God at Bethel. By Jacob's favoritism he fired the jealousy of his sons against Joseph.

This saint and patriarch was a sinner. That is what the Bible clearly reveals in exhausting detail. And that is what God had to teach Jacob at Peniel when the angel of Jehovah—his savior—rushed on Jacob in the middle of the night and wrestled with him in sweat and grime on the dusty banks of the creek. Jacob did not attain and retain the promise of God in his own strength and by his own ingenuity and might. Indeed, by all his sins he should have forfeited God's covenant promise to him, and by those same sins he deserved only condemnation. Jacob himself confessed at Peniel, "I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies!"

Those who have the God of Jacob for their help are like Jacob, who had God as his help. As God was Jacob's God, so God is their God. They are Jacob, walking in today's world as Jacob walked in the days of the patriarchs. They are his spiritual children, the seed of Jacob.

God was the God of Jacob.

Now let me tell you how wonderful and gracious that name, God of Jacob, is.

If parents have a son or a daughter who does embarrassing and sinful things—becomes pregnant before marriage or gets caught breaking the law—the parents are ashamed. If the evening news broadcasts the names of the parents along with their child after he or she has committed a crime, they are humiliated. They do not want their names

associated with crime or sin. But God—before the whole world, on the pages of sacred scripture, and to all eternity—will have himself known as the God of Jacob. That is his name. The God of Jacob.

The God of Jacob, then, is God. Jacob has as his God the God of heaven and earth, who reveals himself in the psalm as Jehovah. Jacob has Jehovah, the I AM THAT I AM, as his God. God is the same in all the instant and constant fullness of his divine being from eternity to eternity. He is the covenant God in himself. He is the triune God. He is the living God. He alone is good and the overflowing fountain of all good. He is absolutely independent, having need of no one and nothing to make himself happy, full, or blessed. He is blessedness itself, and he is the endless and eternal fount of all blessings. The fountain of eternal life is found alone in him.

That God is Jacob's God. He is Jacob's God in the sense that God is for Jacob and never against him. God

possesses Jacob as his beloved, and Jacob possesses God as his God. He is for Jacob for his eternal salvation, and God is never against Jacob to his eternal condemnation.

Jehovah has said to Jacob, "I am your God, and you are mine." That is a life-changing word. That word of God is powerful to give what it speaks. That word of God is not dependent on the one to whom it is spoken, but that word of God lays hold on that one and changes him in the very depth of his being from being a God-denier into being a God-lover. That word lays hold on the object of God's delight and translates him out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God's dear Son. That word draws that one into the presence of and fellowship with God. That word spoken to one reveals to him the grace and the mercy of God, shows to him God's covenant of friendship and fellowship, and

works all things for that one's eternal glory. "I am your God" is the most blessed word in the world. That word makes God that person's inheritance, and Jehovah becomes his portion.

And corresponding to "I am your God" is the second part: "You are my people." That word makes that people God's inheritance, his precious possession in the world.

The God of Jacob is the God of infinite power. He made the heaven and the earth by the word of his power and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gives to every creature—

from the angels, to the sun and moon and stars, to all the animals and birds and fish—their being, shape, and offices to serve him. He provides for all and gives them their meat in due season. All men live, move, and have their being in him. Without him and apart from his will, no creature can so much as move, and apart from him they cease to exist. Jehovah is Jacob's in infinite power, so that nothing is impossible for the Lord in his will to bless Jacob. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Jehovah, who is sovereign over all, is Jacob's. Nothing—in heaven above, on the earth beneath, or under the earth—happens apart from Jehovah's will. All things are decreed by him. And all things happen as he unfolds that decree in his sovereign control. Especially is he sovereign over the eternal destinies of men. What did God say to Rebekah when the twins were not yet born and had done neither good nor evil? "The elder shall serve the younger."

The God of Jacob is the God of sovereign election and reprobation; he is the God of unmerited grace; he is the God of an unfailing and unconditional promise of salvation to his people—a promise that does not depend in any sense at all on the recipient of that promise.

He needed to say nothing more. Rebekah understood perfectly well what God had said. That was God's word to Rebekah that he had chosen Jacob and rejected Esau. Jacob was God's beloved. Esau was hated. God said that. God said that about twin boys. God made that distinction eternally. God revealed in that his goodness and severity. He said that in his great love for Jacob. Eternally, in love he desired and delighted in Jacob, and in love God appointed Jacob to grace, mercy, and salvation. Eternally, God decreed to make a covenant with Jacob and to incorporate him into that covenant in Christ.

Jehovah is the God of Jacob in God's great grace. Grace is the eternal favor of God. Grace is the power of God to save his beloved people. In grace he is Jacob's God. The God of Jacob is the God of sovereign election and reprobation; he is the God of unmerited grace; he is the God of an unfailing and unconditional promise of salvation to his people—a promise that does not depend in any sense at all on the recipient of that promise. That promise depends on God alone; and in the realization of that promise by grace, God gives all that he has promised.

Jehovah is the God of Jacob in a covenant of grace, reconciliation, and friendship. God possesses Jacob in love, and Jacob has God as his inheritance, so that all the blessedness, goodness, grace, power, sovereignty, mercy, and life of God are Jacob's by promise. God is Jacob's.

And so, possessing God, Jacob has God for his help.

Oh, how Jacob needed a help! Even from a physical viewpoint, he stood as the weaker over against his stronger brother, the younger over against the older. Even deeper, he stood as the spiritual over against the carnal, the elect over against the reprobate, the lover of God over against his hater. Jacob—and all like him—existed in the midst of a sinful, sin-cursed, and dark world that hated God and thus hated all who were of God's party in the world, that hated all his friends and his servants. Besides, Jacob needed a help over against his own sins, both his original sin and his own actual sin. He existed in the world in his guilt because he broke the commandments of God. He existed in the world with his transgressions, his sins, and his violations of the law of God.

Still more, Jacob stood in the world powerless to bring the promise of God. The promise of God is the promise of salvation from sin and life with God in his covenant now and in eternity. But there was in Jacob no power at all to bring that promise. He could not pay for his sins, but he daily increased his guilt. He could not preserve himself in his life but would have been swallowed up by his enemies, a fact that was driven home to him when Esau came to meet him with four hundred armed men. Of all the things that Jacob could not do to realize the

promise, he could not bring himself to heaven and realize the new, heavenly, and eternal life with God. Jacob could not because he could not raise the dead. To bring God's promise, to realize that promise, and to bestow the blessings of that promise, one must be able to raise the dead; to overcome death; to put an end to death; and to raise man and, indeed, the whole creation above the power of sin and death. So it was for Jacob, and so it is for all who are the seed of Jacob.

And that is the reason there is no power and thus no help in the sons of men either, even if they are princes. That is the contrast. You have the God of Jacob for your help, or you have princes. *Princes* refer to the very best and most powerful of men. But there is no help in princes. Though they have great riches in this life; though they have great power, wisdom, or learning in this life, there is no help in them. Princes cannot raise the dead. Indeed, they themselves are subject to death and go the way of all men, and in a day their very names perish. Trust not in princes or in the sons of men.

The God of Jacob alone is help. And to have Jacob's God as your God is to have Jacob's God as your help. That means to have an intimate covenant friend. A help is a friend. He is the one in whom you trust and to whom you tell all your secrets. God is the God of Jacob and of all who are the seed of Jacob as their intimate covenant friend. He draws them near to himself, and he draws near to them. They draw near to him, and he draws near to them. And because he is their help and because he is God, he is also their mighty and willing savior. In all their troubles and afflictions, from all their sins and miseries, in all their wretchedness and helplessness, he shows himself strong on their behalf. His power is made perfect in their weakness. Their sin and guilt, their weakness and powerlessness, their helplessness and inability are the occasions for the revelation of himself as their God, their help, savior, and redeemer.

As their help, he comes very near to them. A help comes to you, draws near to you, and lifts you up when you have fallen. God comes near unto his people. Oh, most gloriously, he came near to them in the incarnation of Christ Jesus. Then God the Son, who is and remains true and eternal God, took on himself and added to his divine nature of the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary and became man. He entered into the womb of Mary and was born of Mary. He came not as a prince and a lord but as a servant, as despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. When he came near, he not only took the flesh of the seed of Jacob, but he also took all the sins of Jacob, all his guilt and his pollution, and all the guilt and the pollution of all the people of God. Jesus took it and made it his,

so he became sin for them and was made a curse for them.

Because he had their guilt and their sin, he was also crucified and cursed by God on the tree of the cross. Jesus took their sin and their curse. He made perfect satisfaction for that sin at the cross and earned for them righteousness, holiness, and eternal life. He made sure God's promise to them. Because Jesus did that, God raised him from the dead.

Still Christ Jesus comes ever nearer and nearer to them. He comes to them in his Spirit and indwells them. Christ regenerates them and bestows on them his life. He washes them in the depths of their beings from all their sin, guilt, and pollution in his own blood. He incorporates them into himself, so that they are in him and he is in them. And as sovereign lord over all,

he works all things according to God's eternal counsel for their salvation and everlasting life. By his Spirit he leads them straight on toward their heavenly home.

Oh, indeed, blessed is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help! And because he has the God of Jacob for his help, such a man has hope. Whose hope is in Jehovah his God! Or better, whose hope is *upon* Jehovah his God.

*Hope.* What a lovely word!

That is what man has nothing of in this world. That is what all the affliction, trouble, sorrow, sin, and weariness of this world seek to take away from God's people, his Jacob. The devil, sin, and the world seek to make God's people despair, to despair as the world despairs, and with the despairing world to abandon themselves to the sins and wickedness of the world, so that like the despairing world their motto becomes, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." So to live in the deep and dark hole of despair and to wallow and perish in that despair is hopelessness.

Hope is like a light that penetrates our darkness and our night, the darkness and night of our sin, of our affliction, and of our trouble. Hope is the expectation of great good.

Hope not in princes! That is what man is constantly tempted to do: hope in princes. To hope in himself: "I will make my life go how I want it to go; I will force the outcome that I want; I will manipulate the circumstances to achieve my end." Jacob was always trying that. By lies and deceits and superstitions, he aimed to have

the blessing. But all that was for naught. Hope not in princes. There is nothing in man that can be the ground for such an expectation of great good. For in a single day he perishes. He has no strength, power, or resources to bring God's promise or to give blessedness.

Blessed is the man whose hope is in Jehovah his God. Because God is his help. Because God—God of heaven and earth, God of Jesus Christ, God of a faithful and unconditional promise—is that man's help, he has hope. Whose hope is in the Lord his God. God is his expectation.

That means having faith. Where there is no faith, there is no hope. Faith believes God's promise and word. Faith clings to Christ and draws things out of Christ. Faith rests and relies on God's word of promise and salvation.

Faith saves. By faith that man is delivered from the crushing guilt of his sin. By faith he is sanctified and made a new creature. By faith he is assured that God is his God. By faith he is confident that not only to others but to him also God gives righteousness and eternal life.

And thus that man has hope upon God. He has hope that over against all his sin, now and to the end of his life, God will forgive him for Christ's sake. He has hope in all his afflictions that God will turn them to his eternal profit. He has hope in all his life, in every circumstance of his

life, that God will not leave him nor forsake him. He has hope that all things in this life do not come to pass by chance but are brought to him by the fatherly hand of God. He has hope in life that God is blessing him in all things. He has hope that after this life God will take him to eternal glory. He has hope that at the end of the world God will raise him up and give him everlasting life in a new heaven and a new earth.

In God there is every reason and every ground for such hope. He is the God of Jacob. He is Jehovah, the almighty and unchanging God. He is the God of a faithful and unfailing promise. He is the God of eternal election. "I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed!"

Is not such who has the God of Jacob as his God a happy man? It may not seem that way to Jacob and to all Jacob's seed. When Jacob looked around at his circumstances, he was tempted to despair. When he thought that he had lost his beloved Joseph, he cried

To bring God's promise, to realize that promise, and to bestow the blessings of that promise, one must be able to raise the dead; to overcome death; to put an end to death; and to raise man and, indeed, the whole creation above the power of sin and death.

out in despair, “All these things are against me!” And so Jacob’s seed too walk in the valley of the shadow of death. There are many trials and many afflictions. Jacob’s seed must pass through fires that threaten to consume them and waters that appear to overwhelm them. They are tempted, tried, and persecuted. They grow weary. Often they are troubled in mind, body, and soul. Their sins appear so great, and their faith is so little.

So Jacob spent his life crying to God. God heard Jacob. Never did Jacob knock on heaven’s door and find it closed to him. God came to Jacob. God blessed him. God delivered him. God turned all to his profit.

Happy is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, who hope is in Jehovah his God. He is happy. That happiness is a God-wrought contentment and joy in God as the God of his salvation. He is happy because he is blessed. He is the object of God’s favor and grace, and never of his wrath and curse. He is happy because God is his God and his help. He is happy because he rests in God. He is happy because he expects from God good and only good.

There is no happiness like that.

Oh, man tries to make happiness consist in everything else besides God. He will seek his happiness in everything except God. Man weaves dreams of happiness for himself. He seeks happiness within, in things, and in about everything in creation that can be imagined: his money; his booze; his drugs; his exercise; and his houses, shopping, fun, and pleasure. They are his happiness and his help and his hope. He seeks his happiness in men. “They will save me!” But they will always disappoint. Call on them in the day of trouble, and you will see that they are as deaf, blind, dumb, and powerless as the stumps and images of the heathen.

But the God of Jacob—he hears. In his grace he hears. In his power he delivers. He is the only source of happiness, and there is no happiness apart from him. That is a happiness that consists in a peace that passes all understanding, a contentment that overcomes every trial, a hope that brightens the worst darkness. Such a man is blessed now. He is blessed in eternity. He is blessed in his seed. He is blessed in all.

The truly happy man!

—NJL

## FROM THE EDITOR

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing, the organization, the editors, and the copy editors present this special issue of the magazine to our readers, dealing with the latest article from Prof. David J. Engelsma. Professor Engelsma continues to insist that man’s activity of coming to God precedes in some vital sense God’s activity of coming to man. In his latest blog post, Professor Engelsma advances his thought to teach that man’s activity of coming to God in an active faith precedes God’s activity of coming to man with the gifts of forgiveness, remission of sins, and justification. The issue could not be more serious, and it demands a response.

Professor Engelsma has not taken up our offer to publish his material in *Sword and Shield* but continues to publish his articles via family email. In this case, that email was picked up by the blog of the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Professor Engelsma’s blog post

is printed in this issue for the convenience of our readers. The additions to the blog that were not in his family email are noted in red, and the subtractions are noted with strikeouts.

One of our contributors to this issue received quite a shock when she first saw Professor Engelsma’s latest email article. Well before that article was emailed out, Mrs. Christina Overway was working on an article regarding the rooster’s crowing and the sun’s rising. Mrs. Overway correctly saw how that applied to the teaching of ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Imagine her surprise when she saw Professor Engelsma using the same illustration but wrongly applied to the Reformed Protestant Churches. Mrs. Overway’s excellent article is included in this issue and sets things straight.

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

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# *“Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc?” Non!, or, “Don’t Kill the Rooster!”*

Reformed Free Publishing Association

September 08, 2021

by David J. Engelsma

For the benefit of most of the readers, the first part of my title is Latin, meaning, “After this, therefore, on account of this?” This is the question. I use the Latin, not to impress anyone, but because this is a saying that is so familiar in the Latin for the thought it expresses as virtually to demand this foreign language.

The saying, or proverb, refers to a common, serious error in thinking. The error is to suppose that because one thing follows another thing (Latin: “*post hoc*”), the thing that precedes is the cause of the thing that follows (Latin: “*ergo, propter hoc*”). The classic example of the saying is that of the lusty rooster whose crowing early every morning is immediately followed by the rising of the sun. Therefore, the rooster concludes that the rising of the sun is caused by his crowing.

“*Non*” in the title answers the question in the (Latin) negative, “no!”—“no,” because that something (in this case, justification) follows something else (in this case, faith) does not imply that this **that** something, that is, justification, is caused by that which precedes it, that is, faith. Because the rising of the sun follows the crowing of the rooster, it is not the case that the crowing of the rooster is the cause of the rising of the sun.

This proverbial mistake, namely, supposing that because one thing *follows* another it is *caused* by that which precedes, is being made by the ministers who have recently left the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). They charge that because the PRC teach that forgiveness of sins follows repentance, as God’s way of forgiving sins, and because the PRC teach that justification follows believing, as God’s way of justifying the elect sinner, the ministers in the PRC are teaching conditional salvation. “*Post hoc*,” that is, “after believing,” “*ergo, propter hoc*,” “therefore because of believing.” This is the misunderstanding and charge.

The misunderstanding and charge are false. Confessing that justification follows faith, or believing, does not imply that justification is caused by faith. The response of the PRC to the misunderstanding, or charge, is “*non!*,” “no!” Because the sun comes up immediately after the rooster

crowes does not mean that the rising of the sun is caused by the crowing of the rooster.

Justification, or forgiveness, follows faith, as the end follows the means. Faith precedes justification. Repentance precedes remission of sins. But because it pleases God to justify by means of faith (believing), and to forgive in the way of the sinner’s repenting, justification is not caused by faith. Neither is repentance the cause of forgiveness. Faith is the (God-worked) means. It is not the cause.

“*Post hoc, ergo propter hoc?*” “*Non!*”

Everyone grasps the reality that a means precedes its end. A child does. Leaving aside for the moment that in these earthly illustrations the means is also in a way the cause, and concentrating only on the truth that a means precedes its end, eating is the means to perpetuate earthly life; rain is a means unto the healthy growth of plants; and sexual intercourse is the means to the conception of children.

Does anyone, even theologians in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC), deny that the means precedes the end, and that even in natural life the end follows the means? God works this way in everyday, earthly life. He works life, nourishes crops, and produces offspring by means that precede. And even in natural life, this does not detract from His glory, at least, on the part of the Christian, for the Christian acknowledges that God works the means as well as the end.

All illustrations limp and are, therefore, subject to criticism. Let us now address the issue of “*post hoc, ergo propter hoc? Non!*” directly with regard to the spiritual realities of God’s work of salvation. The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance. Similarly, believing is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto justification; as end, justification follows faith.

Do the theologians of the RPC deny this? Do they deny that the end follows the means? Do they deny that the (God-worked) repentance of the sinner precedes for-



giveness? Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification? Do they deny the teaching of James 4:8 that an important aspect of salvation has God's causing us to draw nigh to Him precede His drawing nigh to us. Is this now the rock-bottom, doctrinal basis validation of their separate existence? Is this in the end their "here we stand"?

This denial puts them in a hard place practically. Let us suppose that these churches too have a member living impenitently in sin. The minister and an elder make a disciplinary call on the sinning member. What do they say to him? In their mistaken fear of "post hoc, ergo propter hoc" do they say nothing at all, governed by their theology that to call for (preceding) repentance leading to (following) forgiveness would be the heresy of conditions? Then, their theology prohibits their carrying out a fundamental aspect of the ministry of the gospel: calling sinners to repentance. Or, true to their misunderstanding of "after something, therefore, on account of it" do they first declare, "God forgives you," and only then call for repentance, if they dare to call for repentance at all? Then, their theology demands that they reverse the biblical order of repenting and being forgiven.

But matters are yet worse for the theologians of the RPC. With their mistaken notion of "post hoc, etc., they contradict the explicit teaching of the Bible—the explicit teaching. Having seen his faith, Jesus then declared to the man sick of palsy, "thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matthew 9:2). Believing preceded remission. Peter preached, "Repent...for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). In his gospel, remission followed repenting. Likewise, in Acts 10:43, the apostle proclaimed as Christian orthodoxy, and as the urgent way of salvation, "whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." The present tense, "believeth," precedes a future tense, "shall receive." God works (preceding) faith as the means to receive remission of sins that follows. *The Scripture of James 4:8, in an exhortation to the regenerated human's activity, has the believer's drawing nigh to God precede God's drawing nigh to him or her. One can, indeed must, explain this truth of salvation, but he may not explain it away.*

So as not to become tedious, I refer only to one other passage, Galatians 2:16, a grand passage on justification: "We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be jus-

tified by the faith of Jesus Christ." The Greek original has "in order that" we might be justified. The text states—states!—that believing (faith) precedes the gracious gift of justification, as the means (faith) precedes the end (being justified).

Forgiveness and justification are "post" (after) faith. Are these gifts of salvation therefore "on account of" ("propter") faith? "Non !" (No!) The cause of forgiveness and justification is not the believer's faith. But the cause is the grace of God the Holy Ghost, on the basis of the cross and from eternal election as the source. "Post hoc?" Yes. "Ergo propter hoc?" No!

The appeal by the men of the RPC to the Reformed controversy at the Synod of Dordt and to the Protestant Reformed controversy with conditional theology in the 1940s and 1950s, therefore, is wholly mistaken, illegitimate, misleading, and unjust. The issue in these controversies was not at all whether justification and remission of sins follow faith and repentance ("post hoc"). The issue was whether, therefore, justification and remission are on account of faith and repentance ("ergo propter hoc"). To the doctrine that justification is caused by faith, and then faith as the act of man, rather than as the gracious work and gift of God, Dordt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the PRC in 1953 said, "non!" These defenses

of the gospel did not at all intend to deny that justification follows faith as the end follows the means.

Regarding the issue at the Synod of Dordt, since it is a creed, I appeal only to the Canons of Dordt, 5/7. God renews elect sinners to "repentance...[so] 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 the creed, which came out of the fires of a conflict with the false doctrine, that because faith precedes justification, faith is the cause of justification, the truth is that remission of sins, the experience of God's favor, and the adoration of God's mercies follow faith and repentance. But the entirety of the creed rejects as false doctrine the teaching that faith and repentance are conditions of justification, that is, that justification is "propter" (on account of) faith.

The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance. Similarly, believing is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto justification; as end, justification follows faith.

Much as it was concerned to deny that faith is the cause of justification, the Canons does not deny that faith precedes justification, as the means precedes the end. I dare say that the thought of this denial never entered the orthodox mind of any delegate to the synod. None of them even entertained the idea of denying that the way to remission of sins is repentance; or that the way to justification is believing; or that a means precedes the end; or that Acts 10:43, Galatians 2:16, and James 4:8 are not in the Bible.

As for the doctrinal issue in the controversy of the PRC with a theology of conditions in the early 1950s, we learn what that issue was, and what it was not, not from the writings of individual ministers, no matter how *reputable respectable*, but from the official document that decided the issue, the “Declaration of Principles.” According to the synodically adopted “Declaration,” the issue was whether God makes a gracious, conditional promise to all baptized children that He will save them, which promise is dependent upon a child’s fulfillment of the condition of faith. To this conditional theology, the PRC said “*non!*”

According to this same “Declaration,” the issue was not that a preceding faith is the God-worked means in the elect unto a justification that follows. *The issue was not whether God draws nigh to those who draw nigh to Him.* “We maintain (*declares the ‘Declaration’*)...that the preaching comes to all; and that God seriously commands to faith and repentance; and that to all those who come and believe He promises life and peace.” Coming to Christ by faith and repentance is the (preceding) means to the (following) end that consists of life and peace. To this basic Christian truth the PRC said “yes” in 1953, and hope to say “yes” until the coming of Jesus.

Out of a misguided fear of the error of “*post hoc, ergo propter hoc,*” we will not, therefore, kill the rooster. I refer, of course, back to the classic example of the error of thinking that if something (in this case, remission of sins and justification) follows something else, it must be on account of that something else (in this case, faith). So opposed is the farmer to the error of the thought that, because the rising of the sun follows the crowing of his rooster, the crowing of the rooster is the cause of the rising of the sun, that the farmer kills his rooster. Now no one, including the rooster, can make the mistake of supposing that the rooster’s crowing is the cause of the rising of the sun.

This is the error of which the RPC are guilty, or to which they are tending. So opposed are they, commendably, to the heresy that justification is caused by faith, which is the false doctrine of justification by works, and committed as they are, mistakenly, to the notion that, if justification follows faith, justification must be caused by faith, they deny that faith precedes justification. They kill the crowing roost-

er. Declare the men of the RPC, “we will have no more crowing by the rooster.” That is, “we will not countenance the teaching that repentance precedes remission, or that faith precedes justification, *or that our drawing nigh to God precedes His drawing nigh to us.* From henceforth, we judge that all who teach that faith precedes justification, that is, that faith is the means to justification, *and all who teach that God will draw nigh to those who draw nigh to Him are Pelagian, Roman Catholic, are Arminian, federal vision, conditional theology, viperish,* and what not more heretics.”

One can only hope that *it is out of ignorance that* they ignorantly overlook that their novel, *searing* judgment in the sphere of Reformed, indeed, Christian, theology, falls also upon Paul, Peter, *James,* and our blessed Savior.

They kill the rooster, because, in addition to contradicting the fundamental, and plain, teaching of Scripture that God justifies the elect sinner by means of His (preceding) work of faith, *and draws nigh to those who draw nigh to Him,* they are guilty of that error of thinking exposed in Logic 101: “*post hoc, ergo propter hoc.*”

That a simple farmer kills his rooster to avoid the error of supposing that its crowing brings up the sun is not serious (except for the rooster).

But to deny the preceding faith in God’s grand work of justification and to negate the preceding repentance in His gracious work of remission of sins are serious indeed. Such is the necessary relation in these two-fold works of God that without preceding repentance there is no remission, and without preceding faith there is no justification. Remission is *by means of* (preceding) repentance; justification is *by means of* (preceding) faith; *God’s drawing nigh to us is by means of our (preceding) drawing nigh to Him.* Jesus said so. Peter taught so. Paul proclaimed so. *James declared so.* The Canons of Dordt and the “Declaration of Principles” confess so.

With genuine love for the men of the RPC (*which among other things avoids name-calling*), I would warn them: Do not allow your developing hatred of the PRC to kill the theological and gospel rooster.

1. ~~This missive was written for the benefit of my family, in fulfilment of a father’s calling to shed light on the truth in times of troubles in the churches, which in the present distress of the PRC include confusion.~~
2. ~~I wrote this explanation in August 2021.~~
3. ~~I have no objection to the dissemination of the missive as widely as my family judges to be beneficial to others and helpful to the cause of the truth of the gospel, which this missive explains and defends.~~

David J. Engelsma

## CHANTICLEER

### *A Logical Order*

I write this September 13, 2021. Professor Engelsma has put out another email letter to all and sundry. Out of character for him and curiously, the letter is undated. But he tells his readers, “I wrote this explanation in August 2021.” I am not sure why this information is relevant, when he emailed the letter on September 2. The Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) posted the email on its blog with some additions and subtractions that I assume were made by Professor Engelsma.<sup>1</sup> Among those additions is that he *again* cites James 4:8 against us. He is going to make this text his *Hoc Est Corpus Meum*.

Notable though is that he does not take back a word of what he has written previously, especially about justification and about experience, so that there still is a certain sense in which man is first.

The email is shabby. The editors of *Sword and Shield* devoted the entire August 15 issue of the magazine to replicating his letters faithfully so that everyone could read them and to explaining our position. Professor Engelsma is obviously responding to *Sword and Shield*, but he will not even pay us the courtesy of writing in the magazine. He writes *about* us, but he will not write *to* us. He condemns us before the world, and he will not even write a word *to* us. Perhaps, he thinks that writing to us would give us a standing that he thinks we do not deserve. Regardless, writing *to us* is beneath him!

His arguments against us are weak at best and consist of knocking down a straw man that he has set up. He writes,

They charge that because the PRC teach that forgiveness of sins follows repentance, as God’s way of forgiving sins, and because the PRC teach that justification follows believing, as God’s way of justifying the elect sinner, the ministers in the PRC are teaching conditional salvation.

This has never been our charge, and he knows this. Where in all of our writings have we made this our charge? We have charged conditional *experience* of salvation—conditional justification and a conditional covenant—but we have never based this charge on the fact that someone taught that forgiveness of sins follows

repentance. We have charged that conditions are being deceptively taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and that ministers who are teaching that are saying much more than that forgiveness of sins follows repentance. We have argued this point with many quotes and lengthy analysis.

He continues,

Justification, or forgiveness, follows faith, as the end follows the means. Faith precedes justification. Repentance precedes remission of sins. But because it pleases God to justify by means of faith (believing), and to forgive in the way of the sinner’s repenting, justification is not caused by faith. Neither is repentance the cause of forgiveness. Faith is the (God-worked) means. It is not the cause.

This is apparently all that the Protestant Reformed denomination is teaching. We in the Reformed Protestant Churches are guilty of committing the logical fallacy of confusing *post hoc* with *propter hoc*, the fallacy of thinking that because something follows something else, the one *causes* the other. The classic example is that the rooster’s crowing before dawn is said to cause the dawn. We have been confused all this time. There has been all this trouble about nothing. All the quoting and analysis that we have done is fallacious. No smoke or fire here. First repentance, then faith, then justification. The controversy is only a matter of *the order of salvation*. Go back to sleep.

My esteemed professor must mistake me for a high school logic student. Everyone knows that the controversy is *not* about whether this follows that in the order of salvation. I previously ridiculed the idea that the controversy is merely about whether this follows that in the order of salvation. I add now that if a temporal order is what members in the PRC want their ministers to preach as the *gospel* until Christ comes, let them preach that, and they will all perish with those stones for bread. Besides, the order of salvation is not a temporal order. It is a fundamental corruption of the idea of the order of salvation to teach that it is a temporal order. It is a logical order. A temporal order is not the point of scripture, for instance, when it says the following in the classic proof text on the order of salvation:

<sup>1</sup> David J. Engelsma, “‘Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc?’ Non!, or, ‘Don’t Kill the Rooster!’” September 8, 2021; <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc-non-or-don-t-kill-the-rooster>.

29. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
30. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Rom. 8:29–30)

That is not a temporal order. It is a logical order that points both to the eternal source of every benefit of salvation and to the infallibility and inevitability of that salvation because of that eternal source. The election obtains salvation and every benefit of it. In connection with the covenant, election obtains the promise, the fellowship, and all the blessedness and eternal glory of the covenant of grace. In election the elect have every benefit of salvation really and legally in Christ. From that election salvation and all its benefits flow as a river from its source. Besides, there is a certain definite sense in which the elect possess every benefit of salvation in their regeneration. A baby in the womb is regenerated, justified, and sanctified. This is our confession about our children at the time of baptism, when parents confess that their children are sanctified in Christ; and according to the Canons, this is our comfort in the death of our infants. As to time, I know and everyone knows and no one is denying that faith precedes justification, that repentance precedes forgiveness, and all the rest. What the elect receive in time is the unfolding of what their God gave them in eternity and what Christ accomplished for them at the cross.

### *Deceptively Conditional*

The point in our controversy is that *under the guise of the order of salvation, Protestant Reformed ministers are teaching conditions*. To use the language of the day, *in the way of* no longer means *in the way of*, but it means *propter hoc, because of, in order that, or means unto*. Our contention is that Schilderian covenant theology has won out in the PRC and that this language of *before* and *after* is the same as Klaas Schilder's A before B. Remember how Schilder defined a condition? It was only A before B, but he meant A before B as a *condition*. A was *unto* B. The same thing is being done in the PRC today. Professor Engelsma himself does this. He writes as though the words *in the way of* and *means unto* are synonyms. He writes, "Because it pleases God to justify *by means of* faith (believing), and to forgive *in the way of* the sinner's repenting..." He also writes, "The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) *means unto* the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance" (emphasis added).

This is shocking to me. In all of my life, I have never

thought *that* was Protestant Reformed theology. He did not teach me *that* as Protestant Reformed theology. Is justification *in the way of repentance*, or is repentance *means unto* justification? If repentance is *means unto* justification, then it does not matter how many times one says that repentance is *by grace* and *God-worked* and *God-given*; that is conditional justification. Is repentance a *means unto* forgiveness? Is that the meaning of *in the way of* in the PRC? *In the way of* means now in the PRC *means unto*? And that in connection with justification!

Then I have a similar point with what Professor Engelsma says about faith. He writes, "Similarly, believing is the (God-given and God-worked) *means unto* justification; as end, justification follows faith" (emphasis added).

There are at least two problems with this, as I see it. The first is that all of the emphasis in his email is on *active* faith, that is, faith as man's activity. The reader can notice that he adds to his blog the words *an active* to faith at a crucial point. Is faith, as man's activity now, the means unto justification? Faith—as man's doing—is the means unto justification. I have never believed enough to be justified, and neither has he, and he would be the first to admit it.

The second problem I have is with the word "similarly." He writes that similarly as repentance is a means to an end, so faith is a means to an end. Worryingly, the end in both cases is *justification*. The full quote of what he maintains as Protestant Reformed theology is this:

The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance. Similarly, believing is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto justification; as end, justification follows faith.

And then this from his September 8 blog, and I underline what was not in his email:

Do the theologians of the RPC deny this? Do they deny that the end follows the means? Do they deny that the (God-worked) repentance of the sinner precedes forgiveness? Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification? Do they deny the teaching of James 4:8 that an important aspect of salvation has God's causing us to draw nigh to Him precede His drawing nigh to us. Is this now the rock-bottom, doctrinal validation of their separate existence? Is this in the end their "here we stand"?

We see from this exactly what he meant when he exegeted James 4:8 and similar passages as man first, then God's blessing—of course graciously. What he meant was that faith is the means unto justification, *and* repentance—drawing near to God—is the means unto justification.

I have some problems with this that he should clear up. He is my teacher. I have never in my life been taught that repentance is the means unto forgiveness and that faith is the means unto forgiveness. I have never been taught that the relationship of repentance to justification is similar to faith's relationship to justification. Such language makes repentance and faith coordinate in the matter of justification. To put it in terms any layman can understand, this means that *we are justified by faith and repentance*. Or to put it another way, it means that faith—as man's activity—and repentance—as man's doing—are conditions of covenant fellowship. There is no covenant fellowship with God apart from justification, and justification is the basis of all of our covenant fellowship. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." To use the language of the day and without any injustice at all to the words of Romans 5:1, we could interpret this verse to say, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have delightful covenant fellowship—consciously and experientially—with our God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Without justification there is no experience of God as our God, and there is no fellowship with God. The Protestant Reformed doctrine is that in justification faith—as man's doing—and repentance—as man's doing—both justify the sinner. It is justification by faith as man's work and by repentance as man's work—by grace, of course.

I deny that repentance is a means unto the end justification and that faith is the means unto the end justification. I deny this in two senses. First, I deny that repentance and faith are both means unto the end justification. Faith's relationship to justification and repentance's relationship to justification are fundamentally different. Second, I deny that faith as man's activity, faith as what man does, is the means unto the end justification. That is a new Arminianism. The Arminian also spoke of justification by faith, but his wicked doctrine of justification, like that of Socinus, was that the Arminian made faith man's work on account of which he was justified. I see the same thing going on today with the language of faith as man's activity. Faith is what man does—by grace, of course—to be justified and to enjoy fellowship with God. Worse now is that repentance is being added to faith. How many more things must man do to be justified?

### *Active Faith?*

And this leads to my problem with Professor Engelsma's language of *active* faith. He adds the words *an active* to his blog post. Those words were not in his original email. To me this is significant in light of his question to us, "Do they [the theologians of the RPC] deny that an active faith precedes justification?" He wrote in his email letter,

"Do they deny that faith precedes justification?" which is a stupid question. No one in the history of theology has denied that faith precedes justification. He knows that this is not what the controversy is about. It is about that word *active*. But that tactic will not work with us anymore. We are on to it. Just like the federal vision's *obedient* faith, and *sanctifying* faith in the doctrinal statement of the PRC, now we have *an active* faith. These are all the same. They mingle and intertwine faith and faith's repentance as co-instruments in justification, and they make faith man's activity—his doing—*because of which* he is justified and blessed of God. As was said previously, faith is *means unto* justification, and repentance is *means unto* justification.

I also answer Professor Engelsma's questions: "Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification?" That is a clever question. If he means faith as believing, then we do not deny that. I would add, though, that babies are justified before they believe, and we have as much to do with our justification as babies do. As Christ said in Luke 18:17, "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." If man insists that faith is his doing—by grace, of course—and repentance is his doing—by grace, of course—unto justification, he will not enter the kingdom because he has not received the kingdom as a little child, who does nothing to enter the kingdom, as the babies whom Christ held in his arms and blessed testified. So if Professor Engelsma means faith as man's activity, man's doing *unto* his justification, then, yes, we do deny that. If he means faith as repentance and believing unto justification, then, yes, we deny that too. We deny that emphatically! Repentance is not coordinate with faith in justification. Repentance is not another means with faith unto justification, and faith is not man's doing unto justification either. The promise comes into our possession by faith alone. We are justified by faith alone, absolutely alone. That faith is God's gift. We are justified in the way of repentance? I will grant that, although now I am going to ask Professor Engelsma to explain that, because I see how corrupted that language has become. The phrase *in the way of*, which Hoeksema offered as a solution, is now being used to bring in a freight train load of false doctrine. And it is becoming increasingly clear that those who are doing it cannot stay with the phrase *in the way of*. They said previously, "In the way of," wink, wink, and now they want to make sure that their audiences do not misunderstand. They are being forced to come out with what they believe, and what they believe is "means unto" and "because of" and "conditioned on." We are justified by means of repentance? I absolutely deny that. That cannot be. Justified by faith as man's activity—man's doing? I deny that too.

And to all those enamored of the term *active* faith I ask: what in the world is *active* faith? Why the word *active*? Is not faith itself an activity? That is what faith is: activity! It is rigorous, vigorous, and consuming activity. It is the utterly unique activity of clinging to Christ alone. It is the activity of casting off all confidence in the flesh, including in one's believing or in one's repenting; it is the activity of doing nothing, nothing but believing. Faith that looks at repentance is not faith. Faith that looks at faith is not faith. Faith that looks at works, activity, and doing is not faith. Faith refuses to look anywhere and to anyone but Christ. Faith refuses to trust anyone or anything but Christ. Faith clings to *Christ* alone.

What is being screamed at us is, "Faith is an activity! Faith is an activity!" I know that. I preach that. But Professor Engelsma's—and others'—*active* faith now means faith and repentance. Repentance is a part of faith, and without repentance faith does not function. Repentance together with faith are the *means unto* the end justification. By that word *active* is meant faith as man's doing and repentance as man's doing unto his justification.

My response to this is that one cannot believe enough and repent enough to be justified! This *active faith*, *sanc-tifying faith*, and *obedient faith* are what I have been arguing is federal vision theology in the PRC. It is Schilderian conditional covenant theology in the PRC, and the denomination now through her theologian espouses it unashamedly.

And in answer to Professor Engelsma's question, "Is this now the...doctrinal validation of their separate existence?" again, the answer is yes. I cannot be in the same church with those who teach that faith and repentance are the means unto the end justification. I do not believe that this is Protestant Reformed theology. Professor Engelsma did not teach me that this is Protestant Reformed theology. I believe that he has sold out Protestant Reformed theology at the crucial point of man's experience. Why he has done that is a mystery to me. Is it perhaps now to validate the doctrinal decisions of the Protestant Reformed Synod 2021 that undo Synod 2018? Regardless, he has surrendered, and he is doing so by creating an excuse for himself and for everyone else to stay in the PRC by attempting to make his opponents look stupid.

Worse, by means of Professor Engelsma's doctrinal explanations, the Protestant Reformed denomination now has a new doctrine of justification—defended by appeals to *experience* and to *active* faith—in which faith and repentance are means unto forgiveness. With this new doctrine of justification—experience—she also no longer has an unconditional covenant; she has a conditional one—a cleverly conditional one. She is jettisoning God's decree as controlling the covenant. Instead of starting with God's decree, she starts with man's experience in

her explanation of scripture and the experience of salvation, and that is very Schilderian too.

Our criticism of that doctrine and our consigning it to the anathema of Paul are not based on mistaking *post hoc* for *propter hoc* but on detecting that the doctrine teaches justification by—*propter hoc*—faith and repentance, and it is not even subtle any longer.

Hoeksema, Luther, Paul, James, Jesus, and Malachi all rejected that doctrine, and we with them do too!

## Rewriting 1953

Then there is Professor Engelsma's very strange section about 1953. He writes,

The appeal by the men of the RPC to the Reformed controversy at the Synod of Dordt and to the Protestant Reformed controversy with conditional theology in the 1940s and 1950s, therefore, is wholly mistaken, illegitimate, misleading, and unjust. The issue in these controversies was not at all whether justification and remission of sins follow faith and repentance.

We agree. The issue in those controversies was not at all about whether faith follows justification, absolutely not about that! Who would be so dense as to think that? Neither is the present controversy about that. That analysis is only Professor Engelsma's straw man. He is fighting against his own foe and not the actual foe, if we be a foe. We do not contend against first this, then that. First repentance, then faith, then justification. So we sweep away all his rhetoric about the Synod of Dordt and the doctrinal issue in 1953.

What *is* interesting to me is his *new* analysis of 1953. He writes,

We learn what that issue was, and what it was not, not from the writings of individual ministers, no matter how respectable, but from the official document that decided the issue, the "Declaration of Principles"... The issue was whether God makes a gracious, conditional promise to all baptized children that He will save them, which promise is dependent upon a child's fulfillment of the condition of faith.

Now, I would like to know from Professor Engelsma, which "respectable" Protestant Reformed minister got it wrong in 1953? Was it Rev. Herman Hoeksema with his "do nothing" sermon on the Philippian jailor? Because in that sermon Hoeksema was not dealing with a baby but with an adult. Was it Rev. John Heys with his "Afraid of the Gospel" series in the *Standard Bearer*? Because he was not dealing with babies either but with the gospel as

such—with the question of what the gospel is, with the way ministers actually preached it and how they subtly denied the gospel in their preaching. We have appealed to both, and I know of no other to whom we have appealed. Who was it, then? Who got it wrong, so that appealing to them we miss the issue of 1953? Professor Engelsma should answer this question for the sake of the PRC, if for no one else. The denomination should know which of her ministers got it wrong.

Further, Professor Engelsma knows that the controversy that culminated in 1953 *began* with the question whether God makes a conditional promise to all baptized babies, but that is not where the controversy stayed. The Declaration of Principles was written in 1951 to condemn as unreformed the conditional covenant theology of the Liberated. But Rev. Hubert De Wolf made the issue one of covenant theology for *adults* too, as it really was for the Liberated as well. The Liberated never kept the issue at babies, but it was a matter of whether at any point in the covenant man is first, and God waits on man—to put it crudely. De Wolf made it an issue of the gospel at all times, in all places, and to all people. And so did his defenders at the May 1953 session of Classis East. The question was of an offer, not just to babies but also to adults. The question was of conditions, not just for babies but also for adults. The question was of the nature of the promise, not just for babies but also always for everyone. The question became the nature of the preaching!

De Wolf had preached, “God promises every one of you that if you *believe* you will be saved.” That was Liberated covenant theology applied to the preaching of the gospel. The Liberated’s gospel, which is no gospel, was first man and then God—first what man must do and then what God would do. Then De Wolf preached that *repentance* was a prerequisite to enter the kingdom. First what man must do and then what God would do. So first De Wolf went after *faith*, then he went after *repentance*, and he made both what man must do to be saved (justified). He did not use this language that I am aware of; but to put it in today’s language, De Wolf made both faith—as man’s activity—and repentance—as man’s activity—means unto justification.

Indeed, before the Protestant Reformed Classis East of May 1953 was the question of whether in the daily experience of salvation man is first. *That* was the issue. I have proved from the documents in an earlier *Sword and Shield* article that that was the issue.<sup>2</sup>

De Wolf defended his statements by the subterfuge that he was not too keen on the terms *prerequisite* and *condition* and could gladly use the term *in the way of*. His

colleagues tried to help him out in the majority report by saying that he was only talking about the *experience* of salvation—the daily entering into the kingdom—and by appealing to active faith and the idea that De Wolf was only emphasizing the need for active faith and that he was preaching to regenerated people. The controversy had to do with the nature of the promise and of grace and of salvation itself and whether God waited upon man and man’s activity and doing. Key to the controversy was this concept of *an active* faith.

Professor Engelsma says that hopefully until Christ returns the PRC will be making the confession of the truth that was made in 1953. But the denomination has already departed, if his explanation of faith, repentance, and justification is what the denomination believes. I can only hope that in this case Homer nodded and that if he did, he will wake up quickly and realize that the theology he taught me and that I have defended has no place in the PRC anymore.

It ought to make Professor Engelsma pause and reconsider his email, blog post, and explanations of Malachi and James and this whole matter of faith and repentance—man first in experience—that the defense of De Wolf himself and by his colleagues in the documents and in De Wolf’s false apology was an appeal to *an active* faith. They spoke about the experience of salvation and actively entering into the kingdom. The language of the majority report and the language of today are eerily and strikingly similar. De Wolf’s and others’ use of that language was a ploy, legerdemain, sleight of hand, and theological misdirection in order to bring in Liberated covenant theology in the name of the believer’s experience. All De Wolf was doing, crowed the majority report, was emphasizing the need for *an active* faith.

And Hoeksema and others chopped off the rooster’s head. The believer’s experience must be explained as Paul did in Romans 8—beginning in election. All the benefits of salvation, like a golden chain, follow from election. The election obtains the promise, also in the case of the believer’s experience. It is always God first and man after. The Protestant Reformed denomination wants to start with experience and has lost the gospel.

### *James 4:8 Again*

Professor Engelsma also says that our mistaken notion of *post hoc* puts us in direct conflict with James 4:8. But he should stop bringing up this passage. We answered him, and our explanations are perfectly orthodox. We devoted an entire issue of *Sword and Shield* to explaining these things, which he ignores. So I will repeat what

<sup>2</sup> See Nathan J. Langerak, “The Majority Report,” *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 13 (March 2021): 12–18.

our position is: the issue is not one of first repentance, then forgiveness. That passage is not even teaching about what is first, second, third, fourth, or fifth. The passage is about God's call. If a *man* tells you, "Draw near to me," then it *is* first, second, third. But when *God* says, "Draw near to me," that is an effectual call that draws the sinner unto God. That call proceeds from God's eternal decree. That call is effectual to accomplish what the decree determined. The issue is God's effectual call. The issue is not God's causing man to do something, so that man's doing is the means to his receiving God's blessing. The issue is about the nature of God's call, and the issue is about whom God calls. He calls his elect, so that many are called, but few are chosen. The elect are called to him, and the reprobate are hardened.

Then there is this curious matter of Professor Engelsma's insertion in his blog post about an appeal to the regenerated human's activity. I take this in the same sense as I take his language about an active faith. And I note that this is not the first time I have encountered this language. Late in the controversy in the PRC, in October 2018, Rev. Kenneth Koole wrote an absolutely atrocious article in the *Standard Bearer* about what a man must do to be saved, in which article he cleverly militated against the synodical decision in June 2018. He was supposedly exegeting Acts 16:31. Koole taught that there is something man must do to be saved and that Herman Hoeksema's exegesis of the passage in his sermon as "do nothing" was nonsense. Professor Engelsma rightly called Koole out on that. I note, though, that the most Engelsma would say was that Koole's criticism of Hoeksema merely *threatened the unconditional covenant* that Hoeksema was defending in the sermon that Koole so lovelessly savaged. Better would have been that Koole's exegesis was *Arminian* and *an assault on the unconditional covenant*. Nevertheless, Koole deftly parried Engelsma's blow and drove him from the field by appealing to the fact that he (Koole) was only talking about regenerated people, and, of course, we all know that regenerated people are *active*. It was clever, devious, and effective. It fooled many and ended Engelsma's assault. But it also was revelatory because it showed that what Koole was saying was suspect. It was the same sort of defense that De Wolf's colleagues and supporters gave for him. Koole, like De Wolf, had to take refuge for his theology in a subterfuge. Is it okay to be an Arminian when talking about regenerated people? Is that what regeneration now means in the PRC? Regeneration means that we are free to do theology like the Arminians. Before regeneration we are all good Calvinists. But after regeneration we become good Arminians?

Now Professor Engelsma employs the same device in his explanation of James 4:8. He adds to his letter these words in his blog post:

The Scripture of James 4:8, *in an exhortation to the regenerated human's activity*, has the believer's drawing nigh to God precede God's drawing nigh to him or her. One can, indeed must, explain this truth of salvation, but he may not explain it *away*.

I will not explain the truth of salvation away, but I will explain it. God's efficacious call draws the sinner to God. The sinner whom God calls is elect. When God says, "Draw nigh," God draws the sinner; and in saying those words, he has already drawn nigh to his people. It is an election theology that governs the calling, the covenant, salvation, and the experience of salvation.

But there is this added in the blog post: "*an exhortation to the regenerated human's activity*." Koole did the same thing when he explained Acts 16:31. Paul was talking to a person who had been regenerated. De Wolf's friends had the same excuse: he was talking to the congregation as regenerated! But then, of course, with election there is no first man, then God. Then *all* of salvation—regeneration, calling, faith, justification, and sanctification—comes to the sinner because of election. Election brings it all to him.

Perhaps Professor Engelsma can explain what he meant by that insertion. Why did he feel the need to add it? Is it because without it his explanation sounds rankly Arminian? Are the only people to whom I may say, "Repent and believe," or to whom I may say, "Draw nigh," those whom I assume are regenerated? Or is my calling to them to draw nigh to God based on my appeal to their regenerated nature?

Frankly, I find the addition to be hyper-Calvinistic. On the mission field, in the congregation, and wherever God sends me, I declare in the name of God to the adulterers and adulteresses, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you," and I am not addressing only regenerated people. Rather, I am demanding in the name of God to all and sundry that they repent; and no man, unregenerated or not, has a right to refuse to draw nigh to God. Frankly, I do not care if they are regenerated, unregenerated, or Martians. God says, "Draw nigh." I say in his name, "Draw nigh." God promises that he will draw nigh to all who draw nigh to him, and he will refuse none. It is a promise. There is promise there! Does not anyone see it? The promise of covenant fellowship with God is at the heart of the text in James 4:8. Let me put Professor Engelsma's explanation in that language: when the promise of God is God's drawing nigh, there is a certain sense in the fulfillment of God's promise that man is first; there is a certain, specific sense in which in the realization of that promise man is first.

I do not believe that. If he does, then we must part ways, and he will be responsible for leading the PRC



astray. If he does not believe that, then he must condemn his explanation of the text as unreformed and not Protestant Reformed.

### *Controversy about the Truth*

Professor Engelsma trained me, and I teach what he taught me, even if what he taught me has been sharpened by controversy. He cannot complain about a minister's growth after seminary. He required it of his students. And I am saying that I teach what he taught me and that my teaching has no place in the PRC. My colleagues complained about that teaching before my suspension, some openly and more behind my back. Many in the congregation and consistory hated it and fought against it. Before Crete's consistory seized on the Persian subterfuge of requiring my resignation from *Sword and Shield*, there were efforts by the newly elected elders to silence the preaching. I grew to find out that they had been sent to the consistory with that very purpose. Election theology was hated; sound, Reformed theology was hated; the theology that I had learned from Professor Engelsma was not wanted.

Frequently, Professor Engelsma told us, his students, that we must not do theology in the 1920s, but we must face the errors of the new day. We have done that. I just never thought that in doing so, Professor Engelsma would be my opponent, if he be my opponent. As I said before, I do not relish a fight with him, but if he wants to have it, let us have it. He will in a sense be fighting himself, because I will only present him with what he has taught me. But in this fight let us not set up stupid straw men to knock down. We have written and continue to write voluminously about the issues that faced us in the PRC and where we see departure from sound doctrine in the PRC. No one will answer what we have written. It is worthless argument, according to the PRC. We have been contending that there *is* in the PRC a new threat to the gospel, and we have explained what that threat to the gospel is, and we were killed for that.

In that light I add for Professor Engelsma's benefit, since he complains about our tone—growing hatred—that we were finished a long time ago with polite arguments and friendly debate. The time for friendly debate has long since passed. It had passed when I was still preaching and writing in the PRC. The denomination, mainly through the consistories' and the ministers' condemnation of *Sword and Shield*, made clear that there was to be no debate on the issues facing the denomination.

It was perfectly permissible for Rev. K. Koole, Rev. R. Van Overloop, Prof. R. Cammenga, and many others to militate against the decisions of the denomination and to do it in the most underhanded ways, so that when they were accused of it, they could say, "Who, me? I agree with

synod. I would never militate against synod!" All the while they hated what synod had decided, and they worked constantly to undermine the decision by pushing the rejected conditional theology that had snaked its way into the churches and that had cloaked itself by deceptive language and appeals to orthodox words. These men are guilty of massive ministerial malfeasance. If they were doctors practicing medicine, each of them would have written over his office, "His remedies are poison!" The time for debate *in* the PRC is finished. The time for debate *with* the PRC is finished. I wish it were different. I wish there could be a debate. I would debate publicly with any Protestant Reformed theologian who offered. The denomination is not debating anything. The ministers, elders, and professors make pronouncements—*papa dixit!*—and they issue their bulls and decretals. All their arguments are merely loud assertions, rhetoric, or angry recriminations. Their best tactic is an amateurish fight against straw men. And there is a massive reeducation effort underway to make sure that the new language is cemented in the minds of the people and especially in the minds of the young people. For the denomination there is no controversy; there has been no controversy; it was schismatics who were to blame. This all is nonsense, and everyone knows that.

Still more, the time for friendly debate long since has passed based on the actions of the PRC, including Professor Engelsma. His denomination put out two faithful ministers who preached the gospel. He has made peace with that wickedness by writing off what his denomination has done and by writing off what we have done as the *misbehavior* of some ministers. His last public act was to step over the dead body of his spiritual son, the former minister of Crete Protestant Reformed Church, and to strengthen the hand of the wicked there with an excuse and a justification. There was wickedness by somebody somewhere. You cannot make peace with that wickedness, or you will become like those who do it, and you will be guilty of aiding and abetting them in their wickedness with your excuses. Silence in the face of evil, as Professor Engelsma well knows, is complicity in that evil, and the connivers bear the guilt of that evil.

Since he has obliquely warned me, I warn him as a son a father. War has come now upon the Protestant Reformed Churches. The war is between the denomination and God. That is what happens to the church that departs from the truth, graces her evil with the name of God, gives aid and comfort to false teachers and corrupt men, and loves not the truth unto death. An adversary is among the churches. The denomination thinks that she kicked out the adversary, but she invited him in. She kicked Christ to the curb and invited the devil in. I would say this to every Protestant Reformed minister who still has a mind to preach

Christ: “Don’t! The people do not want him. They put him out. He stands outside the door and knocks. Do not try to drag him back up to the pulpit because you will look foolish, the people do not want him, and you anger them and Christ. He stands outside the door and knocks, and he is not coming in. You must go out to him.”

That war has come upon the PRC is clear because this fight is about the *truth*. It becomes clearer and clearer to me with every sermon, with every blog post, with every email, with every speech, and with every article that the issue has been about the truth and that one side was lying.

Who was lying is also being made clearer and clearer. We have been insisting for months that *the truth is at stake*, that the issue is about the truth, that the truth is being compromised, and that the truth—Christ—is being dishonored in the PRC. And everyone in the PRC kept saying, “It is not about the truth; it is about the misbehavior of some ministers!” This has been preached off pulpits and said in speeches and written in articles. “We had”—so the PRC’s story goes with forced sullenness, crossed fingers, feigned sighs, and false laments—“to get rid of them for their misbehavior. For the sake of the unity and peace of Jerusalem, we had to stop their misbehavior at all costs.” But the professors, ministers, elders, and others who said this were lying. That they were lying is clear with every new letter, article, and email. Every one of them is about what the *truth* is and whether the *truth* is antinomian, radical, idiotic, logical fallacy, and all the rest. These writers and speakers all argue about what the *truth* is. And they are becoming louder and bolder in their crowing that they have driven off the opponents of the truth, radicals who make stupid logical fallacies, and misguided zealots who in their zeal for justification deny obvious truths about the gospel.

Anyone who has eyes to see *yet* and ears to hear *yet* had better be listening *now* to the voices in the PRC that are swelling to a chorus—Professor Engelsma among them—that this controversy has always been about the *truth*. Do not swallow what has been and remains the lie that this controversy had anything other than the truth at its root. Since 2015 and before, the controversy has been about nothing else than the truth.

Professor Engelsma scornfully dismisses us as having no doctrinal basis or “validation” for our separate existence and then promptly argues and shows what the doctrinal basis (“validation”) of our separate existence *is*. It *is* a big deal to us whether God is first or man is first, no matter how you explain it. It *is* a huge deal. It *is* a big deal whether faith and repentance are means unto justification. That is a Reformation issue. It is a matter—and it is my conviction that history will prove this—so serious that it involves whether a denomination is in principle

false or whether a denomination continues as true. It involves the article of the standing or falling church.

Professor Engelsma and others with him are constantly pointing out where we err doctrinally. I thought this controversy wasn’t about doctrine? I thought that everybody loved and taught the same truth, and this was only a matter of misbehavior? That was a lie, and everyone involved in the lie and in spreading the lie knew that. They knew it at Byron Center; they knew it at Crete; they knew it at Trinity, where my brother led the deceit; and they knew it at Peace. It was about the *truth*. It was about the truth that was being preached off the pulpits at Byron Center and Crete and that was appearing in the magazine *Sword and Shield* and that powerful men in the PRC were sick and tired of hearing. They wanted smooth things.

### *Blow the Trumpet*

I will remind Professor Engelsma what the issue is—and he knows this too and should need no reminder. It is about John 14:6! Everything we are contending for comes down to that verse. His denomination is teaching in many different ways that the way to the Father *is* by the works that the Holy Spirit works in a man. Jesus is good too, but the way to the Father is especially by the works that the Holy Spirit works in a man. The way to the Father *is* by unconditional obedience. Jesus is okay, but especially unconditional obedience is necessary as the way to the Father. The more you obey, the more God blesses you. Do a little more, be a little more godly, work a little harder, pray a little more fervently, repent a little more deeply, and you too can be closer to God. It is modern-day monkey. That is the issue.

It is, and he knows this too, about *justification*. And though he refused to admit it in his protest to Synod 2017, the issue is about the unconditional covenant.

Professor Engelsma, do not set up straw men. It is unworthy of you. Deal with our arguments, our preaching, and our writing. Tell us that it is not a big deal and no worry to you and can be explained as perfectly orthodox that not only could those lies about John 14:6 be preached off Protestant Reformed pulpits, but also that theology was in such an absolutely sorry state in the PRC that a consistory, classes, and synods of learned men could not—or would not—condemn those lies for years. Then once the lies had been condemned, ministers and professors went on to bring the wretched theology back into their preaching and writing. We have given many examples, and they are multiplying. Read them. Professor Engelsma, if all this does not bother you, there is nothing more I can say that will alert you.

I can say that I would rather be found denying some temporal order than teaching available grace that is

different from the irresistible grace of regeneration, as Reverend Koole preached! I would rather be found confusing *post hoc* with *propter hoc* than teaching that the way to the Father is Jesus and my good works. I would rather be guilty of the worst thing that I have been accused of than be guilty of preaching the heresy of conditions and that there are two rails to heaven, as Reverend Van Overloop did. This is the theology now of the Protestant Reformed denomination, which was once a grand lady.

Professor Engelsma should ask himself, how in the wide world could it be that John 14:6 has been so corrupted in the *Protestant Reformed Churches*? How could it be that ministers preached *conditions* off their pulpits? How could *available grace that is not irresistible* be preached? And hardly anyone batted an eye! How could that be?

I disagree with Professor Engelsma's assertion that I hate the PRC. Rather, I hate what bad theologians and ministers have done to the denomination, which was such a grand lady and now has become a vindictive and lying old hag under their watch. I hate what ministers who are called to preach the gospel have done to sheep that I know and love. I hate what ministers who are charged with preaching the gospel have been doing to whole congregations for years by their man-centered, man-glorifying, and deceptive preaching, about which they crow that they have only been emphasizing the activity that God causes us his people to do and that they have only been preaching about the proper order of salvation.

What ought to wake up Professor Engelsma is what those churches did to two of her ministers who had been preaching neither *post hoc* nor *propter hoc* but Jesus Christ and him crucified as the only way of salvation to all who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, and who had been contending for that against all the *post hocs* and *propter hocs*—*hocus pocus* is more like it—sounding around them. Those churches murdered them, and they will not suffer the ministers' bodies to be buried but insist that every member give his assent to that murderous evil. Besides the wickedness perpetrated publicly, there are all of the shenanigans that were going on behind the scenes that await the day of judgment for their revelation. Professor Engelsma should explain that properly and not take refuge in the bland and deceptive analysis that it was the misbehavior of some ministers and that the issue we are contending for is because we are so dense as to confuse *post hoc* with *propter hoc*. Do not explain what happened to us *ex post facto* by pointing to invented deviations in doctrine and idiotic logical fallacies. Professor Engelsma was a better teacher than that, and he should give himself more credit for our education.

As Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem, I weep for the PRC. After several of my last sermons in Crete Protestant Reformed Church, I could hardly give the benediction

because I saw what wolves—evil elders, who rose up right in the council, and influential members who egged them on—were going to do to the sheep. I weep for the PRC, whose situation now Professor Engelsma makes worse by confirming the denomination in her departure by giving an excuse and a cover for it with his *post hoc* and *propter hoc*. He continues to put the PRC in a pair of brass shoes, so that, once floundering, now the denomination is rapidly sinking.

If only she knew the things that belonged to her peace, but God will gather all his chicks whom ministers scattered and tried to keep from coming to Christ.

Since Professor Engelsma warned me, now I warn him. Christ put him as a watchman on the walls. Does he not see that war has come? People have died, in some cases nearly literally. Families are split, churches are torn apart, officebearers have been deposed, and members are leaving. Shall there be evil in the city and God—God—has not done it? It is gross negligence on the part of a watchman to chalk all this up to confusion about *post hoc* and *propter hoc*. God did this. What is his message?

I say, "It is war. It is not a debate anymore." The war is between God and the PRC. I tried to debate for months in the PRC, and no one would. I wrote twenty articles on the RFPA blog, and the only response I got from anyone on the other side was anger that I dared to suggest that there was a controversy in the PRC. I tried to publish on the RFPA blog, and the editors at the *Standard Bearer* had conniptions, bullied the RFPA board to take the post down, and charged me with sin. We tried to write into the *Standard Bearer* to have a debate. I tried posting on the RFPA blog to debate, and the professors and editors of the *Standard Bearer* charged me with sin. We tried to get the *Standard Bearer* or the RFPA to publish debate and were charged with sin again. I was charged with sin so many times and for so many different things that I stopped taking the charges seriously and realized that they were only the tactics of evil men to silence the truth. There was no debate then. It is surely not a debate now. War has come.

Professor Engelsma must either damn us, or he must damn the Protestant Reformed Churches.

He warns us, and now I will warn him: "*Blow the trumpet!*"

But I fear his emails are his blowing of the trumpet, and its sound is at best uncertain—and worse, signals the people of God to hunker down instead of to flee. It is a tune for peace rather than a blast for war. He has sounded the wrong note. The enemy is within. God put him on the walls with a trumpet in his hand. God commanded him to blow the trumpet. If he does not—first that, then this—then the blood of the Protestant Reformed Churches rests on him!

I am free from it.

—NJL

## BARNYARD MUSINGS

Cock-a-doodle-doo!

The cow opened one eye to see the glistening rays of the sun just beginning to peek over the horizon. The rooster's upright silhouette appeared on top of a nearby fence post. Every morning he sang his song to summon the rising of the sun. The cow mused about how thankful she was for such a dignified and rewarding morning song. She wasn't sure how the rooster knew what posture to adopt or what notes to sound. As lowly and uneducated as the cow was, however, she was certain the crowing of the rooster resulted in the sun's coming up. The activity of the rooster's crowing always preceded the activity of the sun's rays breaking over the farm's skyline. With her keen observation and extended experience, she was sure that if the rooster did not crow, the sun would not come up to light and warm the happy little farmyard she called home.

All the animals in the barnyard were beginning to stir. The horse had begun to amble over to the corner of the paddock, where the sweetest and most abundant alfalfa grew. The goat, with her unique tastes, started munching on grapevine leaves that grew up along the open squares of a wire fence. The rooster hopped off his post and strutted in the direction of the animals. He strode up to the horse, unwavering in his course, and demanded that the horse move over. In a moment the horse stepped away so as not to upset the rooster. The rooster must crow every morning! The rooster was to be revered. If he did not crow, how dreary would be the never-ending darkness of night.

The rooster would keep cock-a-doodle-“doing” his morning summons of the sun, and as a result the sun would continue to display its shining face of light, warmth, and comfort. There was that which the rooster must do for the sun to come up.

Near the barn the cow could see a mother hen with her flock of fluffy chicks. Talking with the mother hen just last week, the cow had been grateful to hear that the mother hen was proud her latest brood included a cockerel. The cow didn't know how the farm animals would survive if something would ever happen to the current rooster. She always worried anyway, but the possibility of lacking a barnyard rooster was a disconcerting thought that had plagued her for some time.

As much as the cow wearied of the rooster's walking around like he was Mr. King Cluck, always demanding the best of the grain and the tastiest scraps that the farmer threw out, she was willing to make any sacrifice so that a rooster would always be present in her barnyard. She couldn't imagine her days being filled without the risen sun. What despair, hopelessness, and anguish would abound if the beautiful, life-giving rays were stifled for a time before the farmer could acquire another rooster. She gazed at the mother hen and marveled at her careful guidance of leading her little chicks to the best areas of

the yard to find insects and seeds. Surely, her mind could be at ease. The barnyard had an operative, dependable, and fit rooster. It looked like that would be the case for some time. The rooster would keep cock-a-doodle-“doing” his morning summons of the sun, and as a result the sun would continue to display its shining face of light, warmth, and comfort. There was that which the rooster must do for the sun to come up.

The above short story is an adaptation and a summary of a children's book called *Little Peep*, written by Jack Kent. There are lessons we can learn and apply from this children's story to our self-righteous inclinations and to the doctrinal controversy that resulted in the separation between the Reformed

Protestant Churches and the Protestant Reformed Churches.

It has been said,

There is a vitally important sense in which, in our salvation, our drawing nigh to God precedes God's drawing nigh to us...this sense has

to do with our experience of salvation...When we draw nigh to God, by faith including faith's repentance, God draws nigh to us in our experience...There is a sense in which Israel's returning to God, by His efficacious call, precedes Israel's enjoyment of these blessings.<sup>1</sup>

It has been said,

God's sovereignty. Man's responsibility. God's gifts and Christ's merits does not exclude God's use of means. Does not exclude God's gift of the use of the means of our obedience. And yet, God commanded. I performed a duty. Two rails. They go side by side. In the wisdom of God: his sovereignty, our responsibility. And it's all grace. And nothing but grace. "Labor to enter into the rest, lest ye fall in unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). And that labor is what we identified in Deuteronomy 10:12: Keep his commandments.<sup>2</sup>

It has been said,

And he [a little child] understands the more I do this, the more I hug and embrace her [my mother], the more I will enjoy her embrace and fellowship as well. Well, so it is with the life of conversion and good works. If the life of good works is the life of living, enjoying fellowship with God, then you understand the more you do that, the more that joy and fellowship you will have. It really is something like this: the more you fellowship with God, the more you enjoy fellowship with God. And because the life of turning from sin and living in obedience to God is the life of fellowship with him, the more you do that, the more you will enjoy the love of God your Father for Jesus' sake.<sup>3</sup>

It has been said,

In the way of good works we enjoy, we experience, various aspects of salvation...It's good to have clear in our minds...that when we speak of *in the way of*, we are speaking of the reward of grace...When we're speaking of *in the way of obedience*, some good thing occurs, or we enjoy

the fellowship of God...we're speaking of the reward of grace...When scripture speaks again of "according to," it means there is some correlation between good works and the reward...there is a correlation so that we understand the less of a good work, or the less good that a good work is, the less or smaller the reward. The less number of works, the less of a reward one receives. So, too, with regard to the more. The more that one walks in good works, the more of a reward is received... The same thing is true, of course, with regard to punishment. Those who sin greater are punished more greatly. The same, too, also with regard to the reward of grace.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, when favorably quoting Herman Witsius, the *Standard Bearer* printed the following without immediate repudiation:

Whence it is, that by how much one is more holy, by so much he is the more acceptable to God.<sup>5</sup>

Christ is the way to life, because he purchased us a right to life. The practice of Christian piety is the way to life, because thereby we go to the possession of the right obtained by Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The printing of the above quotes from Herman Witsius was only a few short years after Synod 2017 had declared a sermon on John 14:6 to be erroneous, a sermon that taught that the way to the Father included our obedience. Synod 2018 had decided concerning a related sermon on Lord's Day 45 that

it is erroneous to teach that the way to the enjoyment of fellowship with God, the way of approach unto God, the way to the Father is a way of requirements that God sets out for us and that the believer must meet by his obedience or godliness...The way of approach unto God is not our obedience, but Christ alone, by faith alone (B.C., Art. 23).<sup>7</sup>

What do the teachings of Prof. D. Engelsma, Rev. R. Van Overloop, Rev. C. Spronk, Rev. K. Koole, and former Rev. D. Overway have in common? These men continue to teach what the consistory of Hope Protestant

1 "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra," June 16–17, 2021, in *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 11, 24.

2 Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, sermon entitled "Calling toward Canaanites," November 29, 2020.

3 Rev. Clayton Spronk, sermon entitled "Christian Conversion," September 13, 2020.

4 Rev. David Overway, sermon entitled "Reward of Grace," December 23, 2018.

5 Rev. Kenneth Koole, "Herman Witsius: Still Relevant (3)," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 6 (December 15, 2020): 127.

6 Rev. Kenneth Koole, "Herman Witsius: Still Relevant (4)," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 7 (January 1, 2021): 150.

7 *Acts of Synod 2018*, 66.

Reformed Church taught in 2017. The doctrinal response of Hope's consistory to a protestant stated,

God actually works in us that obedience; and in the way of that obedience that He works in us, He wisely and sovereignly causes us to experience the blessings of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

Their faulty presumption is that the rooster's crow is determinative in the sun's coming up. The rooster's crow is no longer merely the evidence and inevitable herald of the sun's rising, but it is something more. Our repenting is then something more than just the evidence and infallible fruit of God's work. Rather, our repentance becomes the determining factor for the quality and quantity of God's shining face upon us. Whether or not these men want to admit that the rooster is causing the sun to come up, what they are teaching is that the sun's rising is contingent on the rooster's crowing. What happens if the rooster doesn't crow, or crow perfectly, or crow long enough? Will the sun still rise? In their theology the sun will not rise until that sinning rooster crows. The theology of scripture and the creeds is that regardless of what a rooster may do, the sun will always rise upon God's people (Gen. 28:15; 2 Cor. 4:6; Canons 5.8).

These men teach that the rooster's activity precedes in an effectual, determinative way the sun's coming up. The rooster embraces and sings to the sun, and then the sun, as a result, smiles back. And as a matter of fact, the more the rooster embraces the sun, the more sunshine the rooster gets! The rooster's crowing is something more than a fruit and fruit *only*. The "doing" of the rooster obtains and has erroneously become a prerequisite to the life-giving rays of fellowship from the sun. Maybe we all need to consider whether we have fallen into the foolish, self-righteous reasoning of the rooster, the cow, and the Pharisee of Luke 18, who gave thanks and praise for the good "doing" that effectually caused the Sun of peace and fellowship to show his beauty that day.

Certainly, there are instances when the storm clouds of our sin obscure our experience of the light of life. The Holy Spirit assures us, however, that he will preserve us to the end (Canons 5). At the end of every storm, his efficacious, merciful, gracious light of fellowship pierces through the gray clouds, and once more we experience the light of his countenance shining upon us. The Sun

never leaves us or forsakes us. The Sun is always aloft in the sky. We may feel for a time the consequences of a storm, the lack of the assuring warmth of the Sun, uncomfortable temperatures of emotional distress (severe at times), and many other effects of inclement weather. When we are elect, his Light will pursue us through the thickest, most tumultuous storm clouds that are placed between us and our shining Friend. He will save us, draw us by the cords of faith; and as a result of our Friend's activity of drawing us near, he will work in us repentance and obedience.

We are assured that God will admonish us, call us to repentance, and work in us to live a life of repentance and thankful gratitude in obedience to his law (Heidelberg Catechism, A 64). The "theological and gospel" rooster has not been killed but is alive and well and crowing! As our Father pursued and found Adam and Eve hiding

in the garden, trying to cover themselves with their "leaves of repentance"; as he sent the prophets to Israel and Judah to give the word of promise of a savior and to warn of the ways of sin; as he told Hosea to pursue his wife in her whoredoms; and as he came and drew near to Peter after his denials, God will

pursue and save us by the power of his word even in our greatest falls into temptation. The cross is the reason. The cross is our justification. The cross is our sanctification. The cross is all our salvation. The cross is the "doing" of that which must be done for us to experience fellowship with God. The gospel is that Jesus saves sinners. The gospel is not that Jesus and sinners save. The truth of the effectual experience of salvation is not that man's activity precedes God's activity but that we experience salvation on the basis of Christ alone, through faith alone, that it might be by grace alone and to God's glory alone.

Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:78–79)

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:6)

—Christina Overway

These men teach that the rooster's activity precedes in an effectual, determinative way the sun's coming up.

<sup>8</sup> Hope Consistory response to Connie Meyer, in *Acts of Synod 2018*, 161; emphasis added.

# THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL AND THE ORDER OF SALVATION: A RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR ENGELSMA

In a recent blog post<sup>1</sup>, Prof. David Engelsma seeks to bolster his position that in the experience of salvation man's activity precedes God's activity by appealing to the order of means and end. His argument is positively that he and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) teach that repentance and faith are means to the ends of forgiveness and justification respectively, but they are not causes of these ends. Negatively, his argument is that the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and her leaders blunder around in the word of God, misunderstand the order of means and end as one of cause and effect, and thereby deny any order in salvation. According to his argument, this results in their being unable to call anyone to faith and repentance, lest they make faith and repentance conditions to salvation. I argue here that his argument is not only misplaced; but also, in common with other leaders of the PRC, he uses the entirely proper order of means and end to make room for prerequisites in salvation. I will argue that Professor Engelsma misrepresents the order of salvation to teach prerequisites and misuses the call of the gospel in service of the former. In other words, he misuses the call of the gospel in the service of his misrepresentation of the order of salvation.

## *Misuse of the Call of the Gospel*

That there is an order in God's application of salvation, we do not deny. I will describe and define that order later. As part of his position that in a certain aspect of salvation man's activity precedes God's activity, Professor Engelsma appeals to texts of scripture that contain the call or address of the gospel. He does this both in his writings against Reverend Lanning and in his more recent blog post. On the basis of such texts, he argues for an order of salvation in which certain activities of man, chiefly his repenting and believing, precede acts of God. I will deal with these texts before describing the Reformed truth of the order of salvation.

The texts used by the professor are Malachi 3:7; James 4:8; and Acts 2:38, 10:43. In his June 2021 letters to family and friends taking issue with a sermon by Reverend

Lanning, he argues that God's returning and drawing near to us follow our returning and drawing near to him. He bases his position partly on the future tense of the verb in James 4:8: "he will draw nigh to you." In other words, his position depends on a time element, so that the tense of the verb tells us *when* God fulfills his promise (after our act). This is also how he uses the texts in Acts in his recent blog post. From Acts 2:38 he concludes that God's remitting of our sins follows our repenting. From Acts 10:43 he argues that our believing precedes in time God's remission of our sins. This he concludes from the tense of the verbs: "The present tense, 'believeth,' precedes a future tense, 'shall receive.'" For the professor a time element is the primary relationship between God's activity and ours in these texts. And that is crucial for his whole position on the order of salvation, for in this way he makes the order of salvation a temporal order.

I believe the professor is mistaken when he uses such texts—those containing the call of the gospel—to teach an order of salvation. The purpose of the call of the gospel is not to teach the order of salvation. That is to say, texts like those used by Professor Engelsma say nothing about such an order. Rather, the purpose of the call of the gospel is twofold: it gives to the elect what is commanded, while it hardens the reprobate. In the case of the elect, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ speaks that call in the heart of the sinner in such a way that the Spirit gives the sinner what is commanded. The call comes in the form of a command: repent and believe! That command lays upon man his obligation: he must repent and believe. The Spirit uses that command to make the elect conscious that he cannot perform what is commanded. The Spirit does so by applying that command to the heart of the elect in such a way that he becomes deeply conscious that he is completely unable to obey it, that consequently he is completely hopeless and lost. This is the internal or effectual call, which gives to the sinner what God commands: it works faith in the elect sinner, making him conscious of his misery and that his only hope is Christ.

1 David J. Engelsma, "Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc? Non!, or, 'Don't Kill the Rooster!'" September 8, 2021; <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc-non-or-don-t-kill-the-rooster>.

The effectual call of the gospel as the power to give faith and repentance is described in Canons 3–4.10–12. Article 10 teaches that the elect obey the call of the gospel and are converted because God gives what he requires. Regarding the elect’s obedience to the call, the article declares, “It must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance.” The effectual call as the wonderwork of God is further elaborated in this and the next two articles. It is defined as an internal call of the Spirit that “pervades the inmost recesses of the man” (11). By the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the call of the gospel works conversion, giving faith and repentance, so that article 12 may conclude triumphantly, “So that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168–69). The Canons’ teaching in these articles is astounding and beautiful. Taken together, articles 10–12 constitute a beautiful doxology to the God of our salvation. They declare emphatically that with regard to our conversion, God does it all. The child of God exalts in the Canons’ ringing declaration that the call of the gospel is God’s power to give us faith and repentance. That is the purpose of the gospel call. To claim that the gospel call sets out an order of salvation in which man’s activity precedes God’s activity is a clear contradiction and denial of the Canons.

Lately, Professor Engelsma has variously argued that faith precedes justification; our activity of returning to God precedes God’s act of returning to us; and our drawing nigh to God precedes God’s drawing nigh to us. Yet others in the PRC say faith precedes assurance and / or our entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Irrespective of which particular blessing of salvation they have in mind, their point is that faith precedes salvation in some respect. When they speak of faith, they have in mind the activity of faith; they have in mind man’s act of believing. The problem with their teaching is not that they make faith an activity of the believer. The believer actively and consciously believes in Christ and repents of his sins. The believer out of this active faith exercises himself unto a life of good works. No doubt about it. But that is not the issue. The issue is that they place man’s activity where it doesn’t belong. They place man’s activity of faith in the order of salvation. But only God’s acts belong in that order. My point here is axiomatic, and it is this: *when these men put man’s acts where only God’s belong, this is the express result of their appeal to texts that contain the call of the gospel. It is their appeal to these texts that leads them to establish an order in which man is first.*

It is the heart of Reformed soteriology that when we speak of the order of salvation, we speak of those acts that are necessary for salvation, acts that impart and effect salvation. And never does an act of man impart or effect salvation. Only Christ’s acts impart and effect salvation, which is to say, Christ is the heart of Reformed soteriology. To insert man’s acts into the *ordo salutis*<sup>2</sup> is to put man where only Christ belongs. Man’s activities of faith and repentance are only ever the results of God’s acts that cause and give man’s activities. This is to say, man’s activities are only ever privilege for him; and God is to be thanked for giving us the privilege to believe in his name.

I draw attention to the fact that Professor Engelsma is not alone in grounding his position that activities of man precede acts of God in the call of the gospel. Rev. K. Koole did the same thing in the *Standard Bearer* three years ago. There he wrote the following:

If a man with his household was to be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom, placing himself with his family under the rule of Christ as his Lord and Savior, he was called, he was required, to respond obediently to the call and command of the gospel—“Repent and believe, that thou mightiest [*sic*] be saved with thy house.”<sup>3</sup>

According to his view, a man’s act of believing precedes God’s act of granting him conscious entry into the kingdom. In the same article Koole also appealed to two texts that contain the gospel call (Acts 2:37–38, 16:30–31) as the basis for teaching an order of salvation in which activities of man precede acts of God. This understanding of the call of the gospel as establishing an order of salvation in which man is first in some aspect is current orthodoxy in the PRC.

In his blog post Professor Engelsma charges the leaders of the RPC with the logical fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. I suggest it is rather Professor Engelsma who is guilty of fallacious reasoning. I suggest that in his use of the commands of the gospel, he is guilty of trying to get an indicative out of an imperative. He argues that because the imperative is prior to the promise in the texts—“Return unto me, and I will return unto you” (Mal. 3:7) and “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8)—this means that our act of returning is prior to that which is promised. The form in which the gospel call comes is that the obligation is first. He reasons from this order that the fulfillment of the call—our repenting and believing—is also first. But is not this false reasoning? Because the imperative is first in the language

2 *Ordo salutis* is the Latin term used in dogmatics for *order of salvation*.

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



of the call, he reasons that man's activity is before God's activity. The call or command is first because it addresses man's obligation; it confronts man, who is a sinner, with the nature of God. The call or command is what God requires, but it does not follow that man can perform what is required, nor that man's activity precedes the operation of the promise of God. The theology of salvation is that the promise of God is logically prior to man's activities, indeed that the promise is the cause of man's activities. That is why we preach the theology of salvation in which Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise and *then* call men to Christ. Simply put, the order of the gospel address is not the order of God's work of salvation. That might be the implication of man, but it is manifestly not the gospel implication.

In the address of the gospel, there is a certain order. The order is always command (or call) followed by promise: believe, and you will be saved; return unto me, and I will return unto you; draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Upon this order Professor Engelsma has hung a whole theology. The theology is that man's activity of repenting or returning to God precedes God's activity of returning to man; that man's activity of believing precedes God's activity of drawing near to us, which is our assurance; and now according to his blog post, man's activity of believing precedes God's act of justification. That this theology is restricted to the aspect of man's experience of salvation makes no difference, for man's experience of salvation *is* salvation. I will prove this with one text. Romans 5:1 teaches that to be justified by faith is to have the conscious experience of justification (which is peace with God). To put it another way, the conscious experience of justification is what it means to be justified. The experience of salvation *is* salvation.

The order upon which this theology hangs is that of the order of the gospel address—imperative (command) followed by promise. Professor Engelsma reasons thus: because the imperative is first, that which the imperative requires—man's returning to God—must also be first. In other words, Engelsma gets an indicative out of an imperative. He reasons that because the command "return unto me" is first in the address of the gospel, man's activity of returning is also first in the order of salvation. This means that which is promised in these texts—God's returning to us in the sweet experience of his fellowship—waits upon a prior activity of man. In this way our activity is the power to realize the promise instead of the promise of God being the power to give us faith and repentance. In other words, the gospel has just been overthrown. And this is so not least because Engelsma makes the order of salvation a temporal

order, one in which man's activity of returning precedes God's activity *in time*. This is evident from his appeal to the future tense in the promise of the gospel address: "and he will draw nigh to you." He bases his argument on the time element.

To imply an indicative from an imperative is the same fallacy committed by both the well-meant offer men and by hyper-Calvinists. It is the position of the former that to preach the command of the gospel—repent and believe—to all men implies God's intention or purpose to save all who hear. From the imperative they imply the indicative, namely God's intention. It is the position of hyper-Calvinists that to preach the command of the gospel—repent and believe—to all men implies that all men have the ability to repent and believe. From the imperative they imply the indicative, namely that man is not totally depraved. It seems to me that Professor Engelsma's line of argument—that man's activity comes before God's activity because the command to repent is first in the order of the gospel address—is a version of the same fallacy.

The same mistake is made by Engelsma and all in the PRC who over the last six years have argued from the commands of the gospel that our activities of repenting and believing precede salvation in some aspect. Engelsma lately has made use of two texts for this purpose. He has used Malachi 3:7: "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts." He has also used James 4:8: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." I refer here to his June 17 email addressed to "Dear Forum and Terry." It is the burden of his correspondence to teach that our activity of returning to God precedes God's activity of returning to us. Where does he get this from? He gets it from the order of the gospel address in these texts; he gets it from the word order of the imperative preceding the promise. I will let him speak for himself:

Does he [Reverend Lanning] deny that God draws nigh to us in the way of His drawing us nigh to Himself, so that our drawing nigh to Him precedes our experience of His drawing nigh to Him [*sic* (us)]? Does he deny what James 4 is teaching?...

The truth is that God works in a certain order...

God is always first in salvation, but with regard to the assurance of salvation He works in the order of drawing me to Himself as the way to draw nigh to me...

Does the passage [Malachi 3:7] not teach that there is a sense in which Israel's returning to God, by His efficacious call, precedes Israel's enjoyment of these blessings.<sup>4</sup>

4 "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra, June 17, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 23–24.

The logical fallacy involved in Professor Engelsma's attempt to get an indicative out of an imperative is an implication of his misusing the call of the gospel to teach the order of salvation, an order of salvation in which man's activity precedes God's. As I have argued, this is completely wrongheaded because the call of the gospel does not define the order of salvation; that is not its purpose.

### *Misrepresentation of the Order of Salvation*

Over the summer Professor Engelsma argued hot and heavy that an activity of man's—his repenting or returning—precedes God's activity of returning to man. This was all ostensibly to refute Reverend Lanning, who, it was claimed, had gone off the edge within a mere few months of being put out of the PRC. In response to the professor, *Sword and Shield* ran a whole issue criticizing his position. There was also my article in the September issue of *Sword and Shield* demonstrating that the current theology of the PRC is an overthrow of the doctrine of 1953.<sup>5</sup> That article exposed the false teaching that faith and repentance as activities of man precede acts of God in salvation. It did this by arguing for the election theology of Reverend Heys (who represented the orthodox fathers of 1953), the theology that made faith and repentance flow from election and thus made faith and repentance first of all God's acts for salvation. Most recently the professor wrote his blog post, in which he doubles down on his theology of man's activity preceding God's by appealing to an order of salvation. I will argue that the professor wrongly conflates two things that are really opposites, namely logical order and temporal order.

It seems the only way one can argue—as the Protestant Reformed denomination does today through her leading theologian—that faith and repentance as man's activities must precede acts of God is to cut faith and repentance off from election and place them in a temporal order of things. In their teaching, election does not govern salvation, for if it did, they would say what Reverend Heys said, namely that God confers faith and repentance upon the elect. I emphasized this point in my recent article not only because Reverend Heys' theology is the orthodox theology of 1953, but also because the truth that election governs salvation is precisely the theology of the Canons of Dordt.

This Reformed creed defines for us the precise relationship between the order of God's acts and man's activity. According to Canons 1.9, faith and repentance are the effects of election:

Therefore 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, according to that of the apostle: *He hath chosen us* (not because we were, but) *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love* (Eph. 1:4). (*Confessions and Church Order*, 157)

Since an effect follows a cause, it ought to be clear that election is the cause of faith and repentance. And if election is the cause, it follows that God is first in faith and repentance. That is exactly what I argued at length in my previous article: faith and repentance are first of all God's acts. And more than that, anyone who says otherwise contradicts his own confessional standards because what the creed teaches here is the confessional statement on the order of salvation. The order is this and this alone: all of salvation in every aspect, including its experience, is caused by God's sovereign decree of election as the one controlling principle. As such, to say that election is the cause of every aspect of salvation is to say that God is first in every aspect of salvation, including its experience.

In addition to 1.9, which I cited, there is also 1.6, where we read, "That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, *For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (Acts 15:18)" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 156). That faith proceeds from election means election is the cause of faith. Election precedes faith logically as the cause of faith. There is also 1.8, where we read concerning election, "According to which He hath chosen us from eternity, both to grace and glory, to salvation and the way of salvation, which He hath ordained that we should walk therein" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 156). The idea expressed here is that God has not only chosen us to a certain end, namely salvation; he has also appointed the way to that end—"the way of salvation." And the way to that end implies a certain order, the order of salvation. That order is defined for us in the next article (9) as a logical order of cause and effect—"faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation" proceed from election "as its fruits and effects" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 157).

Professor Engelsma's teaching of an order of means and end is to the same purpose as that of Reverend Koole in the *Standard Bearer*. Koole tried to escape the charge of making faith a condition to salvation by citing an order in which one thing follows another—that to say B follows A does not necessarily mean that A is the cause of B. It is simply that God joins certain activities together so that one is necessary for the other to take place. He wrote,

We point out that to teach that A is something that is *necessary* for B...does *not* necessarily mean

5 Philip Rainey, "Faith and Repentance as Conditions: A Return to the Mire," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 6 (September 2021): 14–23.

the enjoyment of B *depends* on A...All one is teaching is that activity A is a necessary element for the enjoyment of blessing B, and *that* by God's own gracious determination. Not because the enjoyment of blessing B is *caused* by activity A... But because they are two things God has determined to join together, and that most graciously.<sup>6</sup>

But this was disingenuous on his part because it was exactly his teaching that faith was something we do for, or in order to obtain, salvation. As I explained in my article, he taught that faith was something we do that meets requirements of God, so that faith is not part of salvation but is a requirement we meet for salvation, and that is to make faith a condition.

What Koole was alluding to in his attempted cover for teaching prerequisites was the aspect of logical order in which faith is a means or instrument of salvation.<sup>7</sup> But although Koole appealed to this, he was really using it as a cover. His real objective was to smuggle conditions into the PRC again. If anyone in the PRC still seriously doubts this, let them read his articles on Witsius. Without ever bothering to tell his readership that Witsius was a conditional covenant theologian, Koole used him to teach that our obedience gains for us blessings of salvation.

Engelsma also appeals to the logical order of means and ends in his recent blog post. He does so in order to claim that the leaders of the RPC are guilty of making a logical fallacy. Without repeating his line of reasoning (the interested reader may read his blog post, which is printed earlier in this magazine), he arrives at the conclusion that the leaders of the RPC are completely unable to call anyone to faith and repentance and so are unable to preach the gospel. Very strange, but I seem to remember Reverend Lanning being the only Protestant Reformed minister to publicly, consistently, and urgently call a whole denomination to repentance for over two years. But then, as someone said, "Facts are troublesome things."

In his blog post Professor Engelsma purports merely to teach the well-established Reformed order of salvation. Speaking of this order, Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote, "When we speak of the *ordo salutis*, we must understand this order in a logical rather than a temporal sense."<sup>8</sup> The current theologians and leaders of the PRC try to dress up

their version of the order of salvation in orthodox clothes. They appeal to the logical order of means and ends—perfectly sound and orthodox in itself—but they use it to justify a temporal sequence of salvation. Their emphasis is wholly different—it is on the time element. Witness the emphasis put by Professor Engelsma upon the tense of the verb in James 4:8: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Engelsma's emphasis falls upon the future tense; in fact, the matter of the future tense is to his mind that which clinches his whole argument. Regarding this he wrote, "The future tense compels every reader to acknowledge that in some sense our drawing nigh precedes God's drawing nigh, and that God's drawing nigh *follows* [his emphasis] our drawing nigh."<sup>9</sup> He returns to this argument in his recent article. Quoting Acts 10:43, "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," he argues that due to the future tense of the verb, a blessing of God follows *in time* an activity of man. This is why he wants to make the aspect of salvation we call our experience the context for introducing prerequisites into salvation. Our experience is always a temporal matter. Time is essential to experience. I savor a fine cup of tea in time—it takes time to savor it.

However, contrary to what the professor says, the time element of the verb is not primary in these texts. The texts are in the form of a call or an admonition accompanied by a promise, of which there are multiple examples in the word of God. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" is another example. The promise in each occasion may be in the form of a future tense of an English verb, but that is not the emphasis. The emphasis is the declaration of the counsel of God that he wills (purposes) to save those who believe or to draw near to those who draw near to him. The emphasis is upon the promise of God as a statement of the unchangeable purpose of God, not that God must work in a strictly temporal order.

It is clear that Professor Engelsma is attempting to conflate two things that do not belong together—logical order and temporal order. You might as well try to mix oil and water. So, although in his blog post he alludes to logical order—that of means and ends—at the same time he teaches temporal order. This is clear from two considerations. First, he explicitly makes the order temporal when he hangs his argument on the future tenses of

6 Kenneth Koole, "Response," *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 11 [March 1, 2019]: 255.

7 Rev. M. McGeown in his defense of Reverend Koole approved of Koole's bogus appeal to this order. See Martyn McGeown, email dated May 7, 2019. This email was widely circulated and is available from the office of Reformed Believers Publishing. Not only so, but McGeown also appealed to the logical order of means and end in an attempt to justify his making Peter's act of repenting a condition of God's restoration of him (Martyn McGeown, "Answer" [to Philip Rainey], RFPA blog post, December 19, 2019; [https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/a-reader-asks-was-peter-s-experience-of-fellowship-conditioned-on-his-repentance?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=bd78486bf&\\_ss=r](https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/a-reader-asks-was-peter-s-experience-of-fellowship-conditioned-on-his-repentance?_pos=1&_sid=bd78486bf&_ss=r)).

8 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:16.

9 "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum, Terry Dykstra, and Andy Lanning, June 21, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 31.

verbs, which is to say, he hangs it on the time element. Second, the relationship of his order is between man's acts and God's. Engelsma insists as strictest Reformed orthodoxy that in the aspect of the experience of salvation, certain acts of man precede acts of God. Since man's activity can only precede God's *in time*, it follows that the professor's order of salvation is temporal.

What is becoming clearer with every email and blog post the professor writes is that he and the denomination he represents have a completely opposite soteriology from the RPC. The PR denomination now has a soteriology in which man can be said to be first. The Reformed Protestant denomination has a soteriology in which God is always first. And this is because the denomination believes and confesses an order of salvation in which acts of God follow other acts of God; whereas the Protestant Reformed denomination now believes and confesses an order of salvation in which certain acts of God follow acts of man. The attempt to explain this away by continually crowing like roosters, "Oh, but these acts of man that precede God's are God-worked" is mere sophistry. If they are God-worked, then they are acts of God, in which case God's act precedes man's. You simply cannot have it both ways. You cannot say man's activity of returning precedes God's act of returning and that God causes man's activity of returning. If God causes man's activity, then God's activity is first.

Perhaps a reader might say at this point, "I can see that the PRC and the RPC have a different soteriology. Well and good, but what has all this got to do with your charge that the Protestant Reformed denomination now teaches conditions in salvation? What is the big picture here?" The big picture is this: the Protestant Reformed denomination now teaches an order of salvation in which man's activities come before God's in time. That necessarily means that God's acts follow man's, so that God waits for man to act. This makes man's activity a prerequisite, for God requires man to perform some act before he (God) does something. The big picture is simply this: anytime man's activity precedes God's, you have a prerequisite, and a prerequisite is a condition—that which a man must do, perform, exercise, or bring forth before he can obtain or receive something from God. And do not let the leaders of the PRC off the hook here. Do not, under any circumstances, not for one moment, give any heed to their favorite *get-out-of-trouble-card* for this, namely man's act is God-caused. To claim that man's activity is caused by God *and* that man's activity precedes God's is a contradiction, for if God causes man's activity, then God's act is first. They want to have it both ways.

### *A Question Answered*

In his blog post Professor Engelsma poses questions to those like myself who oppose his recent writings. He asks,

"Do they deny that the end follows the means? Do they deny that the (God-worked) repentance of the sinner precedes forgiveness? Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification?" The first thing to say about these questions is that the professor is talking about our activities of repentance and faith. This is clear from his description of faith and repentance four paragraphs prior to his questions. There he refers to faith as "believing" and to repentance as "the sinner's repenting." The second thing to say is that he is speaking about the order of means and end. In this order he places both faith and repentance. He does so when he writes, "...because the PRC teach that forgiveness of sins follows repentance, as God's way of forgiving sins, and because the PRC teach that justification follows believing, as God's way of justifying the elect sinner..." Thus the professor places repentance in the same category as faith as a means of salvation. He says that repentance is God's way (means) of forgiving our sins.

In answer to the professor's questions, I respond by declaring that I most certainly deny repentance as a means of salvation. To say repentance is a means of salvation is to say it is an instrument of salvation. And this contradicts the truth that faith is the alone instrument of salvation.

He also asks, "Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification?" By this he means, do we deny that man's activity of faith precedes God's act of justification? I do indeed deny this. It is the burden of this article and my previous one to argue for historic Reformed soteriology in which certain acts of God follow other acts of God, not the PRC's recent doctrinal development in which acts of God follow acts of man. I affirm that the faith that justifies is God's act as much as justification itself is God's act.

This is precisely what faith as instrument means. It is absolutely true that faith is an activity of the believer. The believer consciously comes to and relies upon Jesus Christ for all his salvation. He is called to come, to believe, to trust; and he must, for God commands it. But as the alone instrument of salvation, faith is first of all and essentially union with Christ. And in the order of salvation as I have defined it in this article as one of logical order, *faith as union with Christ* and not as man's act can be said to precede other blessings of salvation. Again, I do not say faith as man's act precedes God's acts. Since faith as union with Christ is God's work alone, man being completely passive therein, we may say that faith precedes other works of God. Uniting us to Christ by faith is exclusively God's work, just as grafting a shoot from one tree into another is exclusively the work of the horticulturalist and not of the shoot. The result of God's act is that a man now lives one life with Christ and thus becomes a living branch in him. As a living branch he manifests the life of Christ in the

activity of faith; he actively and consciously believes, seeks, comes to, receives, and rests upon Christ. Nevertheless, this activity is but the effect of God's act.

That the instrumentality of faith is rooted in faith as the bond of union with Christ and not in something the believer does is exactly Rev. Herman Hoeksema's doctrine of faith. Does he take as the starting point for his doctrine of faith as instrument the activity of the believer? This is what he says: "The only proper conception of the relation between justification and faith is that faith is a means or instrument that God gives his people, whereby he unites them with Christ and whereby they receive him and all his benefits" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:106). This "proper conception" enables him to write these beautiful and soul-stirring words:

We must maintain that faith is God's own work, the work of his free grace within his people, the spiritual means of God, the spiritual power (*habitus*), whereby God ingrafts them into Christ through the Holy Spirit, and whereby he causes all the blessings of salvation to flow out of Christ to them. It is the bond to Christ whereby their souls cleave unto him, live out of him, and receive and appropriate all his benefits. (2:72)

Hoeksema's doctrine of faith, that it "is God's own work"—that it is first of all God's act—flows from his order of salvation, in which election is first as the cause of all salvation. This is what enables him to write,

Along the entire line of the application of salvation, from regeneration to final glorification, the work of salvation never proceeds from man, but always from the living God through Jesus Christ the Lord...Ephesians 1:4 points to the deepest source and cause of this union of Christ and his church and of this application of all his benefits unto his body: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."...The whole work of salvation, therefore, rests in and flows out of God's eternal good pleasure. (2:14–15)

To teach, as Professor Engelsma does, that man's act of faith precedes God's act is to make salvation proceed from man. We in the RPC take our stand with Hoeksema, for when we deny that acts of man ever precede God's acts, we affirm that salvation always proceeds from the living God through Jesus Christ the Lord. And this brings me to my final point, for when we affirm this, we affirm the doctrine of our Canons of Dordt.

### *The Canons and the Order of Salvation*

The reason the professors, ministers, and members of the PRC want to emphasize a temporal order of salvation

rather than a logical order is simply this: in the Reformed faith logical order is the order of election, and in that order God is always first. And if they can make the order primarily about time, then they can more easily dispense with election in their theology. Emphasizing a temporal order in which man does something and then God does something enables them to cut the tie with election. In this way they can very really make man's activity first. And this is why in my previous article I made such a play of the language of contrast and qualification now employed by the men of the PRC. Oh yes, and this they will trumpet from the rooftops when it suits: they unquestioningly believe in election. At the same time, they almost always place man's responsibility, specifically his activities of faith and repentance, in a relationship of contrast, even of opposition, to election. Since the Protestant Reformed denomination has now returned to the mire of conditional theology, she must sever the bond between election and faith and repentance. Where election is consistently maintained as the source and cause of salvation, so that all of salvation is the result of election, it is impossible to teach faith and repentance as conditions. If election is the cause of faith and repentance, then faith and repentance are first of all acts of God for salvation. If this is so, they cannot at the same time be acts of man for salvation, that is, acts whereby man does something before he can receive something from God.

What I have just described is election theology. It is the theology of the Canons, which establishes election as the controlling principle and cause of all salvation. Everything then flows from election as its source. That is, after all, what it means to be Reformed: we begin with the fundamental principle of a thing, and in light of that we explain all its component parts. When we adopt that approach, we see every part of salvation in its true light. And when the creed comes to explain faith and repentance, it does not (as do the Protestant Reformed today) take a lurch in another direction and begin to explain faith and repentance from the viewpoint of man's responsibility. Rather, the creed sticks to its election theology and explains faith and repentance in terms of that theology. The following quotations from the Canons make this clear:

"That others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will...but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance" (3–4.10, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 168). Notice the teaching here is that God confers faith and repentance upon the elect; that is, God puts his elect in possession of these gifts; God works these things in them. This is confirmed

by the opening line of the next article: “But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, *or works in them true conversion...*” (my emphasis).

“All in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe” (3–4.12, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169). I believe. Why? Because God worked faith in me.

“Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected as his pleasure...but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (3–4.14, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169). And at this point we have come full circle, for the creed has taken us right back to the origin and source of faith: “That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God’s eternal decree” (1.6, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 156). That is the order and the only order of salvation known to the Reformed faith—the order of election. And in that order God is first, always first, in each and every aspect.

When we adopt the approach of the Canons, we get things in their proper places. When we start right (with election), we end right. Conversely, when we start with man and his responsibility, we will only ever get to man. The teaching of the Canons on faith and repentance is that God produces these gifts in us. The idea is that for the one who produces something, for that one it is required. God requires faith and repentance for salvation, and God meets his own requirements for us and in us. That is also clear from article 22 of the Belgic Confession, which teaches that all things required for our salvation are

in Jesus Christ. Since faith and repentance are certainly required for our salvation, it follows that Christ has met the requirements for them too.

To put it simply for our present controversy about the order of salvation, faith and repentance are first of all God’s acts. They are activities of the believer—no one disputes that—but they are activities of the believer because they are first of all acts of God. As Canons 1.9 so beautifully puts it, they are the fruits and effects of election, and they proceed from it, so that God gives them and causes them. Canons 3–4.12 makes the same point:

So that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 169)

We repent and believe actively and consciously, no doubt about it, but only as the effect of God’s act. This article stresses that it is *in consequence of this influence* that we become active. God’s act is first and is the cause; my activity is the result. Repentance and faith are first of all God’s acts, and only as such is there any possibility they can be my acts.

We do not deny an order in salvation. But we do deny that man is first in any respect. “For of him [God], and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

—Philip Rainey

## EDITORIAL RESPONSE

# FINALLY, JUSTIFICATION

Finally, the doctrine before us in the current battle with Prof. David J. Engelsma and the Protestant Reformed Churches is justification by faith alone.

That justification by faith alone is the doctrine before us was made clear by Professor Engelsma in a September 8, 2021, blog post that began as a September 2 family letter

intended for the general public.<sup>1</sup> The professor’s post was in response to the August 15 issue of *Sword and Shield*, which attacked his teaching that there is a vital sense in man’s salvation in which man’s activity precedes God’s activity. The purpose of the professor’s latest blog post was to accuse the Reformed Protestant Churches of committing the logical

1 David J. Engelsma, “‘Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc?’ Non!, or, ‘Don’t Kill the Rooster!’” September 8, 2021; <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc-non-or-don-t-kill-the-rooster>.

fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. In trying to make this logical fallacy the issue, Professor Engelsma is carrying on his denomination's favorite tactic of demolishing straw men. Other writers elsewhere in this issue expose that tactic well.

In the course of his argument and as the essential doctrine of his argument, Professor Engelsma comes to justification by faith alone. He states the doctrinal issue thus:

Justification, or forgiveness, follows faith, as the end follows the means. Faith precedes justification. Repentance precedes remission of sins. But because it pleases God to justify by means of faith (believing), and to forgive in the way of the sinner's repenting, justification is not caused by faith. Neither is repentance the cause of forgiveness. Faith is the (God-worked) means. It is not the cause.

Shortly thereafter Professor Engelsma restates this as the doctrinal position of the Protestant Reformed Churches and issues a series of questions to the Reformed Protestant Churches.

The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance. Similarly, believing is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto justification; as end, justification follows faith.

Do the theologians of the RPC deny this? Do they deny that the end follows the means? Do they deny that the (God-worked) repentance of the sinner precedes forgiveness? Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification? Do they deny the teaching of James 4:8 that an important aspect of salvation has God's causing us to draw nigh to Him precede His drawing nigh to us. Is this now the rock-bottom, doctrinal validation of their separate existence? Is this in the end their "here we stand"?

It is fitting that justification by faith alone is the doctrine before us. The battle between the truth and the lie with regard to man's salvation always comes down to justification by faith alone. So let it come down to this in our battle as well.

### *Finally, Justification by Faith Alone*

It is a relief that the doctrine before us is finally justification by faith alone. The relief is that the truth of justification by faith alone is simple and clear. Whether one is the mightiest theologian or only a small child, one can be an expert

in the simple truth of justification. It is this: I am right with God because of what Christ has done and not because of what I have done. How lovely! How marvelous! In that fathomlessly deep but wonderfully simple truth is all the hope and happiness of the people of God.

The relief is also that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a bright and shining beacon to every Reformed person. A Reformed man instinctively knows that he sails in serious waters when the doctrine before him is justification by faith alone. If a Protestant Reformed man has been asleep at the helm of his vessel until now in this controversy, then the fact that justification by faith alone is under attack must be to that man like the blinding flash of the lighthouse's beam cutting through the night and like the deep boom of the foghorn resounding through the mist. However much a man might think of his church and his theologians, when justification by faith alone is compromised, that man must realize the deadly shoals into which his church has sailed herself. The wreckage of Roman Catholicism and Arminianism and conditional covenant theology and the federal vision are all piled on the rocks of their compromising justification by faith alone. Perhaps some Protestant Reformed men will yet take notice of their danger now that the theologian of the PRC for the past few generations has taken it in hand to compromise justification by faith alone.

It is also a relief finally to have the doctrine of justification by faith alone before us because this doctrine pins Professor Engelsma down in his corner and prevents him from dancing away from the implications of his position. I feel pity for my professor when I read his current writings, because he is obviously in a tight corner. He has loudly and repeatedly stated that there is a critical sense in which man's activity precedes God's activity in man's salvation. For example: "First, to repeat, there is a vitally important sense in which, in our salvation, our drawing nigh to God precedes God's drawing nigh to us."<sup>2</sup> Rather than acknowledging the implications of his tight corner by stating forthrightly that there are prerequisites to salvation after all, as his position demands, Professor Engelsma has ducked the issue.

He has ducked the issue primarily by insisting that the real issue is not whether or not man precedes God. Rather, according to the professor, the real issue is that I deny the call of the gospel, including the command to sinners to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, with the promise that all who believe in Jesus Christ shall be saved. Never mind that I have affirmed the truth of the call of the gospel to Professor Engelsma clearly and at length, which affirmation apparently evaporated into the air for all the notice the professor took of it. Never mind the fact that I learned my doctrine of the call of the gospel

2 "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra, June 16, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 11.

from Professor Engelsma, that I love that doctrine, believe that doctrine, teach that doctrine, and practice that doctrine. Never mind the fact that I was deposed from the Protestant Reformed Churches precisely for issuing the call to the denomination to repent of her false doctrine, which call the denomination found highly offensive and for which call the denomination cast me away from herself as some wicked thing. Never mind the fact that the Reformed Protestant Churches continue to be the only denomination in all the world warning the Protestant Reformed denomination of her spiritual adultery and calling her members to repent by coming out of the denomination. And never mind the fact that Professor Engelsma himself has not and will not issue the call of the gospel to his own denomination or to his own colleagues to repent of their false doctrine, of which false doctrine he is well aware. And yet Professor Engelsma continues to insist that the issue is the call of the gospel. He writes about the officebearers in the Reformed Protestant Churches in his blog post as if they would have nothing to say to sinners.

He writes in his blog, “Let us suppose that these churches too have a member living impenitently in sin. The minister and an elder make a disciplinary call on the sinning member. What do they say to him?”

What do we say to him? This: “Repent of your sin; believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house.” Just what we have always said, both to impenitent individuals and to our churches, and just as Professor Engelsma has not said and apparently will never say to his denomination about her present departure, though he is well aware of her present departure.

Professor Engelsma has also ducked the issue by speaking in meaningless circles. Recognizing that his explanations to this point have not explained how man can precede God while also not preceding God, he offered this clarification.

Let me state this once again, more simply. In salvation as the matter of our consciousness, or experience, of God’s drawing nigh to us in the assurance of His love and the sweet experience of the covenant of grace, God draws us to Himself (thus He is first in the matter of experience) in such a way that we actively draw nigh to Him by a true and living faith (which faith as a spiritual activity of knowing Him in Jesus and trusting in Him), so that in the way of this our drawing nigh to Him He may draw nigh to us in the experience of His nearness in

Christ. In this specific sense, our drawing nigh to Him precedes His drawing nigh to Him [*sic* (us)].<sup>3</sup>

That is theological nonsense. I do not say that lightly, and I am still astounded that those words must be written. I doubt that Professor Engelsma has ever uttered or written theological nonsense in his life, until now. But this is literal theological nonsense, meaning there is no sense or meaning in it. God is first, and man is first. God is first in the matter of our experience, and man’s activity precedes God’s activity in this specific sense of man’s experience.

Nevertheless, what emerges from this nonsense after all the qualifications have been made is the tight corner that Professor Engelsma finds himself in and from which he cannot escape: man’s activity precedes God’s activity.

In this specific sense, our drawing nigh to Him precedes His drawing nigh to [us]. This is the plain meaning of James 4:8: “Draw nigh to me, and I will draw nigh to you.” This is the plain meaning of the text as it stands in all its perfect clarity before every reader, especially before a minister of the Word. Our drawing nigh to God precedes God’s drawing nigh to us.<sup>4</sup>

No wonder that a man tries to escape the implications of that theology. Who in the whole readership of *Sword and Shield*—or the *Standard Bearer* or the RFPA blog, for that matter—wants to be stuck in that corner? What man who calls himself Reformed wants to try to defend our activity of coming to God as preceding God’s activity of coming to us in any sense whatsoever? A Reformed man instinctively knows that position to be indefensible. Everything about the Reformed faith speaks against man’s preceding God. God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation; unconditional election as the fount of every gift of salvation; God’s particular and efficacious grace; the unconditional covenant of grace. Where are you going to fit man’s activity preceding God’s activity in any of those pillars of the Reformed faith? If a man is attracted to the position that man precedes God, then he is not a Reformed man but an Arminian man.

The tragedy for Professor Engelsma is that he did not have to be stuck in this corner trying to defend man’s preceding God. The tight spot that he is in is entirely of his own making. I remind our readers that Professor Engelsma landed in this corner when he volunteered to condemn my sermon on Malachi 3:7. I interpreted that text as the law that exposed Israel’s inability and unwillingness to return to God. “Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away

3 “Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum, Terry Dykstra, and Andy Lanning, June 21, 2021,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 31.

4 “Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum, Terry Dykstra, and Andy Lanning, June 21, 2021,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 31.



from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?” God intended this command of the law as a sharp and piercing rebuke to Israel for her apostasy from him. That sharp rebuke would show Israel, who was self-righteously ignorant of her own sin of departing from Jehovah, that she was unable and unwilling to return to God. In light of that law, and in light of Israel’s utter unwillingness and inability to return, Israel’s only hope would be the condescending mercy and grace of God to deliver her from her sin and guilt.

Admittedly, my interpretation of Malachi 3:7 as the command of the law appears to be the minority view. Happily for me, this minority view was also Martin Luther’s.

7. *Return to Me, and I will return to you.* These words seem to support the free will of man. They are, however, words of the Law, upon which the ability to obey does not immediately follow. After all, He has already said that they had never kept the Law, even if they were eager to keep it. To be sure, God is a good Lawgiver, but we are lazy doers of it. The Law tells us what we should do. He says, “Return to obey Me, and I will return to you to bless you. I will be your kind Father of mercies.”

*How shall we return?* The prophet has to deal with holy hypocrites, who are unwilling to accept rebuke and who are unaware of any sin or turning away from God.<sup>5</sup>

The alternative to interpreting Malachi 3:7 as the command of the law is to interpret it as the call of the gospel. This appears to be the majority view. As the call of the gospel, God’s word, “Return unto me,” would powerfully work Israel’s turning away from her apostasy and Israel’s return to Jehovah.

This is where things could have ended. Whether one interprets Malachi 3:7 as the call of the law or the call of the gospel is an exegetical question on which Reformed believers can disagree. No doctrine of the scripture is at stake in either interpretation because both interpretations teach that Israel’s salvation is of the Lord. Whether the call is intended to expose Israel’s inability (law) or whether the call is intended as the power to bring Israel back (gospel), Israel’s return to Jehovah is worked by God. This would be a profitable debate at a Bible study, but it is not a theological controversy.

Nevertheless, Professor Engelsma made it a matter of the truth versus the lie when he responded to my sermon by insisting that there is some vital sense in which man’s activity precedes God’s activity. The controversy had to

come to this development of the lie. The matter before us could not rest as two differing but orthodox interpretations of a passage. It could not rest there because the Protestant Reformed Churches and her theologians have committed themselves to the false doctrine of conditional covenant fellowship. Those theologians and members who think that they are not committed to this false doctrine are currently tolerating it as it openly and obviously runs rampant in their denomination. Therefore, this false doctrine of the PRC had to be drawn out into the open yet again and had to be brought to a further stage of development.

That further stage of development is now before us. Finally, the doctrine is justification by faith alone. Here there are no more evasions. Here the doctrine that man’s activity precedes God’s activity bears its evil fruit of making man’s activity of repenting and believing a prerequisite for God’s activity of justifying man and remitting his sins.

### *The Means of Justification*

Let us read once again from his blog Professor Engelsma’s statements about justification.

Justification, or forgiveness, follows faith, as the end follows the means. Faith precedes justification. Repentance precedes remission of sins. But because it pleases God to justify by means of faith (believing), and to forgive in the way of the sinner’s repenting, justification is not caused by faith. Neither is repentance the cause of forgiveness. Faith is the (God-worked) means. It is not the cause...

The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance. Similarly, believing is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto justification; as end, justification follows faith.

Do the theologians of the RPC deny this? Do they deny that the end follows the means? Do they deny that the (God-worked) repentance of the sinner precedes forgiveness? Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification? Do they deny the teaching of James 4:8 that an important aspect of salvation has God’s causing us to draw nigh to Him precede His drawing nigh to us. Is this now the rock-bottom, doctrinal validation of their separate existence? Is this in the end their “here we stand”?

Professor Engelsma is working with the doctrine of the *means* or *instrument* of justification. The means of

5 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Minor Prophets I: Hosea-Malachi*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 18:413.

justification is that gift of God through which God bestows Jesus Christ and all his merits upon the elect sinner. The means of justification is faith, and faith alone. In the term *justification by faith alone*, the instrument of justification is expressed in the phrase *by faith alone*. Article 22 of the Belgic Confession defines and explains this doctrine of faith as the instrument of justification.

We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him...

Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 49–50)

The significance of faith as the means of justification is faith's all-important object. The object of faith is Jesus Christ. Faith "embraces Jesus Christ" and is "an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness" and is "an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits." The significance of faith is not man and what man does. The significance of faith is exclusively Jesus Christ and what Jesus Christ has done.

For that reason, faith is not work but the opposite of working. Emphatically, faith is not work.

3. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.
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. (Rom. 4:3–5)

Also for that reason, faith is not of man but of God. Emphatically, faith is not of man. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

Because faith is not work and is not of man but is the gift of God by which he gives Jesus Christ to an elect sinner, man's righteousness before God is nothing of man but only of Jesus Christ and all his merits.

This is where Professor Engelsma goes wrong as he works with faith as the means or instrument of justification. He makes faith to be man. He makes the significance of faith as the means of justification to be man. He makes man's active faith preceding justification to be the prerequisite of justification. Surely Professor Engelsma would declare his disagreement with this analysis, but that is what he has done all the same. Backed into his corner and having to explain his doctrine that in some vital sense man's activity of coming to God precedes God's activity of coming to man, Professor Engelsma makes justification by faith alone to mean that man's active faith is a prerequisite for his justification. There are especially three ways that he does this.

First, he makes the significance of faith to be man's activity of believing. It was the professor's concern from the beginning that the activity of man be defended and protected. In his first letter to his correspondent, Professor Engelsma wrote about my sermon on Malachi 3:7, "Not to be overlooked is that his peculiar interpretation of the Malachi passage is the denial of spiritual activity on the part of the believer."<sup>6</sup> As I and others have pointed out repeatedly, Professor Engelsma is wrong to say that I deny spiritual activity on the part of the believer. But the point now is that Professor Engelsma makes man's activity of faith and man's activity of believing to be essential for man's justification. In his latest blog post, Professor Engelsma demands, "Do they [the theologians of the RPC] deny that an active faith precedes justification?" For Professor Engelsma, man is justified before God by means of man's active faith.

In justification, it is wrong to make the significance of faith to be man's activity of faith. The significance of faith in justification is not at all or in any way man's activity. The significance of faith in justification is only and strictly faith's object, which is Jesus Christ. To insist on man's *active* faith and man's activity of believing as the means of justification is to make faith into a work. It is to import into the righteousness of Christ something of man.

We could go so far as to say that in justification, faith is utterly passive. I recognize that faith is active in embracing and knowing Christ, for example. But those activities of faith are not the significance of faith as the instrument of justification. Therefore, even when we speak of the activities of faith, such as coming to Christ, abiding in him, embracing him, knowing him, trusting him, and receiving him, justifying faith is passive. Faith does not give anything

<sup>6</sup> "Professor Engelsma to Terry Dykstra, June 14, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 10.

to Christ, does not contribute anything to one's righteousness, and has its meaning only in its object and not in itself.

The confessions are exceedingly clear on the point that the significance of faith in justification is not man's activity of faith itself, but only Jesus Christ.

To speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. (Belgic Confession 22, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 50)

Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?

A. Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only. (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 61, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 107)

Second, Professor Engelsma makes the doctrine of faith as the means or instrument of justification to be a doctrine of temporal order. For him justification by faith alone must be explained in the language of "precedes" and "follows." He writes in his blog,

The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance. Similarly, believing is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto justification; as end, justification follows faith.

Do the theologians of the RPC deny this? Do they deny that the end follows the means? Do they deny that the (God-worked) repentance of the sinner precedes forgiveness? Do they deny that an active faith precedes justification? Do they deny the teaching of James 4:8 that an important aspect of salvation has God's causing us to draw nigh to Him precede His drawing nigh to us. Is this now the rock-bottom, doctrinal validation of their separate existence? Is this in the end their "here we stand"?

The error of this approach is that it inevitably and invariably makes man's preceding activity the prerequisite for God's following activity. It makes man's activity of drawing nigh to God in an active faith to be the prerequisite for God's drawing nigh to man in remitting man's sins. This is a corruption of the doctrine of the means of faith. The doctrine of the means of faith is that our righteousness is entirely the righteousness of Christ

and not at all our own righteousness, and that God graciously grants us that righteousness through faith, which faith itself is not a work but a gift of God. Nowhere in that teaching is our faith a condition or prerequisite for our justification. In Professor Engelsma's approach, we must now explain justification by faith alone as a matter of man's activity *preceding* God's activity and God's remitting of our sins *following* man's active faith. This makes faith a prerequisite instead of an instrument. Man's active faith precedes, and God's forgiveness of sins follows.

In this regard, Professor Engelsma wrongly applies all of the passages that he cites. He quotes portions of Matthew 9:2; Acts 2:38, 10:43; James 4:8; and Galatians 2:16 as if Jesus and his servants were making the point in these passages that man's activity of faith precedes God's activity of forgiving. The point of all of these passages is not that man's activity is first and God's activity is second. Rather, the point of all of these passages is that the elect sinner's righteousness and forgiveness are entirely due to the mercy and grace of God and on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Christ. In Matthew 9:2, for example, the point of Jesus is not that the man sick of the palsy and his friends first believed, and then Jesus' activity of forgiving followed. Rather, Jesus' point is that the object of the sick man's faith—Jesus Christ—was the reason for the sick man's being forgiven. The passage is not about the sick man's activity as such but about the object of the sick man's faith; not the faith in itself of the sick man but Jesus, to whom the sick man looked. When the passage says, "Jesus seeing their *faith*," we could read that according to its meaning: "Jesus seeing *himself and his righteousness*, which was the object of their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

Third, it is an error to make repentance to be the same as faith. Repentance is not faith, and faith is not repentance. I believe that Reverend Langerak is covering this error elsewhere in this issue, so I only mention it here.

The result of Professor Engelsma's approach to the means of justification is that he has turned faith from the instrument of justification into a prerequisite for justification. This is where the doctrine that he has been teaching lately must invariably lead. If one will maintain that there is a vital sense in man's salvation in which man's activity of coming to God precedes God's activity of coming to man, then one has made man's activity a prerequisite. The false doctrine of faith as a prerequisite must carry through into justification by faith, as it now has.

Let all who have been asleep at the helm in the Protestant Reformed Churches and elsewhere take heed. You have now lost justification by faith alone, which has always been the article of the standing or the falling church.

—AL



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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.* — Romans 16:20

**S**atan. Mortal enemy of the Christ. History-long foe of the church. Liar. Murderer. Father of the lie from a nest of vipers. Deceiver of the whole world. He has his seed. They are of him and bear his image. The ungodly in the church and the world. Oh, especially in the church does he work, and there he sows his tares. Cain. Lamech. Esau. Saul. Doeg. Absalom. Ahithophel. Annas. Caiaphas. Judas. Hymenaeus. Alexander. What other names will be added in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God? Liars were they all and murderers and blasphemers. There is enmity between Satan and his seed and Christ and his seed. Christ too has a seed. Abel. Enoch. Noah. Abraham. Isaac. Jacob. David. Isaiah. Jeremiah. John. Peter. Paul. And an innumerable throng that will be revealed in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

The God of peace. Blessed God of peace. Dwelling in perfect bliss and harmony in himself. In him there is no warfare. He forms the light and creates darkness. He makes peace and creates evil. Jehovah does all these things. The mystery of Jehovah, hid from the ages, is to create perfect peace by uniting all creation with itself and consecrating all of creation unto himself in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our peace. He is peace between God and man because Christ is redemption, reconciliation, and righteousness. In him the God of peace crushed Satan's head. Certain victory. In Christ we have peace with God and thus with all things.

To that purpose all warfare and strife are strictly subservient. Under that purpose every enemy shall be subdued. Satan's head will be bruised and his kingdom destroyed. God's kingdom of peace shall be established forever.

But the bruising of a serpent's head always involves a venomous bite to the heel. It is not mortal. It is painful. All history long the Slanderer stands up against God's people to oppose them. He beguiled Eve. He lied about Job to move God to destroy Job without cause. In Jannes and Jambres Satan withstood Moses with their lying wonders. By Balaam Satan cast a stumbling block before the people and enticed them to fornication and idolatry. He provoked David to number the people, and God brought a terrible plague on the people. Satan opposed them because Christ was in them. Satan bit them painfully with many strikes. He brought war and death and sorrows innumerable.

And when the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, came, Satan bit Christ terribly with a most painful bite. Satan came for Christ in Herod. Satan opposed Christ in the wilderness, tempting him and seeking to beguile him with fame and fortune and the kingdoms of the world. Against Christ, Satan spoke through his legions of demons. The lesser quaked before Christ, but Satan himself was bold to oppose Christ openly. Satan came to Christ in the scribes and Pharisees and all their lying words and entrapping questions. He whispered in Christ's ear by one of his closest disciples. Satan tried Christ in the corrupt court of the church and shouted for his crucifixion in Pilate's judgment hall. Satan hung Christ on a tree and rejoiced that the Son of God was cursed and soon would be buried in the grave. Satan had triumphed over his enemy! He had won!

Then his world fell to pieces. The shout of victory from the cross. The tearing of the temple veil. The earthquake. Satan's kingdom was shaking and tottering. And Christ arose the third day and ascended far above the heavens that he might fill all things. He crushed the head of the serpent!

Satan's time is short. He knows this. Now you suffer his painful bites. Patience, beloved. War on. You have peace with God, so you will have war with Satan. Shortly, the God of peace will crush Satan beneath your feet and give you the perfection of victory in the new heaven and new earth.

—NJL